

Indigenous Approaches to Socio-Cultural Cohesion among the Ngie of Cameroon, 1863-2011

Florence Awah Fonbad & Prof. Simon Tata Ngenge

The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

Corresponding Author: florenceawahfonbad@gmail.com

DOI: 10.56201/ajha.v7.no1.2023.pg21.41

Abstract

Communities continuously find it difficult to live together and forge a sense of common development in modern Africa, even though government policies have enacted policies in that direction over the years. This is because most governments have ignored indigenous practices that were in force before colonialism, explaining why most communities have witnessed rampant conflicts between various groups within their vicinities. It is because of this that the study analyses the indigenous approaches which bounded African communities and enhanced coexistence. Using the historical method of analyses with data drawn from primary and secondary sources, the study argues that the indigenous socio-cultural approaches of the Ngie were cohesive in building a sense of common belonging and identity among the diverse groups of the area. It holds that communication modes, justice system, religion, cultural activities and intermarriages as well as social unions were instrumental in that dimension. The paper concludes that if indigenous mechanisms of cohesion are embraced by most colonial governments in Africa, the rampant differences and conflicts in communities will be minimised.

Keywords: Socio-Cultural Cohesion, Ngie & Cameroon

Introduction

Intercommunity relations are often overshadowed by conflicts especially in Africa where heterogeneous societies were bounded into political units at the dawn of colonialism. Though migrations paved the way for the settling of communities with different socio-political colorations or configurations within the same location or geographical area, the level of intercommunity integration was high prior to European interference. This view has been buttressed by Gatawa, who citing the case of Nigeria, argues that ethnic groups had achieved a high level of integration prior to colonial conquest.¹ However, with the inception of colonialism, the socio-political structures of African societies were transformed as Europeans empowered or favoured some groups against others in their quest for the establishment of authority and total control. Groups that supported them were given authority over local affairs and the reverse was true irrespective of the way society was organised.

Though the socio-political composition of the continent was heterogeneous in nature, Western imperialists did not take this into consideration, in most cases, as they faulted these historical realities. People of different ethnic backgrounds, cultures and languages were

¹ Muhammad Mukhta Gatawa, "Inter-group relations in historical perspectives: A Case Study of Yoruba and Hausa Communities of Agege, Lagos, Nigeria". *African Journal of History and Culture* Vol. 5(9), (2013), 171-177.

lumped up in political units and the politics of identity and dominance ensued. The presence of foreign religions did not make things good for intercommunity relations as cultural practices hitherto instrumental in encouraging relations between communities were infiltrated. The resultant effects were cracks in the already established networks of coexistence and conflicts and violence became the characteristic features of some African communities.²

Such developments were also visible among the Ngie of Cameroon which is heterogeneous in nature and made up of four ethnic groups; Mengom (Esaw, Bassic, Echia, Abichia and Nkon), Azem (Ebat, Ngwenjin and Akuwu), Ngie (Abebung, Bonambufei, Bonatu, Ebang, Etoh, Andek, Angai, Etwii, Tinekoh, Tinechung, Angong, Ajei and Teze is one of the ethnic groups that make up Ngie) and the Fulani.³ These groups were compelled to coexist and lived harmoniously after their migrations and settlements in the area though diverse in terms of culture, language and identity and economic activities.⁴ Such harmonious relations were enforced through marriages, exchange of gifts, celebration of mortuary rites of chiefs or fons, trade, exchange of visits as well as emphasises on common histories, cultures and geographies. Such approaches were not particular to the Ngie but generally favoured by most ethnic groups in indigenous Cameroon. Hence, communities never existed in isolation and maintained cordial relations in different forms as mentioned earlier.

This argument is beautifully captured by V.G. Fanso when he concurs that each group was historically and socially linked directly and indirectly to other communities.⁵ The networks or relations between the different groups overlapped from district to district throughout their territory. There were ethnic affiliations and continuities between groups generally located in the same neighbourhood or region. No community was isolated historically, economically or socially from its neighbours.⁶

In spite of the strange network of intercommunity concomitance, acrimonious relations between communities were common. These were caused by intercommunity conflicts, European-initiated factors and natural phenomena. Europeans presence further exacerbated the level of frosty relations as the socio-political organisation of the area was altered. Changes in the administrative seat of Ngies as well as tax collection responsibilities by the Germans and British colonial authorities laid the foundations of contestations and struggle of identity and dominance among these communities. Such scenarios were also witnessed in the post-colonial period and brought deep differences between the people of lower and upper Ngie. Furthermore, the persistence of boundary and chieftaincy conflicts, quest for autonomy and farmer grazer conflicts among others worked negatively on coexistence.

In spite of these setbacks to intercommunity relations, indigenous mechanisms were put in place to offset these differences and encourage coexistence. In this direction, traditional and voice communication, the judiciary system, cultural festivities, intermarriages, social unions among other mechanisms were put in place. However, indigenous methods of cohesion were punctured by the Germans annexation of Kamerun in 1884 and the subsequent subjugation of the Ngie. For instance, to effectively administer their colonial possession, they

² Tasew Gashaw, "Colonial Boarderland Communities". *Africa up Close*. 2017 africaupclose.wilsoncenter.org.

³ H.N Harcourt, Progress Report on the Ngi Native Authority Area of the Bamenda Division (1938), 5. National Archives Buea.

⁴ H.N Harcourt, Fulani Intelligence Report (1937), 3. National Archives Buea. p

⁵ V.G. Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges* Vol. 1, *From Prehistoric times to the Nineteenth Century*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Education Limited, (1989), 4.

⁶ Raymond Njingti Budi, "Obverting the Myth of African Diffidence: Inter and Intra- Community Relations in Traditional Cameroon Society Before Colonialism". *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences* Volume xi, N^o. 11.2 Quarter 11. (2020), 2229-5313.

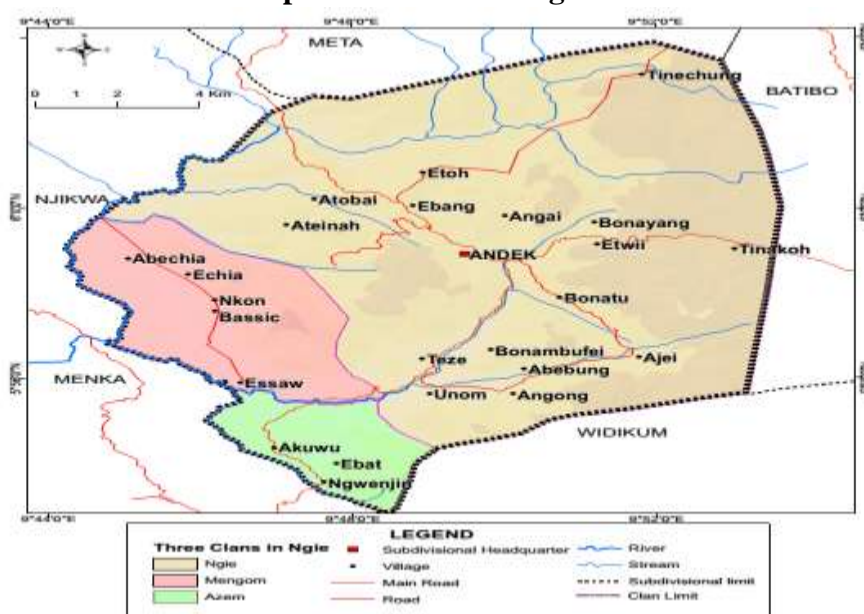
recognised indigenous leaders who were custodians of these mechanisms but deprived them of their sovereignty. With this loss of sovereignty, the chiefs, elders, quarter and compound heads as well as traditional priests and elders saw their involvement in the administration of justice and application of other mechanisms of cohesion dwindling as they were forced to implement colonial policies which at the detriment of indigenous mechanisms. Such developments were also adopted by the postcolonial governments of Cameroon.

In spite of all these efforts, indigenous mechanisms were not completely disrupted as they are still conspicuous and used by these communities especially in conflict resolution. It is the persistence of these practices among the Ngies which ignited this study and there is the need to document these approaches and others that were developed by the Ngie in enhancing cohesion over the years.

Before delving into the issues under focus, suffice to mention that Ngie is a subdivision in Momo Division of North West Region of Cameroon and is bounded to the North by Mbengwi Central Subdivision, to the East and North East by Batibo Sub Division and Widikum sub divisions respectively. To the South and South West, their neighbours are Njikwa Sub Division (see Map 1).⁷ They migrated from Dudum and it is believed that their origin is shrouded in mystery. It is held that their ancestor emerged from a spot named “Temben”, north eastwards to present Ngie area and Ngom clan. According to oral tradition, the founder of Ngie is believed to have appeared from the river at Dudum in the form of a frog and settled in human form there.

This legendary man by name Ambikoh had two sons: Ayirikum who founded the Widikum clan and Ugekum who founded the Ngie clan. According to Seino Mathew Angochang, Ugekum migrated from Dudum to Andegechung where he founded a settlement which further sprouted into the settlements that make up Ngie today.⁸ However, they are made up of three clans which are represented in Map 2. They were later joined in the settlement by the Fulani who were pastoralists and makes up about 30% of the total population. Though the indigenous Ngie settlements had a common ancestry, socio-cultural differences drew them apart and there was the need to institute mechanisms that were to bind them together. These mechanisms are the subjects of concern in this paper.

Map 2: The Clans of Ngie



⁷ Vincent Azobi Abongyah, “The Ngie Clan Area: Human Adaptations to a Harsh Physical Environment”, Dissertation, University of Yaounde, (1979), 2.

⁸ Ibid.

Communication

Communication played a significant role in enhancing social cohesion among the Ngie. In this direction, the Talking drum (*anuh*), sounds and language became veritable instruments in communicating issues of common interest among the communities of Ngie. With regards to the drum, it has been an age old means of communication among the people of Ngie. It was used for announcing the disappearance⁹ fons and even the death of commoners, invitations to festivals and warning against foreign aggressions among others.

The drum was therefore an important instrument or medium in the consolidation of unity within and among the people of Ngie. The development of this medium of communication was sanctioned by the hilly nature of Ngie which made it difficult for the transmission of information from one community to the other. Each community had specialists who were trained in drumming, not necessarily for dancing, but for the conveyance of messages across the clan. In the case of death of prominent personalities in the community as mentioned earlier, the bereaved community conveyed the message through drumming to nearby communities which in turn relayed it to others until the communities were informed. By this medium, the villagers from the different communities were informed and they gathered in the bereaved community for mourning and burial rites.

Added to this, the sounds of drums alerted the community of impending danger especially when an aggressor or enemy was approaching the clan. Worth noting is the fact that during the slave trade era when the people of Bali constantly raided Ngie for slaves, the drum was pivotal in alerting the people who either took refuge or prepare themselves for the attack.¹⁰ Oral tradition holds that Abebung village was the gateway to Ngie for slave's raiders as the later collaborated with them (slave raiders). They led them into Bonambufei and Teze villages in their search of slaves. As a defensive mechanism, the Fon of Bonambufei, Ambofei, married of his younger sister, Eneindou, to the fon of Abebung. She was to act as spy and reported to her people when imminent attacks loomed.

To effectively carry out this mission, the Fon of Bonambufei designed a special basket which harboured a small *anuh*. When got hold information of an impending attack by slave raiders or when noticed the presence of strangers in Abebung village, she took pretext of visiting her farm while carrying the basket. As soon as she got behind the hill, Igunighong, which separates Bonambufei from Abebung village, and on a spot where she knew that the people of Abebung could not hear the sound of her drum, she hit the drum. Once the people of Bonambufei heard the sound of the drum, they escaped or took refuge in the nearby forests and hills.¹¹ Drums were also used in summoning warriors from the different Ngie communities when an aggressor attacked the village especially during the period of intertribal wars. Through the use of drums, the chiefs readily summoned warriors to resist external attacks. A case in point was the German attack in collaboration with the Bali in 1902 as they took the Bali and Germans by surprise. The invaders could not understand the messages conveyed by the drum and before they could enter to any of the community, the villagers had been informed. Immediately, they take refuge in caves while the warriors climbed up the hills

⁹ In the Western grasslands of Cameroon, it is believed that the fon never dies but disappears to the world beyond.

¹⁰ Stephen Ujabeng Andong. Business man, aged 52. Interviewed at Yaounde on the 29/09/ 2021.

¹¹ Joseph Embinjoh. King Maker and Trader, aged 80. Interviewed at Bonambufei village on the 4/06/2021.

and roll down stones against the Bali and Germans and at the same time used bows, arrows and spears in attacking the enemies.¹²

According to Hook, a British colonial administrator in the Bamenda Division the Ngie people were apt in information and intelligence gathering during the German Expedition of 1912.¹³ During the said expedition, as soon as the German soldiers entered a village, the people played drums which sent away the children and women into the hills for refuge and gathered the men into battle.¹⁴ The drum signals were warnings to German soldiers of the impending danger should they persist.¹⁵ Drums were also used in summoning the people when there was the need to institute sanctions on witches and wizards.¹⁶ Even individuals made use of the drums to invite persons to their homes whenever it was difficult transmitting messages through a messenger for the same purpose.¹⁷ Although this practice is disappearing in Ngie clan because most of the drummers died without passing this art to other generations, it is still practiced especially in dead announcements or in summoning the population for urgent and emergency gatherings.

It was a completely different arrangement when a chief or fon died in Ngie. Every palace in Ngie Community and the compounds of notables had big drums (*ndeg*). The *ndeg* were placed at the centre of palaces in shades. The *ndeg* had two main functions. They protected the territorial boundaries of the communities and announced the disappearance of chiefs. When a chief died, the *ndeg* in the palace of the deceased is played and the sound moved like wild fire to the next. When the 'flame of fire' got to the palace of the neighbouring village, their *ndeg* further releases the the information and this went round all the villages of Ngie. This flame of fire (*uzoh*) moved round the entire Ngie clan until all the chiefdoms of Ngie clan were aware of the disappearance of the Chief. These drums are still very much present in Ngie till date. When this happens, all the chiefs and notables of Ngie gathered in the palace of the deceased chief for burial rites.¹⁸

Drums were also used by commoners in conveying messages as over 90% of families in Ngie had talking drums in their compounds. This was mostly used during the hunting season as members of the hunting group in rallying themselves for the exercise. In other instances community work was also announced through this medium. Death and assistance when in times of need was also made through this medium. For instance, when a man suddenly had a guest but had no palm to entertain him, he used the drum to seek for help from his friends or neighbours. On getting the information the receiver also responded with the sound of his drum immediately. Through the various sounds played, one would understand if he is in possession of palm wine and ready to assist or not. The use of the drum was most common among men than women.¹⁹ Apart from the use of drums, voice communication was also practiced as a medium of transmitting information.

In this form of communication, the speakers did not use words but made sounds with the voice. The voice sound was capable of transmitting messages to neighbours and nearby communities.²⁰ It was generally practiced when women had to rally themselves for farm work and men when ready to move to their palm bushes for tapping especially those whose raffia

¹² Stephen Ujabeng Andong. Business man, aged 52. Interviewed at Yaounde on the 29/09/2021.

¹³ R.J. Hook, Ngi Tribe, Bamenda Division Intelligence Report (1933), 10. National Archives Buea.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶ Mathew Ebeteh Fonbod. Retired Civil Servant, aged 78. Interviewed at Tinechung village on the 19/03/2021.

¹⁷ Lawrence Atating. Agricultural Technician, aged 34. Interviewed at Bonambufei village on the 6/05/2021.

¹⁸ Mathew Ebeteh Fonbod. Retired Civil Servant, aged 78. Interviewed at Tinechung on the 19/3/2021.

¹⁹ Achowah Umenei, *Fragment of Ngie Culture* (Maryland Printers Bamenda 2018), 78-79.

²⁰ Augustine Akiemek. Retired Civil Servant, aged 66. Interviewed at Bonambufei on the 10/07/2021.

palm bushes were located within the same vicinities. Whenever women from different villages had to cultivate a particular piece of land as a group, they signalled each other with a voice sound indicating that it was time to take off for the farms.²¹

In certain circumstances, whenever some women got to the farm earlier than others, they were able to inform those still on their way through the voice sounds informing them that they were already in the farm. This was equally true for men as those whose raffia palm bushes were found within the same area also made use of voice messages to inform their colleague, tappers, that they were on their way to tap or that when returning home. This practice which is rapidly dying out or being extinct since the emergence of modern communication systems is still common in Tinechung, Ebang and Angai villages.²² Though the voice communication is fading away in Ngie, their language, *ungie*, has stood the test of time and remains a uniting factor that has contributed greatly to inter-community co-existence. Although each of the four ethnic groups in Ngie had their own languages of communication, *ungie* was the dominant language generally spoken by the people inhabiting the area. The people of Azem, Mengom and even the Fulani had to learn *ungie* and this facilitated social interactions within the area. Never the less, the people of Azem, Mengom and the Fulani maintained their respective languages especially when it came to interactions within their own communities.²³ Another factor for coexistence was the justice system.

Justice System

The people of Ngie identified themselves with a common judiciary practice though some differences were visible among communities. Just like other African communities, conflicts were bound in Ngie as the struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources were recurrent.²⁴ Before the colonial era, there were many principles guiding conflict resolutions in traditional African societies in general and Ngie in particular. Firstly, the people trusted their indigenous approaches to conflict and built strong judicial institutions under the authority of their leaders. In this direction, elders, chiefs, priests, priestesses and secret cults were the custodians of justice and relied on the confidence of their people in administering justice. They acted as mediators, arbitrators, or judges and the fervent belief that justice was meted in the presence of the ancestral forces made them impartial. This was necessary to avoid the wrath of the gods or ancestral forces.²⁵

This view is strongly supported by Sobseh who argues that the Bamenda Grassfields offer a vertical laboratory for indigenous land conflict prevention in pre-colonial Africa. Land conflict prevention and resolution structures and institutions were closely bound with socio economic and political realities of the lifestyle of the communities. Methods of land conflict management and transformation were drawn from the traditional culture with the guidance of traditional leaders. In the domain, the communication style, methods of reconciliation, mediation and retaliation, and participation of parties to the conflict and the third party was visible. He goes further to opine that the structures and institutions, the system of recompense for wrong doing, determination of wrong doing and appropriate punishments, processes for remorse, confession, forgiveness and reconciliation and rituals for making closure and new bargaining were visible. Through this process, indigenous key actors

²¹ Idem.

²² Idem.

²³ Salomen Akaya. Retired Civil Servant, aged 66. Interviewed at Etwii on the 10/05/2021.

²⁴ Onigu, Ottie & Albert, I.O, "Community Conflicts in Nigeria, Management, Resolution and Transformation Ibadan, Nigeria": *Spectrum Books Limited*, (2001), 18.

²⁵ Ajayi, Adeyinka Theresa, "Methods of Conflict, Resolution in African Traditional Society". *African Research review. An International Multi Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia* vol.8 (2), Serial N^o 33, April, (2014), 141. Accessed on 30/09/22.

successfully mitigated and resolved conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields. Hence, Fons, village heads, envoys, councillors, elders, notables, quarter heads and queen mothers cannot be disassociated from the judiciary processes in the continent.²⁶

Such organisations and process were also discernable in Ngie as the traditional approach to conflict management and prevention has been as old as the settlement of Ngie. It was part of the customs and traditions of the Ngie. Though the chieftaincy institution and authority is becoming more centralized, the organisation of justice was segmentary in nature, and as such decision making was not solely in hands of chiefs. The chiefs, elders, notables, title holders' councillors (as mentioned earlier) and tradi-practitioners were important actors conflict management and prevention.²⁷

Minor conflicts were settled by quarter or family heads. More serious conflicts were settled by the Fons and traditional councils. But when it came to complicated issues involving communities, the Fons and his council adjudicated. When the conflict took the form of an inter village conflict, the Fon and village traditional councils of the two villages came together and attempted to resolve the conflict.²⁸ The role of priests and tradi-pactitioners was very primordial when it came to the performance of rituals and the administration of oaths. They were responsible for the invocation of ancestral spirit, preparation of concoctions and other items meant for rituals and sacrifices.²⁹ The approach adopted in resolving conflicts depended on the nature of conflict. Hence, the following methods were used; mediation and negotiations as well adjudication and this involved the mud, squirrel and water judgment methods.³⁰

Worth emphasizing is the fact that in traditional African society adjudication was done by engaging all disputants usually in the chambers or compounds of the family heads, quarter heads and palace courts as the case may be.³¹ The model used was not aimed at punishing the guilty party but it was kind of judgment where reprimand was not the ultimate. Even when punishment was meted on the defaulter, it was mild and reassuringly restorative of peace and harmony in society.³² This process was tied down to the customs and traditions of the people as mentioned and adjudicator were the quarter heads, family heads, notables in council or the chief as the case may be.³³

This can be justified by the squirrel justice system was which was very conspicuous among the Ngie. It was used in settling disputes between individual and communities. This method was shrouded in mystery. The squirrel played an interesting role in settling disputes. The squirrel remained the only judge capable of determining the guilty and the innocent party or who was right or wrong. The squirrel judge was invoked whenever other methods of determining the truth had failed. The disputants could on their own prefer the squirrel judge to settle their disputes. In the case of intercommunity conflicts, the decision to

²⁶ Emmanuel Yenkong Sobseh, "Land Tenure and Land Conflicts in the North West Region of Cameroon, (1974-2008), A Historical perspective". Theses, University of Yaounde I, (2011),66.

²⁷ Ibid., 67.

²⁸ Samuel Anjuambom. Notable and a Retired Civil Servant, aged 88. Interviewed at Bonambufei village on the 8/04/2022.

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ Idem.

³¹ Therese Ajayi Adeyinka, "Methods of Conflict Resolution in Africa Traditional Society". *African Research Review. An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia* Vol. 8(2), Serial No. 33, April (2014), 149.

³² O.B Olaoba, Remi Anifowose, Abdul R. Yesufu Oyedolapo Babatunde Dourojeaye, "African Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution". *National Open University of Nigeria (2010)*, 55.

³³ Ibid., 56-57.

invoke the squirrel was agreed upon by the disputants before the village traditional council just as the assembly might have required the disputants to hunt for a squirrel.³⁴

When once a decision was taken to hunt a squirrel, a special piece of stick was given to the leader or representative of the community who had been charged with hunting the squirrel to prove their innocence. A date was fixed for the squirrel hunt. Squirrel hunts were usually done in the forest around the communities. In most cases, particular forests were agreed upon for the squirrel hunt. On the day fixed for hunting, the two communities gathered at the forest chosen for that purpose. Each community choose one of theirs who had to hunt the squirrel and another person who has to make incantations. The squirrel hunt was done by pulsating the trees and bushes in search for a squirrel while incantations were made using the following words; “if they are innocent, the squirrel should descend into their hands but if they are guilty, the squirrel should disappear”.³⁵

By implication, those concerned did not go after the squirrel but the squirrel came to them mysteriously. When the squirrel was descended or appeared, the representative of the community charged with the hunting moved towards the squirrel, opened his arms, while making incantations, and the squirrel mystically got to his hands when the community or individual was innocent and the reverse was true.³⁶ That is, if the individual or community was at fault, the squirrel simply slipped off and disappeared into the bushes. In cases of land disputes, the community that took hold of the squirrel was automatically declared owner of the parcel of land in dispute. Before them that happened, the elders examined it to find out whether it had a complete tail. If the tail was incomplete it meant that the squirrel had earlier been used for another dispute and such a squirrel was rejected and the reverse was true. Furthermore, if the squirrel had no scrotum it was not considered as a genuine squirrel and was the decision was overruled.³⁷ In the course of hunting, if the hunters came across a snake or a colony of soldier ants the hunt was cancelled and reprogrammed for another day. This is because snakes and soldier ants were believed to be omen of ill luck.³⁸ Another techniques uses was the Water judgement.

This was usually carried out in shrines with mystical outlets connected to streams and rivers of about to ten miles from the tabernacles. These shrines and streams were found in Abebung, Bonatu, Andek and Bonayang. These particular shrines known as *Uneb* were settled both individual and intercommunity disputes just like the case of the squirrel judgment. In Abebung the shrines was known as *Aneuqoi*. This shrine was believed to to be the wife of the founder of Abebung village.³⁹ The outlet in this shrine was connected mystically to *Uneb* through Uno stream which flowed South West of Abenbung to their boundary with Angong. In Bonatu the shrine was located Mboh Hill and was connected to river Fek, about seven kilometers to the Iteibughei pool.⁴⁰ At Iteibughei river Fek shared boundary with Bonatu, Andek and Bonambufei. In Bonayang the *Uneb* was located at Ibong and was mystically connected to the pool located at Bonaneighei quarter in Andek.⁴¹

Whenever someone was accused of theft, witchcraft, murder and dispute arose over ownership of land and other differences as well, individuals or communities concern were required to visit these shrines. This was to prove their innocence, rights or claims. In the

³⁴ Achowah Umenei, fragment of Ngie culture, Maryland Printers Bamenda, (2018),84.

³⁵ Shadrack A. Ambanasom, *Son of the Native Soil* Agwecams printers Bamenda, (2007), 42-43.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

³⁷ Isaac Njaiberg. Farmer, aged 60. Interviewed in Bonambufei village on the 4/06/2021.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Florence Awah Fonbod, “The Role of Women in the Historical Development of Ngie Clan”. Dissertation, University of Yaounde I,(1999), 11-12.

⁴⁰ Andrais Isaichoh. Fon of Bonatu, aged 9. Interviewed in Bonatu village on the 27/02/2022.

⁴¹ Thomas Ikeiyam. Businessman, aged 75. Interviewed in Douala on the 18/04/2022.

process of adjudication, the suspect or community representatives had to go with bamboo(s) or traditional cup(s) and signs for identification were inserted on them by elders, tradi-practitioners or chief priests. After incantations were made, these were thrown into the holes in the shrines. After this exercise, all those present ran to the pools of water, streams or rivers.

On appearing at the pools of water bodies, if these items appeared broken, it was an indication that the suspect was guilty and vice versa. In the case of serious accusations like murder or witchcraft, the suspect was declared guilty and killed at the spot. Suspects whose cups or bamboos appeared unbroken were declared innocent. In the case of inter-communal conflicts, the community whose bamboo or cup did appear in the pool broken was considered to be at fault and lost its claim to the disputed land and the other contestants accorded right of ownership.⁴² The people of Ngie did not use only the squirrel and water judgments techniques but also the mud method.

This method is also practiced among Bakweri and Mamfe areas of Cameroon. they are known as the sasswood ordeal and *Otti* respectively.⁴³ This was used by the Ngie in settling chieftaincy conflicts and intercommunity land disputes. This method involved the use of soil which was mixed into mud and alligator pepper as the principal components though other elements were added to the concoctions. The blend which was prepared by specialised tradi-practitioners was administered to the disputants after taking oaths. Thorough these oaths they declared their innocence by declaring their worthiness of their claims and that if they were at fault let them develop swollen stomachs within seven weeks. Those who were at fault faced such consequences but if they later on confess before the expiration of the period they served from such developments by the specialised tradi-practitioners who prepared the concoctions and administered them. Even after the proven guilty, the same process was administered and defaulters were heavily fined by their communities. Those who remained adamant in confessing died of swollen stomachs within seven weeks.⁴⁴

Such arguments can be substantiated with the land dispute between Bonatu and Ajei village in the 1960s. Ajei village claimed ownership of a portion of land belonging to the Bonatu at their common border where some early Bonatu settlers had occupied but later migrated to Teze village. This was the Bon-anugho family in Teze. They did not lose sight of this land as they constantly returned there for traditional rituals and celebrations under the umbrella of Bonatu, their brothers. Ajei village claimed ownership of the territory and skirmishes ensued between them and Bonatu.

To solve the problem the mud judgement method was employed by adding the soil from the disputed land to the mixture. The people of Bonatu village not being the original settlers in the quarter where the disputed portion of land was situated invited the Bon-anugho family from Teze to take part in the process. On the date agreed, soil from the disputed land, picked by the contestants was used in preparing the concoction. However, the people of Ajei backed down and surrendered their claim and the disputed land became the bonafied property of Bonatu village.⁴⁵

As regards chieftaincy conflicts, the mud method was also used in resolving the chieftaincy dispute in Etwii between Ikaicheck John Ngwanade of Bonayang and Fokim Joseph of Bonatin. Though Ikaicheck John Ngwanade was appointed as the third-class chief of Etwii village by Minister of territorial administration in 1997, Fokim contested the

⁴² Andrais Isaichoh. Fon of Bonatu, aged 97. Interviewed in Bonatu village on the 27/02/2022.

⁴³ Martin Sango Ndeh, "Traditional System Justice and Conflict Resolution: Exploring the Pre-colonial Institutional Framework in Mamfe and Bakweri lands of Cameroon". *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research*. Vol. 5, No. September, (2017), 6.

⁴⁴ Achowah Umenei, *Fragments of Ngie Culture*. Maryland Printers Bamenda, (2018), 85-86.

⁴⁵ Andrais Isaichoh. Fon of Bonatu, aged 97. Interviewed in Bonatu village on the 27/02/2022.

decision. He claimed to be the rightful claimant to the stool. The resistance orchestrated by Fokim in accepting the decision of the Minster stirred up trouble in the village between his supporters and those of the appointee. Unable to convince Fokim to accept the decision, the Senior Divisional Officer for Momo advised the people of Etwii to settle the dispute amicably through indigenous approaches.

It is in this light that the people of Etwii evoked the mud judgment techniques. In the presence of the Senior Divisional Officer for Momo, the two communities of Bonayang and Bonatin gathered at Government School Etwii for the administration of the concoction with mud picked by the two contestants to the throne of Etwii at Government School Etwii. This was used in preparing the concoction which was drunk the protagonists. A few weeks later, Fokim Joseph was alleged to have died of the concoctions though the people of Bonatin and his supporters claimed that he died of natural illness.⁴⁶

Apart from the mud method, the Ngie also employed the Fig Tree Ritual Pact which involved the burial of a human and the planting of a tree on the spot. This was cement peaceful relations between the conflicting communities after episodes of conflicting relations. This was practiced by the Widikum and in Ngie communities in a bid to avert the reoccurrence of such differences among them in future. This was a confidence building mechanism. In this process a human being or dog was at the boundary of the two communities after rituals and incarnations were made. A fig tree was then planted at the spot where this took place and usually at boundary between of two disputing communities. The burial was done under a secret oath and those present were to keep this secret. The fig tree remained as an overt sign of the peaceful settlement between the two communities.⁴⁷

Such an act was performed in 1915, when a brawl between Bonambufei and Abebung. This was necessary in re-establishing healthy relations between them. Suffice to not that, the people of Abebung were noted for always abating and supporting the Bali in kidnapping the people of Bonambufei village for slavery, especially during the period of slave trade. Again, the constant support given to the Bali and German soldiers in expeditions against the Bonambufei made relations tense. This brought serious rancour between them. After the departure of the Germans and end to their colonial presence in Kamerun, there was the need to build the frosty relationship that existed between the two communities especially when they were merged into the same administrative unit by the British. To realise this, the Fig Planting Ritual act was orchestrated and a woman was buried alive and a fig tree planted at the spot which is still visible till date. Since then, the two communities have lived in harmony.⁴⁸

Again, the land dispute between Ajei village and Anong villages was settled by burying a woman, Mah, alive at Offit and fig tree planted at the boundary between them around the 1940s.⁴⁹ This is equally true with the Tinechung in Ngie and Tugi in Meta where the same practice was carried out. The two communities had witnessed strained relations over their common boundary and the problem rested with the burial of a man, Osige alive at Tonogai.⁵⁰ This act was also repeated at the boundary between Tinechung and Oshie as a means of solving their boundary dispute by burying life dog and a fig tree at Enyibai.⁵¹ Such acts were orchestrated only when two communities had solved their differences and restored.⁵²

⁴⁶ Godlove Akobota. *Grazier/Trader*, aged 47. Interviewed in Bonayang village on the 26/06/2021.

⁴⁷ Ruth Osongo. *Retired Civil Servant*, aged 83. Interviewed at Abebung village on the 8/04/2022.

⁴⁸ Joseph Gubinloh. *King Maker and Trader*, aged 80. Interviewed in Bonambufei village on the 4/06/2021

⁴⁹ Zacharia Achonduh. *Retired Security Agent*, aged 60. Interviewed in Ajei village on the 5/04/2022.

⁵⁰ Fonbod Ebeteh Mathew. *Retired Civil Servant*, aged 78. Interviewed in Tinechung on the 19/03/2021.

⁵¹ Stephen Abong. *Nurse*, aged 54. Interviewed at Tinechung village on the 10/06/2021.

⁵² Andrew Andong. *Teacher*, aged 60. Interviewed in Bamenda on the 26/02/2022.

As mentioned earlier the acts of burring human beings and dogs alive and planting trees on the spot was accompanied by ritual pacts. The Ngie, just like some African Traditional states used this method in demarcating states boundaries and the trees planted became reference spots. Hence, Rituals were important aspects of the geo-political diplomacy of many political states.⁵³ The concept and practice of creating and sanctioning traditional boundaries by rituals among the polities of the Cameroon Grassfields appeared to be very strong and fashionable. Ritual pacts guaranteed the performance of state boundaries more than what written and signed treaties did in Europe in the 19th century. This is because the former was bound by both temporal and spiritual obligations to uphold ritual pacts.⁵⁴

With regard to mediation and negotiations, non-coercive interventions approaches were use and peaceful settlement with the help of third parties were employed. The essence of this approach was non coercive with the objectives of instituting peace without a winner and a loser. Mediators usually endeavoured that peace and harmony reigned supreme in the society at whatever level of mediation.⁵⁵ In the process, blame was not apportioned to any of the contesting parties. Mediators are sought from within the communities or societies of the parties concerned. Elders were designated to bring the contesting parties together and the choices depended on traditions, circumstances and personalities, as the case may be. Their roles were and not limited to pressurizing, recommending, giving assessment, conveying suggestions on behalf of the parties, emphasizing the situation if agreement is not reached, and explaining the agreement already attained.⁵⁶

This method was visible in cases concerning intercommunity land disputes. When such conflicts broke out, trustworthy elders or notables contacted the chiefs and leaders of conflicting communities and sought for lasting solutions. A good example is the Abebung and Bonambufei land conflict. Successful mediation brought the leaders and chiefs of the disputing communities for peace talks. The crux of the matter lies in the construction of a water catchment by Abebung village on land which Bonambufei claimed it belonged to them. This was at Mboh hill around Izari in 1992. Rightly or wrongly, the people of Abebung believe that the project went on successfully without their knowledge along their common boundary.

On the discovery of such a project on their land, the chief of Bonambufei approached the Fon of Abebung who claimed ownership of that portion of the land. The situation rapidly degenerated as either community laid claims to the disputed area. Tensions flared and there was fear that the situation would degenerate as it was alleged that the people of Bonambufei were preparing for an assault on the Abebung.⁵⁷ Tempers flare especially when the people of Bonambufei discovered that the tank built could not provide the needed water. It was alleged that the Abebung had filled it with sand making impossible for the tank to serve the purpose it was built for. Besides, rituals performed on the site by the Bonambufei, stirred up more trouble and it was eminent that skirmishes would arise.

However, due to the old age tradition of peaceful coexistence, some notables and elders from the two villages, led by Hon. L.I Umenjoh of Bonambufei and Usongo Isaac of Abebung were call upon to mediate and calm down their respective populations. As an

⁵³ Daniel Abwa, Albert-Pascal Temngua, E.S.D Fomin, Willibroard Dze-Ngwa, Boundaries and History in Africa: Issues on Conventional Boundaries and Ideological Frontiers. University of Yaounde 1, (2011), 32-33.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 33-34.

⁵⁵ Isurmona V.A, Problems of Peace Keeping. Peacemaking and Peacekeeping. Perspective on Peace and Conflict in Africa, Ibadan, John Arches Publishers Limited, (2005), 38.

⁵⁶ Bright-bock title, Indeginous Conflict Resolution in Africa. Institute of Educational Research University of Osolo, (2001), 8-11.

⁵⁷ Joseph Embinjoh. King Maker and a trader, aged 80. Interviewed in Bonambufei on the 4/06/2021.

outcome of their efforts both parties opted for the amicable settlement of their differences.⁵⁸ As a result of the mediation efforts of these elders, the two villages represented by their chiefs and traditional councils assembled at Izari for talk. After a number of meetings between the leaders of the contesting communities, the two parties entered into agreement where-in the people of Abebung accepted that the disputed portion of the land belonged to Bonambufei. On their part, Bonambufei village permitted the construction of the water tank on the disputed portion of land and both communities were to benefit from the water supply.⁵⁹

Another important episode where mediation and negotiated solutions to conflict was also witnessed in Ngie at the dawn of the farmer grazer conflicts in the area. This was especially true when cattle damaged crops. Most often than not exorbitant amounts were always demanded by farmers for compensations and this became a source of bitterness between farmers and grazers. When such grievances were presented to the village traditional council and traditional authorities of Ngie; chief and Ardo negotiated settlements became the order of the day after bargains were made between farmers and grazers by these local authorities.⁶⁰

Though outburst between farmers and grazers were common, negotiated settlements always triumphed since adjudication was hardly adopted as a method of settling the disputes between communities. A case in point was the attack on Fulani by Bonambufei villagers tried to dislodge the Fulani from Mboh hill as they accused Fulani cattle to incessantly destroying their crops. The matter came to the 2010 as the entire village raided the hill, beat up graziers and directed their cattle to the to the Andek council for impoundment.⁶¹

Against the existing rapport of peaceful negotiation of intercommunity conflicts that have reigned in Ngie for a long time, the grazers entreated the divisional judicial authorities in Mbengwi to adjudicate. However, the matter was withdrawn from the Mbengwi Court and settled by the Bonambufei Village Council. True to the existing spirit and traditions of coexistence, a negotiated settlement was reached. The grazers were called upon to provide bab wires while farmers sticks for the fencing in grazing land and farming land.⁶²

This approach was not particular to farmer grazer conflicts but also extended to conflicts related to land and quest for autonomy by some communities in Ngie. An excellent example of inter communal conflict which was settled through negotiation was that of claim of autonomy by Aghemengwi from Bonatu village. Aghemengwi was a quarter of Bonatu, located some miles the main settlement. This area was farmland for the Bonatu and also an area where their raffia palm bushes were found as posited by the Bonatu. The fertile nature of the land ignited Angwi to take up settlement there and founded a hamlet, Aghemengwi in the 1930s though the chief of Bonatu maintained his authority over the area especially in tax collection matters.⁶³

In the 1970s and 1980s the quarter head of Aghemengwi took advantage of the distance between Bonatu and Aghemenwi and claimed authority over Aghemengwi. To him, the settlement was an autonomous village and himself, chief.⁶⁴ He was supported by some of the settlers of Aghemengwi as they paid allegiance to him rather the chief of Bonatu. With these developments, the chief of Bonatu ordered the vacation of all those inhabiting the area

⁵⁸ Idem.

⁵⁹ Festus Angeng. Trader, aged 54. Interviewed at Abebung village on the 8/04/2022.

⁶⁰ Clara Ayongab. Civil Servant, aged 52. Interviewed in Bamenda on the 3/03/2022.

⁶¹ Esther Ayanganou. Farmer, aged 70. Interviewed at Bonambufei village on the 13/04/2022.

⁶² Peter Gnochugi Andu. Driver/ grazier, aged 60. Interviewed in Bonatu on the 25/02/2022.

⁶³ Idem.

⁶⁴ Andrais Isaichoh. Fon of Bonatu, aged 97. Interviewed at Bonatu village on the 27/02/2022.

and advise them to take up residence mainland (Bonatu). Such a decision caused tension between the people and chief of Bonatu and they opted for a negotiated settlement. Their leader accepted the position of quarter head and submitted to the authority of Bonatu. This for once settled the differences and enhanced coexistence between the contestants and their followers and the area has remained a quarter in Bonatu.⁶⁵

Indigenous Religious Practices and Cultural Festivities

Traditional religion is one thing that brings the people of Ngie together and makes them to feel as one person. They believe in a common ancestry binds the people of Ngie together and it is a strong force for cohesion among the people. Just like most other African traditional societies, the people of Ngie have a strong believe in ancestral worship. All the ethnic groups in Ngie, worshiped *Ungiekum* as their ancestor giving them a sense of common ancestor and identity.⁶⁶ Before the introduction of Islam and Christianity They believed in gods of good, *nyui chung*, and gods evil, *nyui ebung*. Among these gods, *Ungiekum* stands out distinct and it is believed that he bring blessings to the people.

This explains why the people of Azem, Mengom and Ngie usually gathered at *Ungiekum's* shrine in Dudum and made libations and offered sacrifices at the shrine.⁶⁷ They saw *Ungiekum* as a unifying factor. The people of Ngie as mentioned in Chapter One traced their origin to *Ungiekum* as their legendary ancestor. They sought the approval of *Ungiekum* before taking some important decisions. There is a tree close to *Ungiekum's* shrine known as *ekia* which is believed to have mystical powers that kill witches and wizards and protects the land. This tree had been visited in the past to get the approval of *Ungiekum* on certain major decisions the chiefs and the notables took in the past. In 1961, the chiefs of Ngie went to this shrine to get *Ungiekum's* approval for their unanimous candidate to represent Ngie in the West Cameroon House of Assembly. Oral tradition holds that when the chiefs and Z.A. Abendong who was the unanimous candidate got to the *ekia* a wet tree branch fell, indicating their choice had been approved by *Ungiekum*.⁶⁸

With the presence of the Fulani in Ngie Islam became one of the religions in Ngie society alongside Ngie traditional religion and Christianity. One expected serious clashes between the worshipers of *Ungiekum* and Muslims but the pluralism instead religious brought tolerance, inter-community interaction and co-existence. This completely changed the notion generally held by non-muslims that war is the central defining feature of Islam when it comes to inter faith relations.⁶⁹ Islam strictly forbids befriending enemies of the faith and those who conspire against Muslims. At the same time, however, Islam exhorts Muslims to relate with other non-Muslims with kindness, good manners, gentleness and love. Islam recognizes a certain sort of brotherhood and feeling of oneness among members of the same community\ nation as an established fact.⁷⁰ It was due to these principles that some indigenes embraced the Muslim and cooperation between the Fulani who were mostly Muslim and the people of ensued.

To this effect, some in the early 1980s, a Mosque was constructed in Angong by a native who had been converted to Islam and adopted the name Aboubakar and this co-existed

⁶⁵ Idem..

⁶⁶ Stephen Ujambeng. Business man, aged 52. Interviewed at Yaounde on the 30/09/2021.

⁶⁷ Jacob Itoatim. Civil Servant, aged 54. Interviewed at Bonambufei on the 10/05/2022.

⁶⁸ John Ambeigwo. Retired Civil Servant, aged 75. Interviewed at Teze on the 13/02/2022.

⁶⁹ Institute of Religious and Social thoughts, Islamic Ethnicity and inter-community Relations. (2020) <https://irstreth>Islamic-ethnicity-and-int...Accessed> on December 22nd 2021 at 4 p.m.

⁷⁰ Maului Yahya Nomani, Islamic Perspectives of Inter-community Relations. Two Circles.net, (2009) <http://twocircles.net>Articles>. Accessed on December 23rd 2021 at 9 p.m.

side by side traditional religion and Christianity.⁷¹ Ecumenical services became the role as this brought Muslims, Christians and traditional African religions together as they usually gather for prayers. Islamic feasts resulted in harmonious coexistence between the Christians, Muslims and adherents to traditional religion as they jointly celebrated together. The Ramadan feast stands distinct and very popular among the Ngie as it involved not only Muslims but also Christians and those who believe in African traditional religion.⁷² Besides, since Islam forbids Muslims from consuming meat slaughtered by non-Muslims, the former were given the pride of place in carrying out such activities and often called upon to do the job for them.⁷³ This thus strengthened in-religious relations within Ngie. As mentioned earlier, non-Muslims actively participated in Muslim and this was reciprocated during Christian celebrations.⁷⁴

Cultural festivities are ingredients that spiced coexistence among the Ngie of Cameroon especially during funeral ceremonies and the enthronement of fons and funeral ceremonies and marriage ceremonies among others. The enthronement of fons ceremonies was not done in isolation by the briefed community but friendly neighbours and chiefdoms. This is equally true for Ngie society. According to Budi, the various indigenous communities in Cameroon before Europeans interference never existed in isolation and maintained cordial relations between them in different forms.⁷⁵ This is beautifully captured by Fanso and cited by Budi, when he concurs that each group was historically and socially linked directly as indirectly to other community. He goes further to maintain that the network of relation between the different groups overlapped from district to district throughout the territory. There were ethnic affiliations and continuities between groups generally located in the same neighbourhood or region. Hence, no community was isolated historically, culturally, linguistically, economically or socially from its neighbours especially in the Western and this was to ensure peaceful coexistence in spite of stiff competition, mutual distrust and sometimes open warfare.⁷⁶

Such incidents, enthronement of fons, required that the chiefs be bestowed with all the spiritual powers which the throne deserves through initiation into all the secret societies of the village. For instance, Talla Song holds that upon enthronement the fon was bestowed with spiritual powers initiation into all the secret societies of the village. This gave him the status of a divine figure with divine powers to communicate with the gods and ancestors of the land who were believed to guide him on how best to administer his people. This therefore meant that they also believed in the concept of life after dead and in the fact that, elders who die, continue to inhabit the earth as spirit as the gods of the people.⁷⁷ Hence, the presence of other chiefs and secret societies were necessary not only to bestow their blessings on the new fon but also enforce relations which their ancestors had initiated.

The ceremony began with the choice of king makers from among the children of the deceased chief or relatives if the deceased had no son. The designated chief is hidden from

⁷¹ Gilbert Aboubaka. Builder, aged 40. Interviewed at Angong village on the 30/06/2021.

⁷² Isa Sally. Grazier, aged 43. Interviewed at Tinechung on the 19/03/2021.

⁷³ Cecila Chinwe Ogbu, "The Role of Education on Peace of co-existence of African States" –A Case Study of Nigeria. *World Educators Foreign Volume 3. N^o. 1* (2014), 2350 – 2401.

⁷⁴ Walters Aghainum. Teacher, aged 52. Interviewed at Tinekoh village on the 21/06/2021.

⁷⁵ Raymond Njingri Budi, "Observing the Myth of African Difference: Inter and Intra-community Relations in Tradition Cameroon Society Before Colonialism". *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences* Volume XI, No. 112, Quarter 11, (2020), ISSN: 2229-5313.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2229-5313.

⁷⁷ Richard Tanto Talla and Ignitions Womai Song, "Enthronement Indigenous Archive in Mbem land of Cameroon: which Way Forward" *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)* Volume 1, Issue 7th July (2014), 157-70.

the public for a period of at least two weeks. It is during this period that he is initiated into the various secret societies in the village and taught the different mystical shrines and alters of the village. On the day of enthronement, he is presented to the public. Before doing that, the chiefs and notables from Ngie blessed and empowered him by rubbing concoction on him. The involvement of other chiefs of Ngie is intended to give recognition to the enthroned chief. The enthronement ends with feasting, drinking and cultural dances. Most of these dance groups come from friendly villages within and without Ngie. Although each village in Ngie maintains its autonomy, when it comes to the enthronement of chiefs it is a matter for the whole Ngie Clan and beyond.⁷⁸ This is also true when it came to the morning of late fons. Other festivals which brought the entire Ngie were burial festivities. This had to do with mourning and rites. The funeral rites were characterized by the performance of traditional dance groups from all the clans of Ngie. These groups included; *Ananfaukobi*, *Akamaa*, *Adeneh*, *Awaraa*, *Awuiuzoh*, *Uchei*, *Ukwen*, *Ichibi* among others. Some of these dances like *Ichibi* were reserved for men while others like *asodere* were for the women. Some dance groups were peculiar to some of the villages in Ngie.

The Funeral ceremonies of notable and high dignitaries in Ngie were opportunities for different dance groups from all the villages in Ngie to come together. A case in point was the demise of honorable Zacharia Akoanung Abendong who died in July 1963. Although he was buried in Bamenda, the people of Ngie all gathered at Andek to mourn him. All the different types of traditional dances of the various villages gathered at Andek and staged during the funeral. In 1972, the Fon of Teze village also disappeared. All the villages and the different danced groups in Ngie gathered in Teze at the Fon's palace for funeral rites and celebration. Also the disappearance of chief Bonajah of Andek village on the 19th October 1989 once more brought the people of Ngie together. During this occasion, the Ngie community came out as one to mourn him as different dance groups and inhabitants gathered at Andek Fon's palace for funeral rites and celebration.⁷⁹ The *Ichibi*, a male dance group usually accompanied chiefs and notables to funerals ceremonies and well as women *akatai*, women dance group.

Suffice to explain that, *Ichibi* was which was a secret society, also held in the absence of funerals as each member was given the opportunity to organise the dance. Before *Ichibi* dance was organized, each member was entitle to a goat. These goats were slaughtered during the ceremony and members from other communities were invited to participate in the exercise. This is an indication that cultural festivals have a strong uniting force in in the promotion of inter-community interactions and social cohesion.⁸⁰ Also prominent persons in society and friends who were not members were invited to participate in the feasting. The *ichibi* dance was organised when a member died and the successor had to be initiated into that society.⁸¹

The performance of traditional dance groups in competitions usually organised by communities also encouraged interactions. During such occasions, the villages of Ngie selected their best dance groups to perform in inter-village dance competitions and demonstrated their prowess. Although these festivals were popular and crowd pulling, some of the dances were so dreadful that certain categories of people could not watch them because certain plaques could befall the community. For instance, in the early 1970s a traditional danced festival was organised in Bonambufei which attracted dance groups from different

⁷⁸ Stephen Ujambeng Andong. Business man, aged 55. Interviewed at Yaounde on the 29/09/2021.

⁷⁹ Pauline Asande. Trader, aged 77. Interviewed at Bamenda on the 21/04/2022.

⁸⁰ Samuel Andong. Retired business man, aged 78. Interviewed at Bamenda on the 03/03/2022.

⁸¹ Joseph Embiinjoh. King maker and Trader, aged 80. Interviewed at Bonambufei village on the 04/06-2021.

villages in Ngie. A dance group left from Ajeie and staged in Bonambufei. Unfortunately, the people were not warned of the consequences that children and women were not supposed to watch the group performed leading an epidemic of scabies on them.⁸² The *efuhnganai* dance festival also drew the populations of Ngie together. This was usually organised by tradi- practitioners and healers in the clan. During such events, only men were part of the occasions as children and women were banned from watching such performances. This took place in the Month of August when yams were being harvested from the farms or when important persons like *ukum* “(notable) died.⁸³ In the early 1950s, the people of Tinekooh village were invited to stage this dance in Bonayang.

In the course of staging the dance, it is alleged that one of the onlookers transformed in to a snake and suspended in the air while watching over the dancers as they performed. The dancers considered him contemptuous of them and tried flinging a spear at the snake. However, it did not hurt it and came in broken pieces. But he developed a broken waist as he fell down. After certain rituals performed with a lot of pleading by the host community, the man was healed.⁸⁴ What made the *efuhaganai* festival popular was the fact that the mystical performances by the tradi-practitioners and healers. It was always a crowd pulling event. Added to these was the *akamaa* dance festival which was limited within particular communities in Ngie brought people of Ngie together.

This was usually organised by persons who just constructed a house on the village. During these ceremonies friends were invited from across the villages of Ngie to feast with him and this pull a large number of persons to his residence. After the people have taken much wine, they then went into dancing. The *akamaa* dance was done by holding the wall of the house and shaking the backs of their legs. This usually started in the evenings through the nights and dispersal to their various destinations in the morning.⁸⁵ The role played by *Unyuei*, (twin dance) festival cannot be over emphasized. The dance was at the birth of twins. Whenever twins were delivered in any village, the father invited all twins in the village and offered gifts while presenting the children to them. The invitation was also extended to friends and twins in other villages. This culminated in a twin’s dance. In this exercise, all the twins present formed separate circles from other dancers and in this process sacrifices were offered involving rituals were made.⁸⁶

Other social dance groups were the *Abanguh* and *abieneefuh*. The *abanguh* dance was organized only when a member died. Though their performance was restricted to affiliates of the village where he belonged, members from other villages usually joined in the celebration.⁸⁷ With regards to *abieneefuh*, tradipractioners and healers from all the villages of Ngie and their Neighbouring like Menka came together. The ceremony was reserved only to those in possession of mystical powers. For example, in Bonambufei village only had only four persons participated in the dance. Whenever *abieneefuh* took place, rain poured on the dancing ground but not on the spot where dancing was carried out by members. Related to *abieneefu* was the *Unang* dance. This was also mysterious involved much witchcraft practices. Members belonged to a secret society and their base was in Ajei village. It was only performed in another village when an in law or a person related to a member died. Non-members were banned from watching their performances.

⁸² John Esuali. Farmer, aged 78. Interviewed at Ajei village on the 17/03/2022.

⁸³ Ferdinand Obad. Retired Civil Servant, aged 75. Interviewed at Bamenda on the 14/11/2021.

⁸⁴ Bernard Ndangoh. Retired Civil Servant, aged 73. Interviewed at Bamenda on the 14/11/2021.

⁸⁵ Joseph Embinjoh. King maker and trader, aged 80. Interviewed at Bonambufei village on the 04/06/2021

⁸⁶ Rose Ambeme. Trader, aged 80. Interviewed at Bamenda on the 17/03/2022.

⁸⁷ Augustine Akienek. Retired Civil Servant, aged 66. Interviewed at Bonambufei village on the 10/07/2021.

This explains why when the group was about to perform the population was alerted through sounds to take precautions to avoid impending plagues. When performing, members mysteriously peeled plantains in a bunch hanging on a plantain stem without harvesting the bunch of plantain and the plantain peelings remained on the plantain stem as if the plantain bunch was intact. The seat of the *unang* dance was Akwundong quarter in Ajei. Only strong and mystical men were able to watch this dance when it was in action. Membership cut across all villages in Ngie and moved to village in question because it was an opportunity for heavy feasting.⁸⁸ This therefore fostered coexistence and watered conflicts among the Ngie.

Marriages cannot also be underestimated as a factor capable of fostering integration and guaranteeing peaceful coexistence. This has to do with Interethnic and inter religious marriages fostered peace and unity among the people. The idea of marriage among the indigenous African people is all embracing; it is not only the affair of the bride and the groom but also the affair of their immediate families and extended families as this was seen as uniting factor among the people.⁸⁹ Inter-community marriage has been identified as a major factor that has contributed to the continuous search for unification instead of separation in the face of religious and cultural differences.⁹⁰ The existence of mixed marriages between the members of groups in conflict increases the social cohesion of that society.

Inter community, inter-ethnic and inter- religious marriages were common in Ngie. During the pre-colonial and colonial era it was difficult for persons from conflicting villages to inter marry. During the days of slavery and slave trade, some villages in Ngie were considered as enemy villages because they assisted the slave raiders, especially those from Bali, to capture into slavery indigenes Ngie. As a result, some Ngie villages prohibited intermarriages with enemy villages. This practice continued until when peace deals were negotiated after sacrifices and rituals were performed. This was the case between the villages of Abebung, Bonambufei and Teze.⁹¹ One other factor that hindered inter community and inter religious marriages in Ngie was hostility. It was alleged that some Ngie villages were cannibals and this drew hostility from their neighbours making it difficult for the people to move from one village to the in Ngie. This hindered inter-community interactions. It was therefore impossible for inter-community or inter-ethnic marriages taking place.

During the colonial era, the colonial Administrations stamped out cannibalism this practiced and hostility between communities was brought under control. Inter-community marriages became possible and brought about interactions between the communities. For example, the marriage of a woman from Abebung village to the Fon of Angong in the 1950s greatly reduced tension, violence and conflict between the villages of Abebung and Angong. The son of this woman, married from Abebung, later on became the chief of Angong. Because of this, violence between the two villages ceased though there were still some isolated skirmishes were bound. In many occasions the people of Ashong village accused their chief for conniving with the people of Abebung by allowing them to continuously encroach on their farm lands simply because his mother was from Abebung village.⁹²

Inter religious marriages in Ngie between the Fulani and the natives also enforced relations. A good number of people in Ngie married Fulani women. Most of these men were

⁸⁸ Joseph Embinjoh. Trader and king maker, aged 80. Interviewed at Bonambufei village on the 04/06/2021.

⁸⁹ Christian Emeka Chukwu, "National integration and peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria: The role of inter-Ethnic, inter-Religious marriages". *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, Volume 13, N^o. 1, (2021), 257-258.

⁹⁰ Friday Nwafor, "Inter- Ethnic Marriage as an Ingredient for Coexistence in a Multicultural Society: Elechi Amadi's Woman of Calabar as a paradigm". *AFRREV JAD: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol 8, N^o.2, (2019), 83-92.

⁹¹ Joseph Embinjoh. King maker and Trader, aged 80. Interviewed at Bonambufei village on the 04/06-2021.

⁹² Richard Akohfei. Farmer, aged 50. Interviewed at Umon on the 01/09/2021.

converted to Islam. This practice was also common in Ajei and Etwii villages. Such inter religious marriages contributed in a great way in lessening rivalries and encouraging interreligious coexistence between the two groups from the economic and religious dimensions.⁹³ There is a custom in Ngie that the family, even up to the extended families of the wife have right to work with the wife on the farms of the husband. The wife is free to invite her relatives to assist her on her husband's farms, or even to cultivate those farms and harvest crops there from for themselves. During marriage and birth celebrations, the two families came together. During sad events like dead and disasters the two families associated in consoling each other or their families. This implies that when a man marries from a different village or ethnic group, the whole village of the wife may move to the husband's village to celebrate or mourn as the case may be. Inter marriages have made the society of Ngie to be closely linked and interwoven.⁹⁴

Cultural Associations and Unions

A number of cultural organisations were created in Ngie between in the 1970s and the 1980s to foster intercommunity coexistence and unity. In the year 2000 other forms of cultural organizations were also created. Most of them did not exist for long but they greatly harnessed inter community coexistence in Ngie. Some of these organizations include: Union of Ngie Students and Teachers (UNST), Ngie Cultural and Development Association (NCADA), Ngie Fon's Union, Ngie Elites Association (NEA), Mangum Cultural and Development Association (MENCUDA) and Azem Cultural and Development Association (AZEMCUDA).⁹⁵ The Union of Ngie Student and Teachers was set up around 1977. At the time there were eight Ngie students in the then University of Yaoundé who crafted the idea and came up with this organizations. Its membership was made up of students of all levels of learning and teachers. The then students were too few to run the organization by themselves as such they brought in teachers who were mostly primary school teacher as at then. The purpose of the Union of Ngie students and teachers was to promote inter community coexistence, unity, culture, the Ngie language and education.

The Union of Ngie students and teachers meetings brought together all Ngie students and teachers irrespective of where they were based.⁹⁶ The executive of the Union of Ngie students and teachers moved from one village to another in Ngie and sensitized the students and teachers of the activities of the organization and encouraged parents to send children to school and the need to diversify fields of study and professions at a time when most Ngie people were teachers. The executive of this association also moved to the then South West, littoral, Centre and South Provinces and encouraged parents to educate their children in school. During summer holidays, Ngie students were encouraged to learn their dialect and culture and participate in the Union of Ngie students and teachers' assemblies. During the early years of this union many students and teachers from different parts of the country including the elites and youths attended the annual assemblies of the Union of Ngie students and teachers.⁹⁷

In 1995 the union split as Ngie students formed their own association.⁹⁸ This was caused by the fact that leaders who came to the helm of the organisation were not charismatic particularly as the leaders were higher institution student coupled with the abolition of

⁹³ Kennedy Fon. Business man, aged 54. Interviewed at Bamenda on the 01/11-2021.

⁹⁴ Theophilus Isegebu. Farmer, aged 58. Interviewed at Umon on the 01/05/2021.

⁹⁵ Jerry Ambanasom. University Lecturer, aged 57. Interviewed at Bamenda on the 28/10/2021.

⁹⁶ Hiram Umenjoh A. Lawyer, aged 56. Interviewed at Bamenda on the 22/11/2021.

⁹⁷ Thomas Mbakwa. Retired Civil Servant, aged 68. Interviewed at Bamenda on the 25/10/2021.

⁹⁸ *Idem*.

allowances to students by the state made it impossible for them to have the necessary finances which could have moved the organisation ahead.⁹⁹ Later, Etwii and Tinekooh villages broke away from the Ngie students Union asserted their independence. This was followed by Bonayang, Bonatin Student Associations. These Associations helped to strengthen unity and greatly improved on inter-community interactions and coexistence in Ngie.¹⁰⁰ Besides, the Ngie Cultural and Development Association (NCDA) was also founded in 1981 with headquarter at Andek, Ngie.

The association from its inception was intended to meet annually and to rotate from one village to another. Even though most of the villages in Ngie had their respective village Development Associations, the NCDA was an umbrella organization encompassing all the respective village development associations. The objective of the association was meant to promote the Ngie culture and developed Ngie. Its funding was to be raised by the village development associations.¹⁰¹ The association took off with much interest and participation by the people of Ngie. This greatly helped in enhancing the social interactions among the Ngie. this association was also supported in its goals by the Ngie Fons Union. This is cultural organisation reconciled the villages of Ngie and reduced conflicts and tension which exist among them. Only the chiefs who have been recognised by the administration were members. The Ngie Fons union functioned in such a way that it was able to resolve the differences among the chiefs of Ngie. The president of this association is usually consulted by the administration on issues related to chieftaincy and other official matters. To enforce unity, leadership of the union was rotary between upper and lower Ngie. This association contributed largely in reducing chieftaincy disputes and intercommunity boundary disputes in Ngie. The leaders were obliged to work together as a united front. Just because the chiefs were able to move and reason together they worked for the common interest of Ngie. As such, relations between the fons and their subjects were greatly enhanced and harmonious coexistence was its elevated.¹⁰²

Conclusion

This paper analysed the various indigenous socio-cultural ingenuities which fostered socio-cultural coexistence among the Ngie. The chapter concluded that upon settlement, the communities existed in isolation but communication endeavours greatly contributed in bring cohesion among the people. In this direction, the drum communication, voice sounds, and language cannot be overemphasized. Added to this the justice system exceptionally brought Ngie together and foster the spirit of common belonging and identity. Here, adjudication which took the form of squirrel, mud and fig tree judgements. This section concluded that the interference of the German and British colonial authorities brought some changes which did not completely punctured indigenous approaches in the administration of justice. However, they overruled decisions and methods that were at variance with colonial policies. The study also found out that indigenous religious and cultural activities were of prime importance in facilitating relations among the people as well as intermarriages between communities. It is within this backdrop that the paper concludes that indigenous socio-economic mechanism have remain relevant in enhancing coexistence and should be strengthened and coexist side by side with modern methods. In this way, the problems plaguing most heterogeneous communities in Africa will be a thing of the past.

⁹⁹ Idem.

¹⁰⁰ Jerry Ambanasom. University Lecturer, aged 57. Interviewed a Bamenda on the 28/10/2021.

¹⁰¹ Anna Agwe. Trader, aged 58. Interviewed at Bamenda on the 16/04/2022.

¹⁰² Andrais Isaicho. Chief of Bonatou, aged 67. Interviewed at Bonatu on the 7/06/2022.

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