

# Constructing From Reminiscences: Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms among the Bakossi (Cameroon), C.1750-2000

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**Abstract:** The current social and political conflicts that characterize many post independent African states is indicative of the fact that existing western modeled national and international conflict prevention mechanisms have failed to provide lasting solutions to the different conflicts that the continent is renowned for. Drawing from the Bakossi ethnic group of Cameroon, this article argues that traditional African societies could offer more effective conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms based on the African's strict respect for traditional symbols and institutions. We demonstrate that traditional Africa was not a conflict free society but that, the societies had evolved highly respected systems which did not permit the intensification of conflicts. We recount how some of these symbols/systems were effectively used in conflict situations among the Bakossi and at the same time calling for their re-appropriation in contemporary times. We argue that German and later British colonialism used and later discarded these mechanisms in abating conflicts. We have relied on oral tradition and some selected literature in gathering and presenting the data.

**Keywords:** Conflicts, Conflict Resolution, Bakossi, Indigenous Mechanisms, Ngwe.

## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO STUDY

This paper examines the role played by different indigenous conflict solving mechanisms in Bakossi during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence eras. Prior to colonial incursion in the Bakossi country of south west Cameroon, there existed indigenous conflicts resolution, arbitration, and prevention mechanisms and these were used in settling inter-clan, individual or village conflicts of different magnitudes. The fact that these institutions existed is indicative of the fact that Bakossi society like other African societies was not without conflicts. Traditional Bakossi society relied on conflict resolution institutions like *Ngwe*, *Muankum*, *Ekumechi* and lineage councils of elders to abate conflicts amongst the people.

Under colonial rule, for instance, indigenous conflict solving mechanisms were allowed to operate only in cases where they did not clash with the erstwhile European super-systems like courts. The German and later the British colonial authorities at different periods during their administration over Cameroon used and discarded traditional authority and conflict resolution mechanisms.

In this study, we try to demonstrate that many African societies had evolved well respected and reliable conflict resolution mechanisms which pre-date colonial rule, but these institutions were systematically undermined during colonial rule and beyond. Notwithstanding, there are instances to pinpoint where these societies solved protracted inter-ethnic squabbles in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa during and after European colonization.

### *Contextualizing the Study*

The history of disputes and conflict resolution mechanisms is not new to human society. From the biblical times to the contemporary period, conflicts and conflict resolution mechanisms have been at the center of human interaction. It was against this backdrop that different communities in Africa and Cameroon in particular evolved varied but similar mechanisms to deal with conflicts within their societies.

Scholars have articulated different definitions in an attempt to explain the various types of conflicts that exists in human society. According to Olatunde J.C.B. Ojo, D.K.Orwa, and C.M.B. Utete, dispute is a struggle between individuals or groups of people or power contenders, each seeking to accede to power in order to foster personal interest and the goals of his supporters<sup>1</sup>. For anthropologists, a conflict is a competition between at least two parties over incompatible desires, values, interest or aims. A party in this sense could be a person, a family, a lineage, the whole community, a class of ideas, a political organization, and a tribe or religion.<sup>2</sup>

From the above view, one can define dispute as a serious disagreement, especially one between ethnic groups or individuals that can last for either short or long time. It can be expressed by either verbal or physical aggression, frequent or passive actions of a party. In fact, a dispute is a process of human interaction, which occurs in all human societies but vary in degree and form of expression. Dispute is an inescapable aspect of human relations which heightens

<sup>1</sup> J.C.B. Ojo Olatunde, D.K. Orwa, and C.M.B. Utete, *African International Relations* (London: Longman, 1985),129.

<sup>2</sup> Webster, cited in Mark B. Funteh, "Inter-Cameroon Baptist Convention Conflicts 1954-2002: A Historical Investigation"(PhD Thesis in History, University of Yaounde I, 2008), 3.

nervousness when it occurs and sometimes it leaves behind remarkable or hurtful scars in the society and victims.

As remarked by Deng and Zartman: “even when the wounds heal, conflicts always leave their indelible hurtful scars for future reference”<sup>3</sup>. All human societies throughout history have gone through disputes because of the dynamic nature of man, so too was Bakossi society in South West Region of Cameroon. The existence of Conflicts, notwithstanding, a number of mechanisms were devised to by different indigenous African communities to resolve them.

## II. UNDERSTANDING CONFLICTS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS IN PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA

In pre-colonial Africa and Cameroon, conflict was an inevitable aspect of the societies. They ranged from land, theft, murder, and marriage disputes involving individuals and groups. In order to mitigate these conflicts, several conflict resolution institutions and adaptable conflict adjudication mechanisms or structures were employed by different ethnic principalities in Africa and Cameroon in particular in events of conflicts.

Historians and anthropologists have argued that in the horn of Africa like elsewhere in Africa, conflicts were generally resolved by creating institutions that addressed both local and regional conflict situations. Traditionally, elders created an enabling environment to resolve conflicts through peaceful dialogue, diplomacy, appeasement and voluntary surrender and inquiry.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to colonial incursion in Sudan for instance, diplomacy and negotiations were largely used to solve or prevent conflicts between parties. The use of diplomacy entailed bringing a third party on board who mediated in between the factions. The third party or negotiator used his/her wisdom to bring the disputant elements together and from their submissions he could easily decipher the offender and reunited them peacefully.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, within the central Africa sub region, Chad and the Northern periphery of Cameroon including groups like Kapsiki, Mundang and Guisiga. These groups once adopted negotiations as a strategy to resolve conflicts among its people.<sup>6</sup> According to T.Eta, negotiation was multidimensional and involved different segments of the population. At the surface, it required the convocation of opposing parties to meet at an agreed place and time. Upon their arrival at the agreed venue, the disputants’

representatives made their verbal submissions on behalf of the opponents or disputant members.

This kind of negotiation took into cognizance other factors in the resolution of the conflicts. The central actors in this kind of negotiation were first and foremost, the conflicting parties and a host of village traditional authority institutions especially specialized sacred/secret societies.

Elsewhere in the grass field regions of Cameroon, conflicts were resolved through different mechanisms but mediation was the hallmark of conflict resolution among the people and this meant the intervention of a neutral third party. The person could be a male or female and his or her role was essentially to brainstorm on lasting peaceful resolution of the conflict using acceptable strategies.

In most pre-colonial communities, the mediator could volunteer or invited to do so depending on the matter at stake. Most of those who were invited to mediate were known to have a mastery of cultural, political and economic environment they lived in and how their past experiences lent them public credence among the people. However, in either case, the antagonists unanimously accepted the intervention of the mediator or negotiator.

To ensure accuracy and sustainability of this conflict solving approach, the mediator was an acclaimed neutral, transparent and frank orator and it was such a perception held by the disputant parties that engendered the smooth and fruitful mediation talk. This third party or mediator had a daunting task of suggesting wisely and putting forward proposals for resolving the conflicts. Such informed proposals often culminated in ending the conflicts amicably. This approach to conflict resolution has transcended the post colonial African state as many conflicts that characterize modern Africa often embrace diplomatic mediation or negotiations.

Bakossiland in the South West Region of Cameroon, like other areas in the grass fields region, had several conflict resolutions mechanisms which were well respected before the arrival of the missionaries and colonialist in the area. These conflict resolution mechanisms included the use of council of elders, *Bengwe*, *Muankum* and their insignia/symbols of authority.

Generally, conflict resolution in Bakossi land in the pre-colonial era was categorized according to the gravity of the conflict. However, almost all serious conflicts were solved in a special traditional house called *Njeb* and *Esam*.<sup>7</sup> The *Esam* was also known by its attribute of conflict solving as “the palaver house”, a pidgin word used by early missionaries to describe it. The appellation ‘Palaver’ does not denote causing

<sup>3</sup>F. M. Deng and J.W. Zartman, *Conflict Resolution in Africa* (Washington D.C: The Brookings Institution, 1999), 301.

<sup>4</sup> Volker Boege, *Traditional Approaches to Conflict Transformation Potential and Limits* (Berlin: Berghof Research Centre, 2006), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas E. Eta, “Conflicts and Conflicts Resolutions in the Lower Banyang Polities, Circa 1886-1958” (MA Thesis in History, University of Buea, 2013), 4.

<sup>7</sup>The *Esam* played a triple function in society because it was used by elders for settling conflicts and maintaining traditional authority at village and clan levels. Besides, *Esam* was also described by Basel missionaries and German colonialists as ‘Palaver’House. It was so-called ‘Palaver House because it handled a wide range of community or inter-state issues which transcended peace-making.

conflict, rather in this context the term is used to describe a venue where conflicts were resolved used traditional mechanisms.

In a situation where the conflict was between two or more Clans or Kindred groupings it required extra ordinary measures or steps. Sometimes this involved the settlement of such disputes in special clan shrines like the *Njengele* shrine in Ngusi village in Mwetug, Bakossi country.<sup>8</sup>

However, different conflicts warranted the use of different approached or mechanisms to abate them. They ranged from the use of notables in council, regulatory societies and negotiation/mediation strategies. Whatever method or mechanism was adopted in a conflict resolution, the goal was to ascertain or ensure that peace was achieved in the end. A brief analysis of the methods or mechanisms used in conflict resolutions in pre-colonial Bakossi will constitute the focus of the next section of this paper.

### III. AN ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS IN THE PRE- COLONIAL BAKOSSI

Three main wings of conflict resolution mechanisms could be identified in the pre-colonial Bakossi society. These includes amongst others; the lineage of council of elders, *Bengwe* and their symbols of peace and *Muankum* societies. However, individuals within the community were free to intervene in conflict situations when they were called up to do so or volunteered themselves for the purpose. As seen above shrines were used to enforce justice and maintain peace in times of instability in society. But *Ngwe* (*Bengwe*, plural of *Ngwe*) had a code of laws which it respected and followed when it was called to deliberate in conflict situations.

#### a) *Muankum* as arm of Conflict Resolution

Several authors have discussed the dynamics of various regulatory societies in Bakossi, Cameroon.<sup>9</sup> *Muankum* is believed to be the highest traditional society in Bakossi land with powers to dispense justice and ensure law and order in times of social unrest. Generally, in pre-colonial times in

<sup>8</sup> Shrines were very instrumental in the settlement of inter-state or inter clan conflicts in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods. There were several of these shrines throughout Bakossiland: *Njengelle* for Mwetug clan, *Etom-muankum* for Muasundem clan, *Abokume* for Ninnong clan, *Asongwaah* for Muanyor clan. These shrines were reserved for resolution of conflicts and also to arrive at far reaching conclusions that affected the social, political and economic life of the people. For an enlightening discussion about these shrines, read Elvis Nkome Ngome, "Colonialism, the Basel Mission and Traditional Authority in Mwetugland, Bakossi, (Cameroon), 1891-1961" (MA Thesis in History, University of Buea, 2013/4).

<sup>9</sup> Joseph B. Ebune, "Tradition and Modernity Among the Bakundu: A Study in Socio-cultural change under colonialism and Beyond." (PhD Thesis in History, University of Buea, 2009), 127., Thomas.S Atabe, "Religion in Bakossi traditional society: A literary Enquiry" (Postgraduate Diploma in African Literature thesis University of Yaoundé. 1979), 65-66; S.N., Ejedepang, *The Tradition of a People: Bakossi*. (Yaoundé: SOPECAM, 1971), 218-240., H. Vaux, "Intelligence report on the Bakossi clan" October 1932:9 (National Archives Buea, henceforth referred to as NAB), SN Ejedepang, *Reminiscences on the Dynastic History of Ndom-Mwasundem* (New York: Xlibris Corporation 2012),69-70.

Bakossi, it used different mechanisms to enforce law and order in society through the system of 'divination.'

By 'divination' we mean the ability of *Muankum* to denounce offenders by calling their names and causing them to confesse their evil deeds in public.<sup>10</sup> This method of divination was specifically used by *Muankum* to denounce acts of witchery in society especially in cases where accused witches and wizards proved adamant to confesse. In situations of conflicts involving kinsmen against the community or between two kinsmen as a result of theft or murder, *Muankum* was called to intervene in such cases. The main instrument it used to sanction defaulters was the *abu-muankum*.<sup>11</sup>

The *abu-muankum* could be likened to modern day "administrative or legal injunction order" placed on the offender's property, usually in front of his/her house. The *abu-muankum* was a combination of herbs, stones, and other medicines. This mechanism was effective as a disciplinary and pre-emptive measure of sanctioning and deterring defaulters from committing further atrocities in society. It was used in the pre-colonial, colonial and in the post-colonial periods in various parts of Bakossi country in Cameroon.

The judgment of *Muankum* was never contested because *Muankum* has characteristics of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. It was and is still the only traditional society with powers to pass a death sentence on a victim. This however, does not mean that *Muankum* did not use negotiation and mediation approaches to conflict resolution. These were often the first steps taken by *Muankum* whenever a member of a community flaunted public norms in the past.

By way of negotiation and mediation, inner core members of the society often approached the defaulter and engaged in a dialogue with him/her and urged him to comply with the fine levied on him, but when he or she failed to respect the request of *Muankum*, this attracted the highhandedness of *Muankum* in the form of *abu-muankum* or capital punishment administered on the victim without any appeal or appeasement to *Muankum*. Besides this society, *Ngwe* was even more influential as regard conflict resolution in pre-colonial Bakossi land in many ways.

#### b) *The Ngwe (Bengwe, plural) and Conflict Resolution*

Unlike the *Muankum* society, the *Ngwe* was typically a peacemaking traditional society reserved for male Bakossi children of 'pure blood.' Traditionally, admittance into the society was upon payment of entrance fee of a fowl, kola-nuts, and palm wine. These items were demanded before the commencement of the initiation ritual which often took place in a sacred forest. Ndille and Nkome have discussed the importance of this society in their study entitled "Killing our Spirituality", pointing of the relevance of the *Bengwe* in

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> This literarily means the excreta of *Muankum*. The excreta of *Muankum* implied a taboo on the targeted victim (s) and hence this act by *Muankum* was a mechanism imposed on victims in society who committed certain felonies.

conflict resolution in traditional Bakossi country in the pre-colonial and colonial periods.<sup>12</sup> Commenting on the reputation and indisputable nature of the *Ngwe* society in traditional governance, judiciary and peacemaking after initiation of an individual; Ndille and Ngome have succinctly argued this in the following sentences below:

It was an opportunity for the initiate to gain spiritual powers from the ancestors and be introduced into adult life and community service. In the past, naked dancing was part of the initiation process into *Ngwe*. Naked dancing was more an expression of humility, truthfulness and openness; qualities which were necessary for making peace and administering justice. Other essences of *Ngwe* were seen in its objects of peace and justice: the broom, the bag, the stick (*ntong-ngwe*), camwood and the *Ngwe*-seat, called *ebale-ngwe*. Each member was expected to possess these as a mark of honour and recognition in society. Special leaves (*mbea-ngwe*) were also a very original aspect of *Ngwe* with only a symbolic rather than magical ends.<sup>13</sup>

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the *Ngwe* was very instrumental in maintaining peace in the community using different traditional insignia such as *ntong-ngwe*, *mbea-ngwe*, and *mwene-ngwe*. These instruments were actually the mechanisms which *Bengwe* in conflict resolution and prevention of inter-ethnic rivalry in the pre-colonial Bakossi society as a whole.

In the pre-colonial period, *Bengwe* used the leaves of a certain plant locally called *mbea-ngwe* and *ntong-ngwe* when a serious conflict escalated between two clans or villages. This plant's leaves are also known as peace plant amongst the western grasslanders of Cameroon, however, those in the western grass land regions are dissimilar to those in Bakossi land. Similarly, *ntong-ngwe* also served the same purpose as *mbea-ngwe* in the context of conflict resolution.

Recently, there was an attempted dispute between the Muambong clan and Mpako village of Muasudem clan of Bakossi in 2000. This occurred following the brutal murder of an illustrious son of Muambong by a group of Mpako youths for allegedly causing the disappearance of a young man's penis in Mpako. He was horribly arrested and killed.<sup>14</sup>

The murder of this Muambong person (George Enogene) provoked hatred which apparently led to revenge. The Muambong community had mobilized all young men and traditionally fortified them to attack Mpako village early in the morning and to slain every living creature they would meet in the village. However, this plot was wisely interrupted by the people of Ndum village who got rid of the assailant and quickly blocked the road with *mbea-ngwe* and *ntong-ngwe*.

On arrival, a respondent at Ndum village maintained that the Muambong people noticed that these *Bengwe* insignia on the road and had to surrender their arms on the spot and took the option of dialogue (mediation and negotiation).<sup>15</sup> The fact that the Muambong community respected these *Bengwe* symbols was enough proof to illustrate the strength and relevance of the *Ngwe* conflict resolution mechanisms during the pre-colonial times and thereafter.

The consequences of violating these conflict resolution mechanisms of *Bengwe* were tantamount to life abomination in various forms on the violators. This made the *Bengwe* society particularly important in conflict resolution in Bakossi land during the pre-colonial era and beyond. The values of the society were so well entrenched into the socio-political fabrics of Bakossi society, making the society the second powerful society in Bakossi land after *Muankum*.<sup>16</sup>

*Bengwe* equally used *mwene-ngwe* (peace broom) principally to call to order dissidents in a community forum like a village meeting or during *Bengwe* court session. The broom was a mechanism that reminded attendants to pay a listening ear to a speaker, usually, an elder. It was believed that this broom and other *Ngwe* insignia were used as oath objects in the *Bengwe* judiciary system during the pre-colonial and colonial eras. This made the *ngwe*-broom an important asset or apparel in conflict resolution in Bakossi land.

Another important component of the conflict resolution in Bakossi land was and still is the Council of Elders in the village. These were autonomous family heads that voluntarily came together for the purpose of maintaining peace and order within the village. Unlike regulatory societies like *Bengwe* and *Ahon*, and *Muankum*, the Council of Elders was charged with the responsibility of entertaining cases between disputants. They arbitrated on matters relating to adultery, theft, witchcraft, and land disputes.

The elders mostly used or incorporated certain insignia of the *Ngwe* Society to ensure truth and transparency in all matters they entertained. However, in a situation where an accused refused to accept his or her fault in a case, the elders used other mechanisms like swearing an oath at special shrine like at *Ndion-dese* in Muambong.

In extreme cases, ostracism mechanism was also applied. In this case, the authority of *Muankum* was invoked and that marked the beginning of the recalcitrant sojourn into the wilderness. For example, the people of Bekume, Meked-mbeng, and Mbulle of Mwetan and Mwanyo clans respectively have *Muankum* to ostracized criminal from their villages in the recent past.<sup>17</sup> However, the most common approach or mechanism used by the elders in council was/is

<sup>12</sup> Roland N. Ndille and Ngome Elvis Nkome, "Killing Our Spirituality: The Basel Missionaries and the Bakossi of Mwetug-Cameroon Since 1896", in *Journal of Religion and Spirituality* Vol. 6, No.3, (2015):1-10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with the President general of Muasudem Cultural and Development Association (MUADAC), Buea, 1<sup>st</sup> of June, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Rev. Ndelle Ebwake, Mpako village, Retired Rev.Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, aged 80 years old, June 23, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Conversation with chief Nhon Nzume-Ngeh Jacob, Nyasoso III village, Chief of Nyasoso III, aged 60 years old, 12 June, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with the chiefs of Mbulle, Mekede-mbeng and Bekume villages, May 13, 14, and 17, 2016.

negotiation, cross examination, and diplomacy, but when these fail; *Muankum* could be invited to penalize the culprit accordingly.

Other conflict resolution mechanisms were used in Bakossi, the one discussed above were more popular and renowned due to their efficacy in conflict related issues in the area over time. Oath taking was rarely used as a conflict resolution mechanism in Bakossi land. However, this does not mean that this approach to conflict resolution was unknown among the people.

Harry Vaux, a Colonial administrator in British Cameroon in charge of Kumba Division in between the wars has documented different types of oaths that were commonly used by Bakossi and other groups in Kumba Division during the pre-colonial and colonial eras. Among these were the swearing on a hot axe, drinking of *sasswood* medicine (*mbim*) on a snail shell, swearing on *mwen-ngwe*, *elop*, and other special *Ngwe* objects.<sup>18</sup> Apart from these, *Nfam* was also used to detect criminal in the post colonial period.<sup>19</sup> This kind of conflict resolution mechanism was foreign to Bakossi land. It was introduced from Manyu Division in the South West Region of Cameroon following the outbreak of the Bakossi – Bamileke Crisis of 1966 in Tombel, Cameroon.

#### IV. IMPACT OF COLONIALISM AND CHRISTIANITY ON TRADITIONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS OF BAKOSSI

Prior to the arrival of European colonizers and missionaries in Bakossiland in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Bakossi had developed well organized socio-political and conflict resolution systems as discussed above. However, this traditional setting was perturbed by the German and subsequently British colonization of Cameroon from 1884 onwards.<sup>20</sup>

German protectorate over Cameroon was confirmed in July 1884, and this facilitated the enactment of German a legal system in Cameroon. This legal code was promulgated into action as early as in 1884. In accordance with their existing legal framework, they grafted four courts throughout the protectorate. These courts were created in Douala, Kribi and Lomie, with a supreme court at Buea.

During the reign of Governor Zimmerer around 1890, chiefs were provisionarily authorized to render justice according to their respective customary laws and practices. As if to officially sanction their authorization, a note of 20 March 1890 from Zimmerer to King Bell of the Douala Dynasty empowered him to settle quarrels among his subjects.

In the former Kumba Division to which Bakossi country belonged, there was a district court that entertained cases from

all parts of Kumba Division. It was this system of judiciary that the British colonial authorities later inherited after the defeat of the Germans in Cameroon following the outbreak of the First World War in 1914-1916. These courts were divided into four grades: A,B,C, and D. Grade A courts were known as Appeal Court and it was located in Kumba. Its first president was Fritz Ntoko Epie, paramount authority of Bakossi.

Cameroon got her political independence in 1960/1, inheriting both French and British legal cultures. Since independence, Cameroon operates a bi-jural legislative system which tolerate the use local institutions in conflict resolution, though, existing modern laws forbids the entertainment of criminal cases in the various customary or traditional councils system throughout Cameroon.

As we have noted above, the arrival of the Germans in Bakossi country led to the establishment of colonial administration there. Upon arrival they conflicted with indigenous administrative structures including conflict resolution mechanisms of the people of Cameroon from north to south, east to west and this often culminated into outright indigenous resistances against German colonial rule in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa.

Colonialism ushered in a new pattern of administration and new village structure to facilitate the effective application of German colonial policies in Cameroon.<sup>21</sup> The new administrative structures and policies eventually impacted tremendously on the erstwhile traditional administrative mechanisms. In this case, they introduced western court systems, police, army, and Christian churches which replaced pre-existing traditional judicial conflict resolution systems.

From its inception, colonialism operated alongside the traditional structures like the regulatory societies and the Council of Elders of the village to ensure a smooth administration.<sup>22</sup> But gradually, these traditional conflict resolution institutions began to be undermined and within the shortest period they were eventually banned in favor of colonial and Christian structures policies.<sup>23</sup> This was because the colonial authorities felt that their institutions could be challenged by these indigenous mechanisms of authority, conflict resolution and leadership. The new structures challenged the exercise or use of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Bakossiland. Through the new structures like chieftaincy and Christianity, traditional conflict resolution system was systematically undermined.

<sup>21</sup>Ignatius Halle Ekane, *The Rationality of African Cultural Dynamism: A Case Study in Bakossiland, South West Province of Cameroon* (Weikersheim: Margraf Publishers), 57-58.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Betoto Ebune, "Tradition and Modernity among the Bakundu: A Study in Socio-Cultural Change under Colonialism and Beyond," Ph.D Thesis, University of Buea, 2009), 90.

<sup>23</sup>1a (1935)1. File No. 1641, Native Authorities Kumba Division: Appointment of District and village headmen under Chapter 14, Section 9(1), NAB. Read also, Ba (1931)3, File No. 174 (1931), Annual Report for Kumba Division, Cameroon's Province 1931, NAB.

<sup>18</sup> File No. 279,H. Vaux, "Intelligence Report on Bakossi Clan, 1932, NAB.

<sup>19</sup> File A6,No.2652 "Nfam Juju", NAB.

<sup>20</sup> Victor Julius Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884 – 1985: A Hundred Years of History* (Yaounde: Navi-Group Publication, 1987), 39.

In line with the colonial objective of undermining traditional institutions, the Germans in the course of their administration, appointed three District Heads. These included Epie-Ajebe for the Bakossi District; Nnoko N'summe for the Elung District and Makoge Ngwese for the Ninnong District.<sup>24</sup> The authority of the appointed District Heads (paramount chiefs) gradually curtailed the influence and traditional functions of family heads (council of elders) and indigenous conflict resolutions systems.

The implications of the creation of District authorities further affected other segments of traditional system in many domains.<sup>25</sup> For instance, almost all conflicts were resolved in the palaces of chiefs and the established courts in the various clans in Bakossi.

The courts became the only legitimate or recognized institutions of justice under colonial rule.<sup>26</sup> This approach continued under the British colonial system and thereafter, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms were outlawed from operating in public and hence started operating underground. For example, the use of some sacred symbols of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms to enforce justice and resolve conflicts such as *mwene-ngwe*, *ntong-ngwe* and other oath symbols were banned by the British and missionary authorities in many parts of Bakossi like in Mwetug Clan.<sup>27</sup> This does not however dismiss the fact that they were not tolerated from time to time during the colonial era for the purpose of peaceful co-existence. But they largely operated underground due to the colonial law of 1924 that abolished *Muankum* and other traditional conflict resolution agencies and governance structures of Bakossi.<sup>28</sup>

Since independence, various communities of Cameroon and Bakossi land in particular have been grappling with different kinds of conflicts and methods of resolving them. One generalization we can make here is that in many parts of Bakossi today, both modern and traditional mechanisms are embraced in handling conflicts. This includes the use of diplomacy, negotiation, mediation, and council of elders. However, more often than not modern conflicts resolution strategies or systems are overtly used in varying situations.

In most cases, conflicts are first entertained by the Council of Elders, which was usually headed by a chief. But where the ap fail to deliver a satisfactory judgment, the litigant often refer the matter to a modern law court for redress. Curiously, the application of *Ngwe* symbols was at work in 2000 following

the murder of a citizen of Muambong by a group of misguided youths in Mpako village in Muasundem clan. This incidence sparked waves of war between Muambong and Mpako village, thanks to the diplomatic and swift use of *Ngwe* symbols and rules of conflict resolutions the matter was laid to rest peacefully.

## V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The rule of traditional conflict resolutions have in recent times come under serious scholarly focus especially as modern styled legal approaches to conflict resolution have failed to produce lasting and irrevocable solutions to protracted conflicts around the world. Although, there are some befitting illustrations across the continents to demonstrate the strength of existing legal frame works and other modern avenues to handle conflicts inter-ethnic, inter-state and inter-continental conflict situations.

From this study, we have learnt that, there were a myriad of traditional indigenous conflicts resolutions mechanisms which pre-dates colonial rule in Africa. These institutions varied from one ethnic group or country to another. The resilience of these conflict institutions was short lived following the introduction of German and later British colonial rule in Cameroon as elsewhere in Africa.

Colonial rule used and later undermined most of these conflict resolution systems in Bakossi for different aims. The undermining of these institutions led to a negative worldview perception about African system of conflict resolutions by African and non African alike. This negative belief resulted in the degradation of these institutions even after the post – independent era due to mindset planted in the masses.

Revitalizing these institutions has, however, preoccupied some social scientist such as anthropologists and historians over the last few decades. And the central preoccupation has been to integrate these indigenous systems into the day-to-day running of the state. The indigenous structures worked well yesterday and could do so in future if they are authorized, entrenched and valorized as a blend system of dealing with conflicts of various natures, but with advice and supervision from the various competent modern administrations where appropriate.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>File No Aa, (1923) 37, Report on the Ancient Tribal Machinery in the Cameroons (1923) by H. Cadman (NAB), 4.

<sup>26</sup>File No. 39(1924), Native Administration or Questions of Primitive Communities Evolving their own Administration and Sub-court as a step in the Process, NAB. Read also File No. 1291, *Juju* Societies Relation to Native Administration, 1926, NAB.

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