

# Indigenous Settlement Types among the Mbum of the Nkambe, Plateau of Cameroon: Continuity and Change

Talla Richard Tanto

*Department of History and Archaeology, The University of Bamenda, North West Region, Cameroon*

**Abstract:** One of the many ways in which man has over the years been striving to adapt to his changing natural environment, so as to ensure his continuous survival, has been in the domain of settlement or housing technology. The environmental changes demanded adjustments to man's technology associated with his shelter, and as a consequence, a lot as to what concerns the true nature of indigenous settlements have been gradually disappearing with time. This paper therefore, tries to reconstruct, for purposes of posterity, the nature of indigenous types of shelters of the Mbum ethnic group on the Nkambe Plateau of Cameroon. Oral traditions, archaeological ruins found at the archaeological/historical Mbum site of Mbajeng, and ethnographic research provided the data for the research. It was discovered that the Mbum have three main indigenous types of settlement architecture, most of which have either been modified or become extinct over the years. The first consist of houses constructed with sun-dried blocks and thatched with grass; the second with bamboos, sticks and also thatched with grass, while, the third had circularly arranged stones also thatched with grass. The last two are gradually dying out while the first is being modified with zinc roofs and walls plastered with cement and sand. In the light of these disappearing indigenous housing structures, the paper concludes that Africans should borrow only alien technology, which when blended with local technology, ensures their sustainability and existence as a people.

## I. INTRODUCTION

As a hunter gatherer, man depended on the natural environment like caves and stone or tree shelters for accommodation. When he became conscious of dominating his environment, he started using some of the natural resources to create the type of shelter he wanted. A settlement according to Okpoko<sup>1</sup>, is generally, a place where there are evidences of human occupation or activity. This therefore means any space that shows evidence of human activity like butchery, burial, industry and hunting constitutes a settlement since these are obviously related parameters or structures, which in one or the other, contribute in making the site to be referred to as a settlement site. It is also in line with this that Ogundele<sup>2</sup>, based on his experiences in Tivland, defined settlement as the sum total of socio-economic and political

activities which man carried in and out of his specific area of residence. These activities include disposal, farming, burials and hunting.

The Mbum ethnic group occupies the Nkambe plateau of Donga Mantung Division, North West Region of Cameroon. This group like most ethnic groups in the Bamenda Grassfields are of the Tikar conglomerate of ethnic groups which are said to have migrated into their present location about 400-500 years ago from Ndobu, Tibati or Rifum, all in the present day Adamawa Region of Cameroon<sup>3</sup>. The Mbum group is said to have arrived the area in three successive waves of Warr with capital in Mbot, Wiya with capital in Ndu and Tang with capital at Tarla, which today, make up the three main clans of the ethnic group<sup>4</sup>.

Their migrations and arrival in the area are said to have triggered a number of wars within the group and, between the group and other alien ethnic groups like the Ntem and Fulani<sup>5</sup>. The reasons for the wars were principally the search for a conducive space for settlement, struggle for power or succession disputes within the groups, security concerns and the acquisition of slaves. Succession disputes in particular, caused some recalcitrant members of the royal houses of the three groups to break away from the main group or clan and formed new settlements. These became new villages of the clan since they still looked up unto the leader of the clan as their father. The leader of the new village was called a chief and the clan head, as earlier noted, was called Fon. He was Fon of the clan and also chief of the mother village.

<sup>3</sup> P.N, Nkwi, and J.P, Wanier, (1982) *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields* Yaounde. Sopecam:23 Noutchachom, C. (1984) *Répertoire Economique et industriel de la République du Cameroun*. Yaounde. Sopecam:268, V.G, Fanso (1989) *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges.Vol.1 From Prehistoric Times to the Nineteenth Century*. London: Longman :34, and V.J, Ngoh (1996) *Cameroon since 1800*. Limbe, Presbook.

<sup>4</sup> R.T.Talla. (2003). "Ethnoarchaeological and Historical Archaeology of Mbajeng in the Wimum land of Donga Mantung Division, North West Province of Cameroon" Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria: 54-55. Also see M.D.Jeffreys, 1963. *The Wiya Tribe* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

<sup>5</sup> W. Carpenter, W. (1934) "Intelligence Report on Nsungli Area. Bamenda Division" File No. Ac 15/ 1956. National Archives Buea: 18-20. Also see E.G, Hawskworth,(1924) "Assessment Report on Nsungli; Bamenda Division" File No. 1189/1924 V 0111 National Archives Buea.

<sup>1</sup> A.I,Okpoko (1979) "Settlement Archaeology in the Anambra River village: A short Note" In *West African Journal of Archaeology* Vol. 9: 157-162.

<sup>2</sup> Ogundele, S.O. (1989) "Settlement Archaeology in Tivland. A Preliminary Report." In *West African Journal of Archaeology* Vol.19: 83-92.

Succession to the throne was hereditary and restricted to members of the royal house who had royal blood flowing in their veins<sup>6</sup>. The wars or challenges faced by the various groups forced the leadership to establish a strong administrative structure to cater for the needs of the people<sup>7</sup>. The Fon was somebody believed to be of divine origin and had the powers to communicate with the gods and ancestors of the land for the good of his people. He was assisted in the administration of his community by a traditional council of elders, called *Leeh Mbi*, various sacred societies such as the *Nwarong* whose members and its masquerades lodges were charged with enforcing the laws of the land irrespective of the personalities concerned. In addition to these, were also the *Ngiri*, an assembly of princes and princesses, and war lodges like the *Nfu* and *Samba* (Manjong)<sup>8</sup> societies, whose membership constituted able healthy men, responsible for the protection of the society.

All of the above groups and institutions, assisted the Fon or chief in the administration of his society and in communicating with his ancestors and gods of land as well as implementing decisions/instructions which he received from them. However, their migrations over the years caused the creation of settlements such as Ngulu, Mbandung, Mbajeng and Ngu, which were occupied for a period of time and later abandoned. Only archaeological/historical research despite their shortcomings, can give us a glimpse into the early past activities of these sites.

## II. AN OVERVIEW OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SHORTCOMINGS

It has not been very easy for archaeologists/historians to even reconstruct the total history of the current society in which they live, not to talk of an extinct (pre-historic) society in which they were not part, and documents do not even exist<sup>9</sup>. This is so because, events are far too multifarious and the totality far too complex to be grasp even by a contemporary observer. His perception like all human perception is a selective process which is predetermined by a variety of factors and individual or societal experiences<sup>10</sup>. To better understand this period, archaeologists and historians have depended very much on the interpretation of material cultural

and physical remains, (generally referred to as artefacts), of those who existed or lived then<sup>11</sup>

This has, however, not always been very easy because it is not in all situations that the material remains have survived for the archaeologists to identify, recover and study. Some of the material remains when identified and recovered are so fragile and disjointed that classification and analysis become a serious problem. Above all, the material remains are not humans and therefore, do not talk. Those responsible for producing them have long died and are not there to tell us the story<sup>12</sup>.

These shortcomings have made archaeological research of the earliest period of man's existence anywhere on earth, painstaking and tedious. It is in line with such shortcomings that Anderson noted "Even with careful analysis of total assemblages of artefacts, reconstruction of the natural environment, and inferred systematic relations between the two realms, the specific uses assigned artefacts may be only vague statements of probability"<sup>13</sup>

To overcome some of the shortcomings or problems, archaeologists over the years, have decided to stretch their tentacles into other academic disciplines for a better understanding and comprehension of man's early past. Scientific methods have been incorporated to discover archaeological sites as well as examine and study material remains from such sites. Knowledge of disciplines like geography, history, oral traditions, linguistics, sociology and especially, ethnography have also been used by the archaeologists in the course of archaeological research<sup>14</sup>.

It is in line with the above that we decided to embark on ethnographic research in order to better analyse, interpret and understand some of the material remains and features discovered at the abandoned archaeological/historical sites of Mbirimbo, Ngu, Mbajeng and Mbandung by the Mbum clans in the early periods of their settlements on the Nkambe plateau.

Our focus was principally on the site of Mbajeng where most of the archaeological/ historical finds were still intact compared to the other sites. It was a site which was still being settled by descendants of the original settlers who are believed to be the founders of the Tang clan. It is as a result of this that we chose to conduct an ethnographic research with regards to settlement types and forms amongst the few Tang people still settled at Mbajeng today, and those at the present headquarters of Tang clan, in the village of Tarla. This village is believed by oral traditions, to be the first home of the Tang people after they abandoned Mbajeng. The ethnographic study

<sup>6</sup> R.T, Talla (1997) "The Fomdom/Chieftom Institution of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon" In *West African Journal of Archaeology* (WAJA) Vol. 27 No. (2): 74.

<sup>7</sup> R.T, Talla (1997) The Fomdom/Chieftom Institution:69-70 and R.T ,Talla (2003) "Ethnoarchaeological and Historical Archaeology of Mbajeng.": 54

<sup>8</sup> R.T, Talla, and S.Y, Nforba, (2010), "The Nfu Society of the Wimbun in the Donga Mantung Division, North West Region of Cameroon: Continuity and Change" In *Tropical Focus* Volume 11 No.1: 112-124

<sup>9</sup> More than 99% of man's existence on earth was without any form of documents. This period can only be understood from material remains he left behind and which have survived over the years. Also see Colin Renfrew, and Paul Bahn, (1997). *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* (2nd edition), London. Thames and Hudson

<sup>10</sup> T. Shaw (1979) "The Prehistory of West Africa" In Ajayi J.F.A et al (eds) *History of West Africa* Vol.1. London, Longman Press :33-71

<sup>11</sup> K.M Anderson. (1969) "Ethnographic Analogy and Archaeological Interpretation". *Science* 63.133-138.

<sup>12</sup> See V.G Childe, 1956 *Piecing together the Past*. New York.

<sup>13</sup> K.M Anderson. (1969) :133

<sup>14</sup>B,W Andah and A.I, Okpoko *Practicing Archaeology in Africa* Ibadan, Wisdom Publishers Ltd:1-17

was also randomly extended to some Wimbun villages like Ndu and Sinna as the need arose.

### III. PROBLEMS OF SETTLEMENT STUDIES AT MBAJENG

Just like in most of Tropical Africa where shifting cultivation<sup>15</sup> for subsistence purposes is practised, the site of Mbajeng does not provide very good tangible successful deposits to enable an understanding of the evolution of settlements there over the years. The few inhabitants occupying the area today have over the years continued to intensively cultivate the area for food.

Other human activities, which have contributed to the continuous destruction of some of these clues to past settlement forms, are construction of new homes, demolition and reconstruction of houses on the same spots. Most of the construction going on is provoked by an increase in human population, which now requires that the common one-room grass thatched roof houses, be reconstructed and zinced, to accommodate more than one room.

The grazing activities of the Fulani pastoralists who now occupy most of the hills in this area, have also done a lot of damages to the material remains and features which could have been used to reconstruct settlement forms especially, on the hills. Some of the material remains and features like upper grinding stones, have been taken to private homes by some visitors and inhabitants of Mbajeng and the surrounding villages<sup>16</sup>. Some of the material remains and features have been ferried away into the surrounding rivers and consequently into distant lands by run-offs especially, during the rainy season.

This has created a vacuum in historical reconstruction as it becomes difficult for the archaeologist/researcher to access and study these material remains which have been taken away.

Natural activities such as decay, have also taken a toll on especially organic material remains on the site. Most of the materials, which were used to construct these buildings in the valley, were perishable, and have decayed over the years. Nothing is left in the valley except the soil heaps which represent foundations. This is what we used in reconstructing building forms and patterns.

With these shortcomings, it became difficult for us to easily reconstruct the settlement of Mbajeng, as it existed before its abandonment in the early periods. To minimise these difficulties, we depended much on oral traditions and ethnographic surveys to reconstruct the nature of settlements which probably existed at Mbajeng in the past.

<sup>15</sup> A.I Opoko.1989 "The use of Ethnography in Archaeological Investigations" (Ethnoarchaology) In *West African Journal of Archaeology* Vol. 19: 65-82.

<sup>16</sup> Garba Ibrahim Age 67 Interviewed 4 March 2019. He is resident at Mbajeng.

### IV. ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN MBUM LAND

Ethnography, which is the study of cultures of the present day societies and those of the recent past, is a very important instrument of archaeological research. For better results, archaeologists usually conduct their own research by living with the people under study, instead of depending on ethnographic work conducted by other ethnographers who are very much concerned with non-material aspects of culture. Archaeologists are interested in material culture and also have their own questions different from those of the ethnographer, to answer<sup>17</sup>. By living with those being studied, the archaeologist will better understand the society from within. This explains why Ngange, a Wimbun elder maintained "until you feel like one of us, you cannot understand us as a stranger"<sup>18</sup>.

Ethnographic observations and investigative methods have been of great help to archaeologists for explaining and interpreting things found in the archaeological context<sup>19</sup>. This becomes easier and possible when there is evidence of direct historical continuity between the ethnographic and archaeological data or societies. It is however difficult where the above conditions do not exist and a comparative approach has to be applied. The difficulty reduces, if it is clear that the societies under comparison existed under the same ecological conditions<sup>20</sup>.

As far as the Mbajeng site is concerned, there exists a direct historical link between those settled at Mbajeng today and those who founded or originally settled on the site as well as those who migrated from there and settled at Tarla. Both communities also lived under the same ecological conditions. There are certain practices and material remains that were discovered at Mbajeng in the archaeological context, which still exist amongst those still settled there and at Tarla. Ethnographic research and observations were therefore, conducted in the domain of construction process, types and pattern of settlement. Archaeological and ethnographic studies at Mbajeng, and other Mbum villages like Tarla, revealed three indigenous types of houses-walls constructed with sun-dried blocks and roofs thatched with grass; walls constructed with bamboos and roofs thatched with grass and lastly, walls constructed with stone heaps in a circular manner and roofs thatched with grass.

<sup>17</sup> A.I Okpoko (1989) "The use of Ethnography in Archaeological Investigations" (Ethnoarchaology) In *West African Journal of Archaeology* .Vol. 19: 65-82.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Ngange Age 75. Interviewed, 16 May 2019. He is a Mbum elder and a former builder.

<sup>19</sup> D.Stiles, (1977) "Ethnoarchaology: A discussion of Methods and Application". In *MAN* 12 (1). 87 Also see C.A, Folorunso1993. "Ethnoarchaology, its Methods and Practice: The Tiv Example." In *West African Journal of Archaeology*. Vol. 23, .92-103.

<sup>20</sup> Ascher, R. (1961) "Analogy and Archaeological Interpretation" In *South Western Journal of Anthropology* 17317 -325. Also see D. Stiles 1977 and A.I Okpoko1989.

### *Construction Process of Settlement Structures in Mbum land*

Settlements are made up of houses referred to in Mbum as *Mndap* (plural) *Ndap* (singular). The commonest indigenous settlements in Mbum land today, include houses constructed with sun-dried moulded rectangular or square shaped bricks, and bamboo roofs thatched with grass. The construction period is during the dry season locally referred to as *Louh* which means “the season of heat” because of the heat from the sun. Bricks are moulded then and dried in the sun. Buildings exist in square or rectangular forms except for a few Fulani settlers in this area who – construct circular structures.

The construction proper, starts with the process of brick moulding which is referred to as *Mborh-Nshi* meaning “to mould the soil into bricks”. Moulders usually dig off the dark topsoil referred to as *Nshi-nse*, which is weak and not plastic. This digging, which might go as deep as 30-40cm depending on the area, takes them to the red or brown soil, *Nshi-mbirr*, which is naturally very elastic and good for moulding.

This particular *Nshi-mbirr* when dug, exists in clods or lumps, an indication of the level of its plasticity. The digging instruments used are the locally made hoes, referred to as *Nsooh*. The *Nshi-mbirr*, is mixed with water and trodden with the feet in the pit where it was dug until it starts holding back one’s feet. This is an indication that it has become very viscous and ready for moulding. This is not left to ferment for some days nor tempered with additives such as grass to make it more elastic as it is done in some regions of West Africa<sup>21</sup> (Farrar 1995).

The area where the bricks will be moulded is cleared of any rubbish and levelled. Usually, more than one person is involved to ease the work. One person stands in the pit where the trodden gluey soil is. He arranges hands full of the soil and sends them up to the person outside the pit who is responsible for the actual moulding of the bricks. He then wets the wooden made rectangular or square shaped, mould referred to as, *Kup Mboh Nshi*, to make it slippery. After the wetting, he fills the mould to the brim with the soil and levels it with his palms by taking off the excess soil. After this is done, he then removes the mould leaving the soil in the desired brick shape. The wetting of the mould eases the removal of the mould which leaves the soil in the desired brick shape. The process continues for days or weeks depending on the number of bricks needed. The moulded bricks are allowed to dry in the sun for some days before they can be used for construction.

The early stages of preparation to build a house are similar to what we see in most places nowadays. The process of building or constructing a house, is locally referred to as *Mboh Ndap*. Before starting any construction, the area is levelled if it is uneven as it was the case at Mbajeng where the Chief’s palace was constructed. After levelling the site, the plan of the house

which is usually in the brain of the builder, (locally called *Nwe Mboh Ndap*), is marked out on the surface of the site, taking into consideration the number of rooms, and shape<sup>22</sup>. The marked out area helps the builder to dig the foundation which is thereafter filled with stones which are either shaped or unshaped. The stones in a foundation, give the house stability. The shaping of foundation stones, which are in abundance in this region, is usually done by those constructing the house (mason or builders) in the course of construction.

When the foundation is finished, the sun-dried bricks are laid in courses over the foundation to the desired height. The courses do not reduce in thickness as work progresses, since the blocks are all of the same size. It should be noted that in some areas of north Cameroon and Nigeria where the trodden soil is not moulded, the thickness of the wall reduces as the height of the house increases to avoid collapse<sup>23</sup>. Construction proper starts first with the corners of the house, followed by the walls. A rope is tied from one corner of the house to the other angle to guide the builder in his effort to obtain a straight wall. The same red soil mixed with water and trodden with the feet, is used to bond the sun-dried bricks together during construction until the house reaches its desired height. This soil is referred to as *Boto-boto*<sup>24</sup>. The houses are usually not plastered in any form.

The roof of the houses are usually prepared in fours. Generally, the roofs of the house in this area are usually made out of bamboos locally called *Re-reng* and thatched with grass, called *Mjeeh*. Before constructing the roof, a ceiling also made of a bamboo framework is first constructed and suspended on the walls of the house. It is thereafter, plastered with the red soil to close any openings or holds which might be noticeable from the floor of the house. An opening into the ceiling is made at one of the angles of the house. This enables access to the ceiling from within the house usually, done through a ladder.

Roofing with bamboos which are thatched with grass, requires the participation of the whole community and where possible, invited friends to assist. The four triangular bamboo frameworks, each for the four walls, are first constructed on the ground like the bamboo ceiling before being mounted on the four walls. Bamboos are arranged horizontally while some are inclined vertically. These are well knotted with ropes or nailed with the harder outer covering of the bamboo, which are sharpened into nails referred to as *Mbah-rereng*, meaning, “bamboo nails”. There are small square-like openings on this

<sup>21</sup> See V.K.T. Farrar (1995) “Indigenous building construction in Southern Ghana: some aspects of Technology and History.” In *West African Journal of Archaeology*. Vol. 25 153-169.

<sup>22</sup> Most home owners construct houses on their family plots known by all and do not fear of any government demolition in the future. They are no building plans nor permits or land certificates as required by government in Cameroon for one to show ownership of land and right of exploitation.

<sup>23</sup> This is what I personally observed in Gamborou –Ngala, a village in Borno State of Nigeria.

<sup>24</sup> In modern construction sand mixed with cement which dried becomes very strong, serves as the *Boto-boto*.

framework which are covered or thatched with grass while still on the ground.

The four separate triangular roofs already thatched with grass, are thereafter carried up the house and mounted on the walls by the population. The mounted roofs are then knotted at the sides and, at the pointed top, giving it a slightly steep gradient to allow rainwater freely run down to the ground and not be retained by the thatched roof. This usually prevents the grass roof from getting decay during, especially, the rainy season.

These stages explain why the whole male community is usually needed for the job to be effectively done. The nature of the society was such that all men knew the art of thatching a roof and those who did not know this were considered incomplete Mbum personalities<sup>25</sup>. The women of the community cooked enough food (fufu-corn and huckleberry, usually referred to as *Njama-njama*) as well as prepared the local maize beer called *Nsha* for entertainment. The involvement of the whole community and friends from far and near in the roofing of a house, depicted the oneness and the concern for one another that once existed in indigenous African communities. On the day of roofing people in the community, suspended their individual activities just to make sure that one of theirs had a roof over him. It is not the case with zinc roofing which is a western introduction and where expert labour is needed.

The bamboo ceiling is used for drying newly harvested crops like maize, since the fire from the house keeps the ceiling warm. In addition to this, a hanging platform constructed solely with bamboos, is constructed over the fireplace or hearth. On this platform is kept wood (that is not dry enough), pepper and other small food items needed for cooking. This platform locally called *Nchang* can be reached with ease by the hand from the floor of the kitchen.

On the middle part of the four walls of the house, are constructed open cupboards with bamboos referred to as *Ngah*. They are nailed to the walls and most importantly, supported at specific points or intervals by poles well planted into the ground. In these open cupboards are kept clay pots of various types and sizes, pans, food and any other thing that might fit there including wooden boxes of clothes<sup>26</sup>. Any visitor to the house sees the various items which are so visible. The type of items also depicts the wealth of the family concerned and some of these were intentionally exhibited to showcase the wealth of the family. Some of these traditional houses nowadays, do not have the open cupboards because they are also very good hide-outs for rats and other cockroaches<sup>27</sup>. Generally, most of this traditional houses have only one room. Two of such houses might be constructed – one for the man and the other for the woman and the children. That of the woman also serves as a kitchen. But all of them

have hearths because fire is needed to keep the homes warm since the area is generally cold. However, a few of the houses do have two rooms. One of the rooms might serve as a kitchen and bedroom for the mother and the female children. The second room might be for the male children<sup>28</sup> while the father has a one room hut alone.

Those who are polygamous either congregate their wives in one kitchen if there is a peaceful coexistence between them as it was the case with Pa Philip Nganyu and his brother Clement Talla, who both married three wives each. All the six wives used two kitchens- one to cook fufu corn, *Mbaa Kwa* and the other to cook *Njab*, that is, the soup which was principally huckleberry locally called, *Njapsu* or *Njama njama*. All of them slept in these two kitchens despite the fact that the two brothers later constructed a six room zinc apartment which they shared with their children. Where this was not possible as was the case with their uncle, Bako, a separate one room house was constructed for each of his two wives to serve both as a kitchen and sleeping room<sup>29</sup>.

The second commonest form of house, was that constructed fully with bamboos and some sticks or poles and the roof thatched with grass<sup>30</sup>. Although these were few in the region, this seems to be one of the original form of indigenous houses in the area. It is very clear that, construction with sun-dried bricks was provoked by the colonialists who constructed with cement blocks. In this situation, there was no foundation dug and filled with stones. The area where the structure was to be built, was well cleared and very heavy poles planted at the demarcated four corners of the envisaged house. Some of the poles were planted at specific points on the walls of the house. After this was done, four platforms made of vertically arranged bamboos which enclosed some horizontal ones, were prepared on the ground.

These four bamboo platforms were the four walls of the house. The construction of these bamboo walls also involved the whole members of the community who after finishing, picked them up and tied them to the big poles which were planted at the four corners and specific points on the walls of the house. A bamboo ceiling platform and four thatched roofs just like the one explained above for sun-dried brick construction was also done.

However, the bamboo walls were later daubed with mud to close the small square like holes on them so as to keep the house warm. In both cases, the roof overlapped the walls of the house to prevent water from touching the walls and also washing away the daubed soils as well as, cause the decay of the perishable bamboo materials. The surface edges of the house were also raised with soil to channel runoff from the roof away from the base of the house, thus, keeping it dry all

<sup>25</sup> Sunday Nganyu. Age 69. Interviewed 12 January 2019. He is one of the Mbum elders.

<sup>26</sup> Ngwa Bakari Age 65 Interviewed 2 February 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Elijah Samba, Age 67. Interviewed 21 March 2019 He is a Mbum elder

<sup>28</sup> The mature male children got independence by constructing their own huts and getting married.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred Nganyu 69 Interviewed 1 July 2019. He is a Mbum elder

<sup>30</sup> This is still a very common practice in the forested parts of Cameroon where wood and palm fronds are used by the locals.

the time. The raised edges also helped in keeping firewood which was retrieved upon need.

Archaeological studies on especially the stoney hills surrounding the historical sites of Mbajeng, and Ngu revealed another form of indigenous settlement which has completely died out in the area. This consisted of stones, which are available up the undulating hills in great quantities, arranged in circles of different sizes and heights adjoining each other. The highest point on the circular structures we saw at the archaeological/historical site of Mbajeng was one meter. The bigger stones were first laid and the smaller ones fitted into the open spaces, which the bigger ones could not close. This was meant to close air spaces so as to keep the circles, which oral tradition claims, were used as homes, warm.

It also prevented snakes and any unwanted animals from entering<sup>31</sup>. There were no foundations dug and none of the stones was intentionally shaped, as they all seemed to appear in their natural form. Oral traditions are however void of how the circular stone features at Mbajeng were constructed. From observations, it looks as if the construction of the circles did not need any specialised labour, but it certainly needed coordination and division of general labour. The community probably set a day for its construction and some people (women and children) went out for stones, while others, especially, men did the construction. It is not for now known whether the stones went up higher than one metre. It is however, believed that as it was the case in the Mambilla Plateau<sup>32</sup>, where these structures also exist, poles were inserted into the stones vertically and others horizontally tied in twos, enclosing the vertical poles. This was later thatched with grass. It is not clear whether some of the stone walls were daubed with mud as was the case with the bamboo walls.

The circles were not partitioned and the possibility is that each circle served as a kitchen and a bedroom for a family. The bigger circles which had a diameter of about 2.5m could take at least 3 beds with five or six persons while the smaller circles with a diameter of 1.5 could take 2 beds with 3 to 4 people. If the surrounding mountains are well combed in the future, there is the possibility of discovering more of these circular stone structures.

The closeness of the circles was probably meant for the maximisation of space, which was scarce up the hill. This closeness was also for security purpose as it enabled easy and fast communication amongst people if they were under threat. This is plausible taking into account that most hills were

settled during war periods<sup>33</sup>. The issue of security from visible and invisible forces was also so paramount in determining settlement patterning.

#### V. SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The pattern of distribution of houses is in the form of isolated clusters representing a quarter or a family. Three of such clusters could be identified at Mbajeng. One with five houses, the second with seven and the third with five houses. In the present day Bongala quarter of Tarla village where some ethnographic research was also conducted, we identified four clusters representing four main families that constitute the quarter. At the present day Tarla palace, is a cluster around the palace proper and another about 500m to the west of the palace where a sub-chief's palace is located. In these clusters, all the other houses are constructed with doors facing the house of the head of the cluster who could be the family head, sub-chief, or chief (Fon). By living in clusters, people psychologically feel secure and less threatened by unseen forces or evil spirits who they believed, usually operate in the night<sup>34</sup>.

There is also an open area in-between the houses and that of the head of the cluster where children play and people sit to warm the sun during the day or bask in the moon during the night as stories and the day's activities, are being recounted<sup>35</sup>. The toilets were constructed some meters away from the settlement and the dead were buried behind the houses. The only exception were those who died under mysterious circumstances like witches/wizards, (locally called, *Ngah Ntfu*), who were buried in distant bushes in unmarked graves. This was meant to obliterate any memory of them amongst members of the society.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Depending on the area of study, settlement archaeologists have over the years, generally maintained that two main factors determine settlement location and the pattern in which they do occur<sup>36</sup>. They have agreed that, it is a certain range of conflicting environmental, socio-cultural and historical factors, which interact, and compromise to determine settlement forms and patterns. Such an interaction is not necessarily complementary but could be a compromise. These

<sup>31</sup> Talla, R. T. (1991) "An Archaeological Contribution to the early settlement History of Mambilla Plateau." M-SC. Dissertation (Unpublished) Dept. of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid:76. Also see R.T. Talla (2014) "An Ethno-historical Appraisal of the Circular Stone Heaps of Dutse Dawadi in the Mambilla Plateau, Taraba State of Nigeria" In *Science Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* Volume 2014, Article ID sjsa-180, 8 Pages, 2014, doi:10.7237/sjsa/180.

<sup>33</sup> There is no evidence of mud construction up the hills which are filled with stones. Also see S.O. Ogundele. (1989) "Settlement Archaeology in Tivland. A Preliminary Report." In *West African Journal of Archaeology* Vol.19 83-92. and C.A.Folorunso (1983). "An Ethnoarchaeological study of the Ushongo Prehistoric Settlement." Paper presented at the 9th Congress of the PanAfrican Association of Prehistory and Related studies Jos, Nigeria.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Tamfu Age 72. Interviewed 20 March 2019.

<sup>35</sup> The ruins of the Tang palace at the site of Mbajeng reflects what we have today in some settlements in Mbum land.

<sup>36</sup> K. Chang (ed.) (1968) *Settlement Archaeology* Natural Press Books. Also see S.Willey (1953) "Settlement Archaeology: An Appraisal" In *Settlement Archaeology* (ed.) K.Chang: 68 and S. Bulmer (1971) "Prehistoric Settlement Patterns and Pottery, Port Moresby" In *Journal of Padua and New Guanine Society* Vol.5.2

determining factors include security, food, water and shelter<sup>37</sup>. The type of shelter constructed is also determined by the available natural and human resources and the period concerned. The three types of settlement discussed above were a consequence of a response to the challenges faced by indigenous Mbum people at different times in the past in line with the available resources.

It is clear that, the introduction of cement made blocks and zinc in construction by the colonialists, paved the way in the area for modifications and changes in the nature of indigenous settlement structures. Over the years, the use of these western technologies in construction has gradually become as popular as the three forms of indigenous houses discussed above are gradually waning or being modified to catch up with the times. However, the lack of sand in the area has seen the people using their skills to adapt local sun-dried bricks in constructing modern gigantic isolated houses contrary to the clusters that existed in the indigenous community. This is a lesson to all Africans that, if we look more within us and less outside for solutions to our problems, we could ensure self-sustainability in the not too distant future. We are the source of all the raw resources that the west uses to produce all the construction products we admire. Not all things about our local settlement technology was bad. We should start learning and instilling in ourselves the consciousness to protect the good values/practices we had before colonialism and only borrow or import only such foreign values which complement and not distort our existence as a people of dignity.

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<sup>37</sup> Trigger (1968), "The Determinants of settlement patterns" In *Settlement Archaeology* (ed.) Chang, K.C. Natural Press Books: 53 and A.I Okpoko (1979) "Settlement Archaeology in the Anambra River village: A short Note" In *West African Journal of Archaeology* Vol 9: 162.