

**OBVERTING THE MYTH OF AFRICAN DIFFIDENCE: INTER AND INTRA-  
COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN TRADITIONAL CAMEROONIAN SOCIETY BEFORE  
COLONIALISM**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Africa and Africans have been victims of Western prejudices largely predicated on the claims that its societies were benighted and lacking in any forms of civilization. Such arguments have maintained that Africa was virtually “inexistent” before colonialism. From this basic premise, this paper, using the example of traditional Cameroonian society, argues that before colonialism, African communities were well-organized politically, economically and socially and interacted with one another diplomatically. Inter and intra-Community relations in traditional Cameroonian society were consummated through marriages, exchange of gifts, celebration of mortuary rites of fellow Chiefs, trade, exchange of visits as well as emphasizing common histories, culture and geographies. However, there also existed cases of acrimonious relations between Communities in Cameroon caused by succession disputes, European-initiated factors and natural phenomena. The paper makes use of documented sources and field experiences to sustain the assertion that the existence of a strong network of inter and intra-Community relations in traditional Cameroonian society is indicative of how organized and well-structured it was before colonialism. It maintains that conflicts were last resorts and only employed in cases where attempts at peaceful diplomatic relations had suffered subsidence.*

**Key Words:** *African Diffidence, Inter and Intra-Community, Relations, Traditional, Cameroon, Colonialism.*

**Introduction**

Before the scramble for and annexation of Cameroon by the Germans in July 1884, there already existed well-organized ethnic structures in the territory classified into several ethnic groups (Ngoh, 1996, p. 7). This is contrary to the views of some western historiographers like Harry Johnston, EndreSik, Wilhelm Frederick Hegel and Trevor Roper. These Historiographers with Western backgrounds generally held very prejudiced positions about African history in general. For instance, Harry Johnston held that “*Tribal Africans were barbarous people who had never*

*advanced beyond the first steps of civilization*” (Fadeize, 1986, p. 15). Similarly, Endre Sik, a Hungarian Marxist remarked that “... *the colonial peoples of Africa led a primitive life that some were sunk in the lowest stages of barbarism...*” (Fadeize, 1986, p. 15). On his part, Wilhelm Frederick Hegel who later influenced Trevor Roper’s thinking also held this prejudiced view of Africa. He maintained that; “... *the History of the world travels from the East to the West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning-Africa being no historical part of the world, it has no movement or development to exhibit*” (Quoted Amaze, 2002, p. 14). These remarks consigned Africa in general and Cameroon in particular to the “footnotes of history” at least from the view point of the Europeans who believed that the history of the territory began with the arrival of the Europeans.

In fact, some of these scholars argued that Africa had no history. They predicated their arguments on the fact that African communities had no written records. They therefore reduced history to documentation. A leading proponent of this thesis was A.P. Newton (A late Professor of Imperial History at the University of London). In a paper delivered at a meeting of African Society on May 1, 1923, Newton has averred that;

Those lands (African) have been inhabited since remote ages by peoples who are to be numbered by millions and who afford to the anthropologist and the student of language and primitive custom an extremely varied field of study. But history only begins when men take to writing, it is concerned almost entirely with written records, and can only make subsidiary use of the material remains with which the archaeologist and the anthropologist are concerned (Cohen, 1961, p. 137).

However, before the coming of Europeans as traders, explorers, missionaries and colonizers from the fifteenth to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the territory which constitutes modern Cameroon already existed with ethnic communities some with already established traditions and civilizations and others in the process of establishing them (Fanso, 1989b, p. 1).<sup>1</sup>

The different communities that existed in what was to become Cameroon were classified into several ethnic groups each of which constituted a cultural unit (Ngoh, 1996, p. 7).<sup>2</sup> These ethnic

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<sup>1</sup>Arguments like these from African writers soon emerged very forcefully thereby pushing most of the western prejudices to the defensive.

<sup>2</sup>Cameroon as it is today with its territorial composition is a German creation. On July 12, 1884, the Germans signed a Treaty with the Duala chiefs which gave them rights over the territory and from thence, the Germans began

organizations varied in their political and socio-economic set-ups. They were classified as either Centralized (stratified) societies or as Decentralized (acephalous) polities. The Decentralized polities were found in the Coastal and Forest regions of Cameroon while the Centralized societies were found in the Savannah and Grasslands regions of the territory (Ninjah, 2011, p. 18). The Centralized polities of the grasslands regions were generally called Kingdoms while the Decentralized societies of the Coastal and Forest regions of Cameroon were known as States. In the Centralized communities, two types of Kingdoms were distinguishable. These were the *Matrilineal* and the *Patrilineal* Kingdoms. Patrilineal succession was by man's direct son while the matrilineal succession was by man's sister. Examples of Centralized kingdoms of the Savannah and Grasslands Region of Cameroon were Kom, Wum, and Bum (Matrilineal), Bali, Nso, Bafut, Mbum, Bamilike, Bamoun and the Lamidats of the Northern parts of Cameroon (patrilineal). The Decentralized communities of the Coastal and Forest regions of Cameroon included the Fang-Beti (pahouins), the pigmies, the Dualas, the Bakweri, the Bakossis just to name but these (Ngoh, 1996, p. 7). This paper however focuses on establishing the political and socio-economic contexts of Cameroon before 1880 (pre-colonial Cameroon) and examining the bases and manifestations of cordial and hostile relations that existed between the indigenous communities of Cameroon before colonialism.

### **Presentation of Traditional Cameroonian Society: Political setting**

The various indigenous communities of Cameroon before colonization were well organized politically. The political features of Kingdoms were the same be there in the matrilineal or in the patrilineal set ups. The palace was the center from where all power emanated. In the palace was the political head of the kingdom that was referred to variously as King, *Lamido* or *Fon*. In the Bamenda Grasslands, the King was called the *Fon*, in the Bamileke land he was referred to as the *Fong* and in the Bamoun land as *Mfon* (Ngoh, 1996, pp. 7-17). The *Fon* was powerful and enjoyed a number of prerogatives and privileges. For instance, he had the right to claim as many women as possible and dispose of them at will (Chilver and Kaberry, 1967, p. 143). Some Kings

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carving out the territory's boundaries through negotiations with the adjacent powers including the British to the West and the French to the East. These agreements created the territorial confines within which the various ethnic groups were found to form modern Cameroon.

like those of Kom, Nso and Bafut had more than a hundred wives before colonization. For Example, the United Nations Visiting Mission to British Cameroon in 1949 found out that the *Fon* of Kom had 110 wives, 44 of whom were inherited (McKay, 1964, p. 29; Reyher, 1953). The *Fon* was assisted in his functions by a group of councilors either appointed by him or constituted from the ancestral history of the people. These councilors were called differently in the different Kingdoms. For Example, in Bamuon, they were called *Titamfon*, in Bamileke, they were called the *Kamveu*, in Kom and Bafut, *Ndiforand* in Nso, *Viban*(Ngoh, 1996, pp. 7-35). Thus, the *Fon* maintained a large retinue of persons who assisted him in running the palace and the different services that were required therein (Nkwi, 1987, p. 39). This constituted the Executive arm of the government. The *Fon* performed the following duties in the land; He took final decisions of the land after consultations with the councilors; He ratified appointments within the kingdom; He granted honors or titles to those who fulfilled the conditions for such titles and could also withdraw them; He could declare war or sue for peace; He was the supreme judge of the land; He acted as mediator between the people and the ancestors; He was Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces especially in Kingdoms like Bali, Bafut and Nso which had very strong military arms (Fanso, 1989b, pp. 2-3).

Kingdoms were usually divided into smaller villages headed by chiefs who were answerable to the King. The villages were further split into Quarters led by Quarter Heads. The Quarters were made up families headed by Family Heads. The family was thus placed in the last rung of the political structure of the Kingdom. To avoid absolutism of the King, he was advised by his bothers. In some cases, the Queen mother called *Yah* in Nso or *Mafo* in Mankon and the Bamilike did not only train the King's wives but also advised him (Ninjoh, 2011, pp. 18-22). The Legislative arm of government was made up of the regulatory societies. It was called in several Kingdoms as the *Kwifon*(Warnier, 1975, p. 22) in Kom, *Ngwerong* in Nso, *Kwifo* in Bafut and *Nggumba* in Bali (Nkwi, 1987, p. 39). It protected the laws and traditions as well as the *Fon* himself. It also performed the burial rites of the king upon the latter's disappearance and enthroned the new king. For Kingdoms to grow, they needed to conquer its neighbors through wars. As such, it followed that many kingdoms had War Councils headed by the *Fon* himself. In

Nso and Mbum, it was the *Mfuh*, in Kom, the *Njong* and in Bafut the *Manjong*. *Fon* Yuh of Kom was famous in military strategies that expanded his kingdom.

The political set up of states was not hierarchical as in kingdoms. They were segmentary in nature. The basic unit of the society was the extended family. A number of extended families formed the Village which was the largest socio-political unit. Families therefore took charge of the administration of the entire village. According to Ninjoh (2011, pp. 18-22), a number of villages made up the clan which was not held together by a single political authority. Each village was autonomous and opposed all forms of domination (Fanso, 1989, p. 3). In these acephalous settings, some families emerged prominent. These included the Bell and Akwa of Duala, the WonyaLikenyé and Manga William of Bakweri land, Ntoko and Makoge families of Bakossi and the Asonganyi of Bangwa (Eyongetah et al, 1974, pp. 39-41). These families thus dominated the political scenes of the respective clans and then put in place some form of hereditary succession. Lineage heads were appointed to wield traditional power. They could be appointed based on exceptional performance in hunting, wrestling or war. Each village had village heads whose authority could be questioned by his subjects. Regulatory societies like the *Nganya* in Bakweri, *Ngonde* in Duala, *Teheahon* in Bakossi together with the Council of Elders regulated the powers of the chiefs and village heads (Ninjoh, 2011, pp. 18-22). The Council of Elders had real powers and was called differently in the different states. For instance, in Bakossi land, it was called the *Ngwe*, and was headed by a *Nhon* who had executive and legislative powers. Patrilineal succession was most common in the states (Ninjoh, 2011, pp. 18-22). In all, the Chiefs of the Coastal and Forest States did not enjoy the authority of the Grassland Kings (*Fons*).

### **Socio-economic contexts**

In the socio-economic domain, the economy of most kingdoms in the Western grasslands was dominated by agriculture and trade. Agriculture was also done through community work. Women formed *Njangi* farming groups especially among the Mbum and Bamileke Communities. Crops like maize, yams, beans, groundnuts, palm produce, tobacco, plantains and cow pea were grown. Arabica and Robusta coffee came in with the introduction of legitimate trade.

Animals like goats, pigs, fowls, dogs and horses were kept for various purposes. Fowls for instance were used to offer sacrifices to the gods, dogs were kept for hunting and to keep guard for security while horses were used for transportation. Meanwhile in the forest and coastal regions, The Bakweri, Bakossi, Fang-Beti and the Duala practiced subsistence farming. Colocacia, plantains and local species of bananas were grown by the Bakweri on the rich volcanic slopes of Mount Cameroon. The Bakossi grew colocacia, banana and vegetables. The Fang-Beti grew cassava and cocoa while palm produce were grown among the Bayang and Ejagham communities. With the advent of legitimate trade, banana, cocoa, coffee, palm, produce and rubber were grown extensively in the forests and coastal regions. Other forms of economic activities carried out in the pre-colonial Cameroonian society included trade (especially using the barter system) including slave trade, iron smithing among others. All these strengthened the communities economically and socially and made most of them food self-sufficient.

These classifications and set-ups notwithstanding, the various polities exhibited a high degree of inter-ethnic relations. It is therefore worth noting that pre-colonial Cameroon was not an uncivilized society (as often erroneously referred to by the Euro-centric scholars), it was just a different one. The succeeding section of the paper shall thus focus on an examination of the nature of inter and intra-community interactions in Cameroon before colonialism.

### **Cordial Inter and Intra-Community Relations**

Traditional societies in the territory that was to become Cameroon never existed in isolation and maintained cordial relations between them in different forms. This is beautifully captured by Fanso (1989b, p. 4) when he concurs;

... each group was historically and socially linked directly and indirectly to other communities. The network of relations 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 neighborhood or region. No community was isolated historically, culturally, linguistically, economically or socially from its neighbors.

This clearly points to the portentous position of inter and intra-community relations in the territory that became known as Cameroon with the coming of the Germans in 1884. These

interactions would be discussed in the following section of this paper according to the various regions namely, the Western Grassfields, the Forest and Coastal regions and the Northern Kingdoms.

### **Bases and patterns of cordial relations**

In the Western Grassfields, interactions between the ethnic polities took diverse forms and patterns and manifested in a myriad of ways. Nkwi (1987, p. 41) agrees that “*the peoples of the Western grassfields were in daily communion with each other...they traded mutually, exchanged women, gifts and visits.*” Relations between the ethnic groups in this territory were a daily and ineluctable reality (Smith, 1976, p. 1). All of these were meant to ensure peaceful coexistence in spite of the stiff competition, mutual distrust and sometimes open warfare that characterized the conduct of these activities (Nkwi, 1987, p. 41). The basic premise on which inter and intra-community relations were based was in the common ancestry of most of the Kingdoms and States of traditional society before the early 1880s. In his PhD Thesis, Warnier opines that the motivation for inter and intra-Community relations laid in their common descent, covenant, alliances and the belief in God that warranted the oaths of alliances (Warnier, 1975, p. 388). With regard to common descent or ancestry, a number of Kingdoms in the Western Grassfield and beyond claim a common origin. For Example, Nkwen and Bafut; Mbu, MbaMbeiAla’Tening and Pinyin; Njong and Mankon (Nkwi, 1987, p. 42). Others included the Nso and the Bamum; Bali Fondoms of Bali Kumbat, Bali Nyonga, Bali Muti, Bali Gasho, Bali Gangsin and Bali Kontan found in the North West Region of the country; Kom and Babessi; Tabenken, Djottin, Nkor, Din and Laan; Ndu, Warr and Tang Clans of the Mbum ethnic identity among others (Ninjah, 2011, p. 20). By virtue of their common ancestry, these communities felt compelled and condemned to relate with each other on very peaceful terms because they believed if they involved in conflict with their blood relations, misfortune could befall them as they would be exposed to the wrath of the gods (Dillon, 1973, p. 288; Dillon, 1980, pp. 658-673). However, they still existed cases of conflicts between communities with common ancestry. Cases in point included the Nso-Bamum War of 1880s (Tardits, 1977, p. 197) and the Ndu-Banyo conflicts. Diplomatic relations between Chiefdoms in the Western Grassfield took the forms of inter and intra-Chiefdom marriages,

exchange of gifts, the celebration of mortuary rites of fellow Chiefs, trade and exchange of visits (Nkwi, 1987, p. 41).

Nuptial or matrimonial alliances were a major feature of inter and intra-community relations in traditional Cameroonian society before colonization especially in the Western Grassfields. This perhaps was one of the greatest areas of interest to Nkwi and Warnier Professors of Anthropology and Sociology respectively who carried out extensive research in the Grassfield region of Cameroon. Warnier in an analysis of some 74 genealogies collected from diverse communities in the Grassfields including Akum, Awing, Beba'Mbu, Mankon, Mbatu, Mundum II, Nkwen and Nsongwa yielded a total of 622 women among whom 188 married into a Chiefdom other than their own (Warnier Quoted in Nkwi, 1987, pp. 43-44). Besides, it was confirmed that relations between Kom, Bafut, Bambili and Babungo were strengthened through the exchange of wives by the royals and commoners alike (Nkwi, 1987, p. 44). King Njoya of Bamum maintained cordial relations with Warr village of Nsob in the Nkambe Plateau because one of the daughters of the Chief NgutanaNsurre was given in marriage to Njoya (Nkwi, 1987, p. 46). FonAngwafor II of Mankon is also said to have had wives from Mankon, Meta, Bafut, Njong, Nkwen, Nsongwa, Mbatu, Awing and Bali (Warnier, 1975, p. 395). These examples attest to the assertion that women were exchanged among communities in traditional Cameroonian society and those wives acted more or less like modern diplomatic missions in the Kingdoms where they were given out into marriage. However, some Kings like that of Bali-Nyonga used raids, kidnappings and intimidation to capture women from neighboring villages and increase their stock at home (Chilver, 1960, pp. 233-258).

The gift systems were another form in which relations between and among traditional communities in Cameroon were fostered. Gifts were not only used to strengthen inter-kingdom and State relations but were of triple significance, that is; the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to repay (return) (Mauss, 1954, p. 13). Any gift received by a Kingdom thus had to be reciprocated. This act in itself had far reaching diplomatic implications on the traditional communities of the territory that was to be crafted into the confines of German Kamerun. These gifts exchanged by the Chiefs of the various communities in Cameroon before

colonization were usually referred to as “Palace Bags” or “Royal Bags”. Some of the gifts that constituted the “royal bags” or “diplomatic bags” included Elephant pelts (skins), Kolanuts, Dane guns, Ivory, beads, Cowries, Salt and Clothes, Palm oil, Gun powder, Palm wine, Goats, Dwarf cattle, Camwood, caps, Ornamented calabashes, Stools, Brass or Clay pipes, Elephant tusks, Livestock, Slaves and Women (Nkwi, 1987, p. 52). These products were usually associated with prestige and high social standing. The Hausa usually used gifts like salt, beads and clothing in several villages to pacify and make friendship with the local inhabitants. This strategy was used by some in areas like Bali, Nso, Bamunka-Ndop and Sabongari (Awasum, 1984, pp. 37). They were also recorded cases of gift exchanges between Bali-Nyonga and Nso, Nso and Bum, Nso and Nsungli, Mbot/Bamunka and Bamileke Chiefdoms of Balim, Nsei, and Wum, Nso, Kom, Bafut and Baba, Mankon and Nso as well as Kom and Nsei (Chilver, 1960, pp. 241). Gift offers were therefore an extension of a hand of friendship and its acceptance spoke of and communicated social reception and hospitality while reciprocating meant the consummation of the relationship. The “royal bags” therefore greatly boosted inter and intra-community relations in Cameroon before colonialism.

Mortuary celebrations of the death of foreign Chiefs by some chiefs were also instrumental in strengthening inter-Kingdom and State relations in pre-colonial Cameroon. Some Chiefs on their dying beds called their neighboring and/or foreign Chiefs and confided in them the name of their successors (Nkwi, 1987, p. 58). It was also a common practice for Chiefdoms especially in the Grassfields to pay funeral visits of neighboring and other Kingdoms that mourned their diseased Chief. Such visits were usually done and the gifts and dance taken along during such visits had intense diplomatic implications and naturally required reciprocation. For instance, the Wiya and Rom Chiefdoms of Cameroon’s Grasslands mutually assisted each other in the enthronement of their Chiefs to ensure legitimate succession (Nkwi, 1987, p. 58). The Wiya Chief came to the enthronement of the Rom Chief with Leopard skins instead of palm oil which was usually brought by Rom Chief to the enthronement of Wiya Chiefs (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982, pp. 160-165). This no doubted boosted the relations between both communities. Such relations also existed between the Mbot and Bum Chiefdoms, Kom and Bafut, Nso, Babungo, Bum, Oku, Bambalang and Mmen.

In the Coastal and Forest regions of Cameroon, inter-Community, State and Kingdoms relations were primarily premised on their common ancestry, similar economic activities and cultural homogeneity. In fact in the Southern coast and spreading into the southern interior of the territory, groups existed that claimed affinities and particular relations with each other (Fanso, 1989, p. 4). The Duala and the Bakweri for instance claim the same ancestry. Besides, they have been recorded cases of trade interactions between the Duala, the Isuwu (of Bimbia) and the Bakweri in items like gunpowder, cloth and strong drinks which items the people hitherto obtained from Lundu who bought them from Efik in Calabar (Eyongetah et al, 1974, p. 40). The Isuwu people were also akin to the Duala as King Bile (or King William) of Bimbia was from Bonaberi in Duala but had moved to settle in Bimbia where his mother's brother lived (Eyongetah et al, 1974, p. 41). Also, the Duala after installing themselves on the Wouri Estuary established very cordial relations with the other groups around them including Koko and Basabased on trade in fish and agricultural produce (Eyongetah et al, 1974, p. 39). It was only much later that they began trading with the European traders especially the British. The socio-economic and political organization of the Duala, the Bakweri and the Bakossi were very similar (Ngoh, 1996, p. 26). This was also one of the factors that led to very cordial relations between these groups in the territory that was to make up modern Cameroon.

Another significant group of people in the Southern forest part of Cameroon whose cordial relation was premised on their common ancestry and cultural similarities were the Fang-Beti (or the Pahouins). This ethnic identity is made up of groups like the Ewondo, the Bane, the Mvele, the Eton, the Mangissa, the Yezum, the Yabekolo and the Evuzok (Northern Group) on the one hand and the Bulu, the Fang proper, the Fong, the Ntumu and the Mvae (Southern Group) on the other hand (Ngoh, 1996, p. 26). Though there existed different dialects among these groups, their greatest factor in unity was the common language (Ngoh, 1996, p. 22). The Beti groups and the Bassa-Bakoko also claimed kinship and continuities across their ethnic frontiers and across present-day international borders with groups in Rio Muni, Gabon, Congo, Central African Republic, Chad and Nigeria (Fanso, 1989, p. 4).

In the North of the territory, the Kirdi groups who had very little in common also established cordial relations by their experience of displacement and domination by the Fulbe (Fanso, 1989, p. 4). These Kirdi<sup>3</sup> groups included among others the Massa, the Batta, the Musgum, the Toupouri, the Mundang, the Guissiga, the Kapsiki, the Matakam, the Podokwo, the Muktale, the Mada, the Zuglo, the Gamshek, the Kina, the Kola, the Daba, the Bana, the Djimi and the Gude (Njuema, 1978, Quoted in Fanso, 1989a, p. 32). All these indicate with astonishing lucidity that the various ethnic groups that existed in Cameroon maintained cordial relations long before the mapping-out of the territory and the creation of “Kamerun” by the Germans in 1884. However, the relations between the various groups in the territory were not always cordial. They were recorded cases of hostile relations between the various groups which would be highlighted in the next section of this paper.

### **Hostile Inter and Intra-Community Relations**

In spite of the strong network of inter-Community, State and Kingdom relations in pre-colonial Cameroon that manifested in the forms of nuptial alliances, exchange visits, mortuary celebrations, trade and the celebration of cultural similarities, there still existed antagonistic relations between the various groups. The quiddity of conflicts in traditional Cameroonian society has often been misconstrued for a feature of societal diffidence. This however is not true because no human society exists without diametric differences within and between the group members. Conflict therefore is a universal feature of every human society. It originates from the fact of economic differentiation, social change, cultural formation, psychological development and political organization (which by nature are antipathetic) and becomes overt through the formation of conflicting parties, which come to have, or are perceived to have, mutually incompatible goals. According to Rakhim (2010, pp. 15-16) the following aspects characterize a situation that can aptly be described as a distasteful one. These include; there are recognized opposing interests between parties in a zero-sum situation; there must be a belief by each side that the other one is acting or will act against them; this belief is likely to be justified by actions taken; conflict is a process, having developed from their past interactions. Conflict is

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<sup>3</sup>“Kirdi” was a pejorative name used by the Fulani to describe these indigenous groups which meant “pagans” due to their resistance to the Islamic Religion.

also an activity which takes place when conscious beings (individuals or groups) wish to carry out mutually inconsistent acts concerning their wants, needs or obligations (Nicholson, 2011, p. 11). Conflicts can occur between individuals, groups and organizations; examples include quarrels between individuals, labor strikes, competitive sports, or armed conflicts (Nicholson, 2011, p. 11).

In the foregoing commentary on the concept of conflict, one thing stands out clearly—the idea of universality of a conflict situation. Conflict is therefore an inherent (an inalienable) part of every human society regardless of its background, location, composition and age. Communities and groups in Europe, America, Asia like in Africa have witnessed conflicts of diverse causes, manifestations and of far reaching attendant repercussions. Conflicts are thus not a preserve of the African and Cameroonian societies. This is to say that it would be illogical to use the conflicts that were common among Communities, States and Kingdoms of pre-colonial Cameroonian society to ratify the assertion that those societies were barbaric and uncivilized. Their civilization was thus not necessarily backward but was just different.

Generally speaking, conflicts in traditional Cameroonian societies were caused by succession quarrels, acquisition of wealth, land and people (Nkwi, 1987, p. 66) not leaving out the phenomenon of slavery and slave trade. In fact, due to the thorny issue of slavery and slave trade, women worked on their farms in groups or were given protection against possible raids and attacks by enemies for slaves (Warnier, 1975, p. 412). Succession quarrels was responsible for a number of conflicts that characterized the traditional Cameroonian society before the advent of colonialism. For example, the Bali Chamba group disintegrated in 1835 following the death of their leader Gawolbe. His sons, namely, Galanga, Galabi, NyongPais, Gayam and Gavabi disagreed and moved to different directions to create the present-day Bali Fondoms of Bali Kumbat, Bali Nyonga, Bali Muti, Bali Gasho, Bali Gangsin and Bali Kontan found in the present-day North West Region of the country (Ngoh, 1996, pp. 14-15). The Dualas also disintegrated, after leaving Pitti, their ancestral home due to dynastic quarrels among the children of Mbedi. While the Dualas moved to the River Wouri, their Brothers moved to settle on the Rio-Del-Rey and the Sanaga River. The founders of the Nso Dynasty (Ngonso) and the founder

of the Bamoun Dynasty (Nchare) were brothers who all originated from Bankim but altercations between them led to their movements to different directions and to be established as separate Kingdoms in the Western Highlands Region of the country (Ninjoh, 2011, p. 19). The Kom separated from Babessi (all of whom left Ndobbo) due to envy.

Usually, the powerful tribes raided the smaller or weaker ones to put them under their control. For example, the Chamba-Bafut-Fondong war of 1830, the Nso-Bamum war among others (Ninjoh, 2011, p. 19). The Tingoh, Obang, Mbakong and Ndung people moved to occupy the Bu area in Menchum when they were attacked by the Bafut (Ngoh, 1996, p. 3). When the Bamoun defeated the Bamilike, the latter were forced to move across the River Noun to the Bamilike Plateau. The raids of the Nkwen people forced the Mendakwe people to move to the Bamenda Hill. The Dualas attacked the Bakokos forcing them out of the Wouri Estuary (Eyongetah et al, 1974, pp. 39-40; Ngoh, 1996, p. 26). The invention and use of iron tools led to military subjugation of some ethnic groups on their neighbors. The Chambas and the Kom people were noted for constantly attacking and subjugating their neighbors. The use of iron tools therefore led to wars and conflicts among the various Groups, Communities, States and Kingdoms in the territory that was to become Cameroon by July 1884.

In the North, the Kirdi groups moved to the mountainous regions of the north in search of peace away from the constant attacks they suffered from the Fulbe. The Fulbe or Fulani who had settled in the Northern regions of Cameroon employed all possible measures to Islamize the indigenous groups of the area. In such a case, ethnic groups that could not bear constant attacks from their neighbors were forced to migrate to more peaceful and quiet settlements. This thus led to constant movements of people groups in traditional Cameroonian society. The jihads wars launched by Islamic revolutionaries with the aim of creating an Islamic Theocratic State in the Northern part of Cameroon also caused instability thereby provoking animosity among people groups in Cameroon before colonization. These wars began in Sokoto, Northern Nigeria under the leadership of Uthman Dan Fodio. They were later launched in the Northern part of Cameroon by Modibo Adama. As a result of these wars, an Islamic Theocratic State was established in the north particularly in areas like Ngaoundere, Banyo and Garoua. It followed that those ethnic groups that

were not willing to submit to the authority of the Islamic Theocracy were forced to move out of the areas to different settlements elsewhere. Such was the case with the Kirdi groups such as the Musgum, the Toupouri, and the Massa among others (Ngoh, 1996, p. 3). They migrated to the hilly parts of the North while the Tikars moved southwards to the Western Grassfields. The Gbaya, the Vute and the Mbum on their parts left Fumbina for the Forest region in the South. This condition also caused the Fang and the Betis to begin their long migrations towards the Coast.

The period of acrimonious relations between the various groups in Cameroon before annexation lasted long indeed and had far reaching attendant repercussions. However, these conflicts were aggravated by colonial rule with the introduction of the policy of divide-and-rule. Some ethnic groups rose against the others in defense of the colonial masters. This was the case with the Bali against the Mankon-Bafut people under the German Rule. A similar situation also occurred between the Bamoun against the Duala in support of their German masters. These conflicts spilled over into the post-colonial period and resulted to numerous outbursts especially in the Grassfields of Cameroon with far reaching consequences on human life, property and local economy (Sobseh, 2011a, pp. 34-36; Sobseh, 2011b, pp. 85-99) However, in the Western Grassfields, conflicts were only used as a last resort when all diplomatic measures for peaceful resolutions had failed. This emphasis is important so that the people of the territory that made up modern Cameroon should not be seen as an anarchical people (Warnier, 1975, pp. 417-418).

## **Conclusion**

This paper sought to examine inter and intra-Community, State and Kingdom relations in the territory that the Germans mapped out in 1884 called Cameroon. Before the arrival of the Germans, different ethnic identities existed and broadly categorized as Kingdoms (in the Western Grassfields), Lamidatsin the North and States in the Forest region. Contrary to some Euro-centric scholars who generally held that developments began in Africa/Cameroon with the advent of the European colonialism, these groups were civilized in their own right. This civilization was manifested in the form of the establishment diplomatic alliances which were characterized by matrimonial pacts, mortuary visits for the burial of their rulers, trade, exchange of gifts and women as well as the celebration their common ancestry. These alliances led to

relative peace in the territory by deepening inter and intra-Community relations. However, due to the fact that no human society is completely void of conflicts, relations between Communities, States and Kingdoms were sometimes also warring. The expression of conflicts did not mean the society was anarchical. Besides, conflicts were not peculiar to the African/Cameroonian societies. Conflicts which were only used when all other diplomatic measures have failed never emphasized differences between the people and did not efface or in any way negate the peoples' common origins. Embattled relations were largely caused by the European-initiated phenomena like slavery and slave trade. Groups went to war with each other to raid slaves and sell to European slavers for money. However, succession quarrels, and other forms of feuds also resulted in conflicts between and among communities in traditional Cameroonian societies. Conflicts were also aggravated by colonialism and spilled over into the post-colonial period. This explains why the Grassfields became the theatre of ethnic conflicts in the post-colonial era including Bali-Bawock, Oku-Mbessa, Bambili-Nkwen, Bambili-Babanki just to name but these.

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