

The Dynamics of Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Bakossiland, 1931-1996: A Socio-Historical Analysis

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Abstract

This paper explores the historical sociology of inter-ethnic relations in the Bakossiland with focus on the village of Ngomboku. It traces the history of the Bakossi who issued from Asomengoe, the son of the eponymous Ngoe and the immigration of the strangers into the area. Investigation of primary and secondary sources revealed that clan consciousness was very rife among the various Bakossi clans resulting in ethnicity. It complicated the smooth operation of the Indirect Rule in the Bakossiland. In spite of the clan consciousness, the relations among the various clans remained cordial as long as land was available. Its abundance and fertility attracted strangers from other parts of the Southern Cameroons and French Cameroons who settled peacefully among the indigenes. As land became scarcer conflicts over land ensued. It provided that education on the customary land tenure in Bakossi will lead to the restoration of cordial inter-ethnic relations.

Keywords: Land, ethnicity, strangers, occupancy right, ownership right

Introduction

Land was an essential determinant of inter-ethnic relations; harmonious and conflict situations in colonial and post colonial times. People were often attracted to areas of abundance of fertile land. The Bakossiland blessed with volcanic soil was a rich agricultural area that pulled bands of economic migrants from different parts of the British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroons. These strangers obtained land from the indigenous inhabitants in absolute agreement with the traditional land tenure system and settled peacefully in the respective strangers' quarters. The creation of strangers quarters created circumstances for ethnicity within these settlements. The ethnicity of the strangers' quarters was preceded by that of the Bakossi. As the respective clans increased in numbers coupled with an ever growing stranger's population, land became scarce and conflicts ensued.

This study is aimed at providing an understanding of inter-ethnic relations in Bakossiland in general and in the Muetan clan in particular. The study begins from 1931 when the British colonial authorities conducted a census of strangers within the various Bakossi clans. The year 1996 is significant for the reinvention of the *come-on-go* syndrome in the South West Province (now Region) of Cameroon by the former Governor, Mr. Peter Oben Ashu¹. The principal theory of this work is the primordial theory of ethnicity based on cultural identifiers of ethnic groups opposed to others. The sources consulted included both primary and secondary. It equally relied on the experiential method; drawing from the author's lived experience in the village of Ngomboku.

Geographical and Historical Background

The Bakossiland in the South West Region of Cameroon is situated between latitudes 5° 15' and 4° 36' North of the Equator and longitude 9° 28' and 9° 51' East of Greenwich, west of the mount Kupe and Mwanenguba, far North of Mount Cameroon and East of the Rumpi Hills (Koge,1986, p. 1).

¹ *Come-no-go* was derogatory and pejorative label for the North Westerners resident in the South West Region.

The area occupied is about 2083 sq km. It is divided into two; Northern and Southern Bakossi linked by a lower plateau like terrain about 1000 metres above sea level that slopes fairly steeply west and east (Koge, 1986, p. 1). The land is blessed with rich volcanic soil good for the growth of tropical products. It was an overwhelming attraction to both 'native strangers' and 'native foreigners' for agricultural purposes.

The cradle of Bakossi is the infertile rocky highland in the northern part of the present Bakossiland. There is no history of migration of the people. According to tradition, an eponymous ancestor named Ngoe is said to be the grand father of the Bakossi. It is suggested he lived and died at Elum where his grave is found. He is said to have had eleven sons who spread out radially from the ancestral compound and founded several groups.

Asomengoe (the son of Ngoe) is said to have been the first child, and founder of the Bakossi ethnic group. He and his progeny stayed close to the ancestral compound and appeared to have held together in the first and second generations in combination against the rest of the other sons and their issue². Asomengoe, the founder of the Bakossi is said to be buried in Muetanaku where Ngoe, his father died. He had three wives and five sons whose descendants expanded rapidly down the southerly vallies. They settled as single families, each settlement owning pure descent from one or other of the five male issues of Asomengoe. As the population increased, the single families grew into loose settlements of single families each settlement owning pure descent from one or the other of the five sons of Asomengoe.

As Asomengoe founded the Bakossi ethnic group so too, his five male issues founded the five Bakossi clans. Each clan enjoyed its independence and there was scarcely an attempt to coalesce into a territorial group. As it were, the ties of the five clans were a matter of blood alone. The present day villages of the five clans are intermixed throughout the area as were the original settlements. The system of marriage was largely exogamous with marriages within the clan was an exception rather than the rule. The five clans include, Muetuk, Muanyor, Mbotmut, Muetan and Muasundem.

There were also some Bakossi villages of slave ancestry. Asomengoe had a slave, Nsusom who founded three villages, Ekangte, Mbot and Epenebie which by ancestry are part of Bakossi groups³. However, the peculiarity of their source places them outside the clan organisation. There are also the villages of Nteho II and Ndibisi which sprang from slave ancestry in the Muanyor clan and the villages of Ebamut, Nkomte, and Ndiangmuin which issued from slave ancestry in the Mbotmut clan.

Clan consciousness was very rife among the different sub groups with no motivating factor to incorporate into an indigenous organisation. The Muetuk, Muanyor and Mbotmut clans sprang from the first wife, while Muetan and Muasundem from the second wife. This had the effect of dividing the Bakossi into two groups and obscured the ethnic group as a single unit. This was further complicated with the presence of a separate community among the Bakossi, the Muambong. The Muambong do not issue from Asomengoe but from another son of Ngoe named Mbong Ngoe. Primordial ties among the different sub groups animated clan consciousness setting the stage for ethnicity in the Bakossiland.

Indirect Rule and Ethnicity in the Bakossiland

The indirect rule system of administration was the brainchild of the ace British colonial administrator, Lord Frederick Lugard whereby colonial subjects were administered through their traditional rulers. Inherent in the system was the search for intermediary chiefs to gain control over a vast territory. It necessitated the reorganisation of administrative units, ensuring that district boundaries were fixed to enclose areas of culture and ethnic diversity (Vubo and Ngwa, 2001, p. 184). The result was the construction of ethnicity in the colonial society. I aver here that ethnicity born of primordial ties complicated the smooth implementation of the indirect rule system. Common or group consciousness which is central to ethnicity and the most dividing factor among ethnic groups was very rife among the five Bakossi clans (Nnoli, 2007, p. 75). This confronted the British at the start of their mandate administration in the area.

² National Archives Buea (here after NAB) Ae 5 Intelligence report on Bakossi clan Kumba Division Cameroons Province by Mr. H. Vaux ADO October 1932 and Mr. H. Childs ADO February 1936.

³ NAB Ae 5 Intelligence report on Bakossi clan Kumba Division Cameroons Province by Mr. H. Vaux ADO October 1932 and Mr. H. Childs ADO February 1936.

At the commencement of British occupation and rule in the Bakossiland, Chief Ntoko Epie of Nyassosso of the Muetuk clan was appointed District Head and president of the only Native court⁴. The Muetuk of Nyassosso collaborated with the German colonialists and swung an unflinching support to the latter. They became converts of the Basel Mission and a centre for Protestantism in the Southern Bakossi. These Christian converts were more agreeable to the colonialists which partly, influenced the British to appoint Chief Ntoko Epie to the position of paramountcy elevating the Muetuk clan above the other Bakossi clans⁵. Besides, Chief Ntoko Epie was educated by the Germans and would express himself well in German. He was progressive as he constructed a road from Nyassosso through Tombel to Loum in the former French Cameroons. He made great improvement on the Kumba-Ninong road in upper Bakossi. The colonialists described him as “standing superior to any other District Head in the Division. He has the confidence of his people”⁶. In this way the British found an intermediary in Chief Ntoko Epie.

To the Bakossi of the five [independent] family clans, the institution of a District Head was artificial. Its survival was thanks to Chief Epie’s strong personality where his absence was to expose the futility of the reorganisation. He died in 1932 after committing suicide in prison. He was arrested by the colonial authorities for series of tax fraud and the chief who could not concede such a humiliation took a way his own life⁷. The creation of a paramount authority in Nyassosso elevating the Muetuk clan above the others revived pre-colonial ethnicity in the Bakossiland. Primordial ties were revoked among the various groups and clan consciousness was made alive. The other clans of Muanyor, Muetan, Muasundem and Mbotmut; the Muambong community and the Bakossi of slave ancestry protested the superior position of the Muetuk and advocated the rule of the clan councils (*Ngwe*: singular, *Bangwe*: plural).

The protest that followed the death of Chief Ntoko Epie and the artificiality of the paramount position of the Nyassosso of Muetuk caused the British to effect an administrative re-organisation in the Bakossiland in April 1933. The 1933 re-organisation created Native Authorities (NA) as well as Native Courts (NC) in the five clans that make up Bakossi; in the slave ancestry of Ekangete, Ndibisi, and Nteho II and in the Muambong community⁸. In his progress report of 31 January 1934, Mr. Riley, a British Colonial administrator observed, the re-organisation was undoubtedly popular that clan councils assumed their authority without opposition from the former village heads⁹. There was a shift, from the rule of chiefs to the rule of clan councils of elders. The councils requested to appoint the most senior member as leader to be recognised by the Government. The clan councils had among other duties the maintenance of law and order and the collection of taxes.

The effectiveness of the system of indirect rule was evaluated partly by the amount of taxes collected. By the virtue of the duty, the *Bangwe* councils were wanting thus, compromising the very essence of the system. In the immediate tax session (1933-34) following their accession to authority the *Bangwe* councils recorded an amazing result in the collection of taxes with a total sum of 1413 pounds out of an estimated 1548 pounds. In the opinion of Mr. Riley this admirable result was due to the “first burst of enthusiasm among the re-established *Bangwe*”¹⁰.

The unfolding of events in the subsequent years proved Riley right. After the Riley progress report of 1934, there was hardly any official report about the Bakossi however, it was frequently visited by Mr. Biddulph another colonial official. The latter noted with dissatisfaction the serious drop in the collection of taxes. Out of an estimated tax of 1580 pounds for the 1934/35 period, just 627 pounds was paid into the Treasury. The drop in taxes was due to the inexperience of the *Bangwe* who were equally weak and lazy as argued by Biddulph. Responsibility in the council was so divided that it became irresponsibility. The re-organisation was, therefore, not pleasing. It failed to satisfy its essence.

⁴ NAB Ae /1935/50 Bakossi clan Reorganisation

⁵ NAB Ae 4 Intelligence Report on Bakossi Clan-Kumba Division by Mr. It Vaux ADO (October 1932) and Mr. It Childs (1936) correspondence and later reports.

⁶ NAB Ic (1933) Epie (Chief) Ntoko of Nyassosso Correspondence concerning.

⁷ NAB Ae 1935/50 Bakossi clan. Re-organisation of; Ae 43 Bakossi, Ninong and Elung Areas, Assessment of Kumba Division-Correspondence Concerning 1931.

⁸ NAB None 1935 Bakossi Clan Re-organisation of.

⁹ NAB None 1935 Bakossi Clan Re-organisation of

¹⁰ NAB None 1935 Bakossi Clan Re-organisation of

It is eloquently evident that clan ethnicity which had influenced the devolution of power to the *Bangwe* councils contained the ingredients of its demise.

Another area of weakness was the maintenance of law and order. The authority of the council of elders was weak. They were unable to enforce decisions and judgments by the courts. They functioned like councils of equals, with no one willing to take from the other. At the same time parochial rivalry among the clans made it difficult for neighbouring courts to cooperate in the execution of any process. Counciliar rule was not nebulous in itself as it succeeded in other areas. Administration through council of elders as used by the British was a huge success in the Owerri area of Nigeria¹¹. In the case of the Bakossi it was an abysmal failure fueled by ethnicity.

The failure of the *Bangwe* councils and the Native courts led to the suggestion of the creation of a Central Native Court for the Bakossi and a return to the central Native Authority at Nyassosso. As for the latter, it sounded theoretically perfect but in practice, impossible. The move to the rule by clan councils had led to a revival if not, a restoration of the independence of the respective clans which they desired to preserve so jealously. Clan sentiments were too rife among the Bakossi which defeated any attempt at a territorial unity of the people as an ethnic group. The former suggestion was debated and deliberated upon with clan sentiments clouding meaningful conclusions.

The Nyassosso who had moved the motion for a return to a central Native Authority also asked for a central court for all the Bakossi sitting in their village. Territorially, Bakossiland is divided into Northern and Southern Bakossi with Nyassosso in the latter. The former argued that the distance separating the two geographical regions made it difficult for the people in the North to attend court sessions in Nyassosso. Over and above all a central court in Nyassosso would give the latter and Southerners an unfair prominence over the Northern villages. It should be understood villages of the different clans were found in both North and the South.

It was suggested a central court be established, one in the North and one in the South. In the North, it was to be at Enyandong which was centrally located and accessible to all Northern villages. The suggestion sparked off primordial sentiments as some clans preferred independent Native Courts. The Ebamut group which included the Ndbise and Nteho II who were of slave ancestry resolved not to join any court as it reminded them of their taint past. They wished to maintain their *Bangwe* court and requested permission to build their own court house. The Muetan and Mbotmut northern villages were resolute to maintain their respective Native courts. Njume of Enyandong, a Muetan elder went further to argue that a central court had once existed at Enyandong but, was a fiasco. Difficult to arrive at a consensus agreement, the colonial authority sanctioned the existence of the *Bangwe* courts but superimposed a central court in the North at Enyandong¹².

Coming down South, opposition to the creation of a central native court came from the Muambong community. In a meeting on 2nd February 1935, Nhon Epie, leader of Muambong clan council told the British they were a separate community and had no affinities with the rest of the Bakossi¹³. They would rather prefer an amalgamation with the Ninong in the North East of Bakossi with whom they share primordial ties. The position of Nhon Epie was endorsed by the rest of the council members and thus, the Muambong were ruled out of any consideration for the creation of a central Native court in Southern Bakossi.

The tussle for supremacy in the South was between the Muetuk and Muanyor clans. The two clans share common denominators, not only that they were both descendants of the first wife of Asomengoe, they were equally Christian strongholds. Nyassosso of the Muetuk clan was the centre of Protestantism and Baseng of Muanyor base for Catholicism. Influenced by religious inclinations they rivaled for supremacy and requested the hosting of the central Native court in their villages, Nyassosso and Mekerembeng for Muetuk and Muanyor respectively. Muetan and Muasundem both issues of the second wife of Asomengoe accepted a joint Native Court for both clans but stood against a central Native Court in the South. Mbotmut supported the motion of the Muanyor. They too like the Muanyor are predominantly Catholics. Unanimous opinion was not of the Bakossi. It was then concluded that the Southern Central court which was to serve as a court of appeal was to sit at Ngusi of the Muetuk clan because of its central location. The Muambong community was to send two members to the Appeal court.

¹¹ NAB None 1935 Bakossi Clan Re-organisation of

¹² NAB None 1935 Bakossi Clan Re-organisation of

¹³ NAB None 1935 Bakossi Clan Re-organisation of

From the analysis it abundantly evident that primordial ties, clan consciousness, common group interest opposed to others was very rife among the Bakossi clans. This ethnicity worked against the indirect rule system. In spite of ethnicity, the relationship between the various clans remained cordial so long as land was available for agriculture and other use

Bakossi Land Tenure System

Land in Bakossi belongs to the community managed by the chief or clan head for the common good. In pre-colonial and colonial times, land in Bakossi like in most African societies was an inalienable property of the community. Land was the common property of the community, individuals owned only what they cultivated (Beng, 1997, p. 15) and (Rudin, 1938, p.396). Land was considered a gift from God and the ancestors. The traditional authorities were and are stewards of the land and its resources for the common good of the community, there was no private property in traditional Africa but true common ownership (Shorter, 1978, p. 26). Communities shared land under the authority and advice of elders, clan heads and chiefs. Decision about who farms a particular piece of land were made by the clan heads but often resulted from discussions in the family and clan guided by customs that took into account the needs of the various persons in the group. The notion of land ownership as exclusive did not exist.

Land tenure in Bakossi was loose because of the abundance of land. The authority over land distribution lay with the family heads. Family land boundaries were not static but usually known to all. When family land becomes fully occupied, family heads took land from another family by arrangement. In the course of time, therefore, family land expanded or contracted according to the fortunes and virility of the family concern. It is well established that family heads arranged their boundaries amicably¹⁴. General congestion in a whole resulted in the village decamping or a part of it breaking away to a new site. This accounts for the present location of villages of different clans within the same locality.

Every indigene has a traditional right to use land, to own both the land and crops cultivated on it. This is the right of ownership. He cannot sell it or undertake any transferring transaction with a stranger on land (Koge, 1986, p. 298). Because of the availability of land customs over it was loose as indicated earlier. If a man wanted land he took it. Once there was a dispute, it was referred to the council of elders. Having once cleared and farmed it, the right to use the land was vested in him and his heirs in perpetuity. This land so occupied, were subsequently sold to strangers. However, land was not customarily permanently alienable from the community. The availability of land and the loose tenure system led to permanent alienation of land from the community.

Sale of land meant something else to the indigenes. The idea of permanent ownership was foreign to the Africans. In the mind of an indigenous African, 'sale' to a stranger represented the grant in exchange for money of the use of communal land by the latter for as long as he likes to use it, but, not in perpetuity. Difference in the interpretation of 'sale' was to constitute a veritable source of conflict. In the colonial and post-colonial periods there were an increasing number of strangers in the Bakossiland who requested land for settlement.

Land Alienation to Strangers

Land alienation to strangers in some African societies were done through well-established institutions. There was the "stranger father" institution among the Lofa of Liberia and the *tutorat* in Ivory Coast. Among the coastal Cameroonians to which the Bakossi belong was the patron-client institution (Bongkorog, 2016, pp.181-83). Herein the indigenous patron upon due examination and attested conduct of the stranger client, recommended him to the village or family head for a piece of land to settle. The land occupied by the stranger is communal land and remained as such. Upon receiving the land the strangers were asked to provide some wine, tobacco and salt for the right to use the land. The property provided by the stranger was regarded as '*mekonde*' (appreciation for the use of land) and in no way translated price paid on land (Koge, 1986, pp. 245-46).

The strangers' right to land was limited to usufruct. He could cultivate food crops but not permanent crops on the land. It would be enlightened to establish here that the 'patron-client' like the 'stranger father' was harped on the principle of a 'moral economy' whereby the strangers were required to contribute to the economic development of their host society. This exonerated the strangers in the planting of perennial crops. Where permission was obtained he was allowed to build on the land.

¹⁴ NAB Ae 4 Intelligence Report on Bakossi Clan Kumba Division

The strangers reserved the right of occupancy of land as opposed to the right of ownership by the indigenes. By the right of occupancy, the strangers owned the crops cultivated and the house on the land and not the land which customarily belonged to the indigenes. He was not supposed to sell the land or transfer it in any form to another stranger. He was allowed to bequeath it to his heirs. In the case of the stranger who left without a successor the land reverted to communal land.

Communal land ownership gradually reverted to individual ownership which led to commercialisation of land. Individual ownership mothered a new concept on land; proprietary right which enabled the outright sale of land *mekonde* was now transformed to '*nkun*' (price, the outright purchase of land). This was thanks to the loose tenure system which was a function of the availability of land. Its availability guaranteed a cordial relation between the Bakossi clans on the one hand and between the Bakossi and the strangers on the other.

The cash crop economy attracted strangers from the other parts of the British Southern Cameroons and the French Cameroons into the Bakossiland to take advantage of its fertile land for agricultural use. According to a 1931, census conducted by the British on strangers elements in Bakossi; it revealed that there were 679 strangers distributed in the different villages. These strangers included Duala, Yaunde, Grassfields, Mohammedan [Hausa] and Nigerians¹⁵. Political developments in French Cameroons precisely, the banning of the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) in 1955 and its post reunification activities forced many Bamileke to seek refuge in Tombel of the Muetan clan and other neighbouring villages. The influx of strangers from the Bamenda Grassfields of the Southern Cameroons and the French Cameroons coupled with an increase in the population of the Bakossi, caused land hunger which, led to conflicts over land.

The Presence of strangers

According the 1931 census, of the 679 strangers in the Southern Bakossi villages, 476 were settled in the Muetan clan villages with 408 in Tombel alone¹⁶. There were two groups of strangers or settlers. The first were the 'native strangers', which is settlers from the different parts of the British Southern Cameroon mostly, from the Bamenda Grassfields. The second were the 'native foreigners', settlers from the French Cameroons mostly, Duala and *Yaunde*. The latter found it advantageous acquiring land in the Urban areas either for farming or settlement. Meanwhile the former were farmers who were attracted to land by its fertility. The native strangers were quickly assimilated into the local community owning both farm and urban land. The 'native foreigners' were not capable of assimilation where the land was farm land. The 'native strangers' were well conducted desirable settlers who were quickly integrated into the local community. The 'native foreigners' were the principal problem. The Duala were contemptuous of the local administration and always grouping and intriguing to deprive the local communities of their land. The *Yaunde* were seldom permanent settlers and prone to violence and difficult to control¹⁷.

The 'native foreigners' were economically stronger capable of corrupting the customary tenure system and deprive the indigenous people of their communal land. To protect the indigenes from these unscrupulous strangers, Arnett, Resident for the Cameroons Province, recommended the Native Authorities keep a register of permit to occupy land by this group of strangers and the latter were not permitted to sign the register. The Resident was also opposed to 'native foreigners' renting land. To further check their excesses, these settlers paid a tax of ten shillings instead of the eight shillings paid by the rest in the division¹⁸. These measures protected insiders' interest while ensuring inter-ethnic harmony.

Changing Inter-Ethnic Relations

In his re-assessment report of the Bakossi area in 1931, E.J. Arnett, the Resident for the Cameroons Province reported "... crisis over land is rare ... but its day will come I am convinced"¹⁹. The day certainly came with the demise of colonialism and the reunification of the two Cameroons. Reunification neutralised the colonial divides that had hitherto restricted the free movement of people across the territories.

¹⁵ NAB Ae 5. Intelligence report on Bakossi clan Kumba Division, Cameroons Province

¹⁶ NAB Ae 5 Intelligence Report on Bakossi clan

¹⁷ NAB Ae 43 Bakossi, Ninong and Elung Areas

¹⁸ NAB Ae 43 Bakossi, Ninong and Elung Areas

¹⁹ NAB Ae43 Bakossi, Ninong and Elung Areas, Re-Assessment of Kumba Division. Correspondence concerning, 1931

The strangers' population increased as well as that of the indigenes. Land became scarce and the leisure decamping of village groups to new sites was restricted by earlier indigenous occupants. Disputes over land between the indigenous Bakossi villages soared high and was a cause for concern to the post-colonial administration.

In a message by the Honourable Secretary of State for Interior on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Bakossi council held at Bangem on 20th February 1971, and read by Mallam Ibrahim Sule, Divisional Officer Tombel cautioned land deputies were on the rise which was dangerous for peaceful co-existence. The hot potato at moment of the address was the conflict over land between Enyandong and Bajoh both of upper Bakossi (Northern Bakossi). The former obstructed the latter from building at a chosen site and most of their material reported damaged²⁰.

A few months later, 5th November 1971, in a pendula movement the scene of conflict shifted to Southern Bakossi. In a Bakossi Area council committee meeting held in the office of the sub-Divisional Officer Tombel, the chairman reported to the committee members the complaint of the Atiek village of the Mbotmut clan. The Atiek had moved from old Atiek crossing the River Atiek to settle in the East for easy access to the market on a land claimed by the Ngomboku village of the Muetan clan. Their settlement was first obstructed by one Mr. Kango who threatened Mr. Clement Nzegge of Atiek with a court action for making a road through his farm and cutting down a tree which damaged 1500 stems of coffee. To resolve the matter the Secretary of State visited the place and found that the road was constructed by the community some fifteen years past and there was no damage of a coffee tree²¹. More to that Ngomboku people prevented the Atiek people from building on the main road because the land belonged to them. The new settlement was growing on the path to old Atiek which was Ngomboku land. To resolve the matter the Divisional Officer Tombel convened a meeting of the Ngomboku Traditional Council attended by councilor Etoe for Atiek and councilor Alobwede for Ngomboku where the new site for Atiek was recognised by both parties and peaceful co-existence restored²². As land became scarcer the distinction between the indigenes and the strangers hardened as inter-ethnic relations strained.

The patron client institution which absorbed the strangers into the descent-based collectivity was based on the principle of a moral economy by which they were expected to contribute to the economic development of their host community. It encouraged the cultivation of perennial crops among the strangers. The gusto among the settlers in the cultivation of cash crops was partly to guarantee security on land. However, they had to obtain permission in order to do so. In Mbule, Ngab and Tombel villages of the Muetan clan vast majority of native strangers obtained permission for the planting of cocoa. Not too long, the village council was alarmed of the value of the cocoa farms. It led to the economic dominance of the indigenes by the settlers causing friction between the former and the latter. As a pre-emptive measure the indigenous inhabitants tended to refuse fresh applications from strangers to plant cocoa and threatened limiting the period within which the existing farm could continue²³.

The first violent outburst of conflict over land between the indigenous Bakossi and the 'native foreigners' was, the Bakossi- Bamileke war of December 1966. The banning of the UPC in French Cameroon in 1955 ushered in the third dominant group of 'native foreigners', the Bamileke. Running away from the repression of the French colonial authorities, these migrants found solace in the Muetan village of Tombel. They obtained land from the indigenes, settled and planted cash crops of cocoa and coffee. Their numbers increased over the years, particularly, after the reunification of the two Cameroons. The influx of the Bamileke into Tombel increased the competition for land as it became scarcer. The Bamileke were accused of invading Bakossi land which strained their relations. Reacting against the robbery and murder of four Bakossi including a school teacher, by a group suspected to be Bamileke shortly before Christmas, on 31 December 1966 a mob of Bakossi in Tombel ran riots and slaughtered as many as 236 Bamileke and wounded hundreds more (Fanso, 1989, p. 168). The West Cameroon Government under the premiership of A.N Jua reacted promptly and restored order in the area. Relative calm was re-established restoring peaceful co-existence between the indigenous insiders and the settlers.

²⁰ NAB Ja/c 1968/11 Bakossi Council Executive Committee Minutes, 1968.

²¹ NAB Ja/c 1968/10 Executive Council Minute, Bakossi Council

²² NAB Ja/c 1968/10 Executive Council Minute, Bakossi Council

²³ NAB Qf/a 1947/1 stranger settlements Cameroons Province.

In the subsequent years the principal cause of conflict of inter-ethnic friction was the unlawful transfer of land rights from one stranger to another. This was a common practice in the Kumba and Victoria Divisions where the settlers obtained and got permission to plant cocoa and coffee²⁴. In Balong area of the Victoria Division complaints were made against strangers to the Divisional Officer for unlawful transfer of land rights to fellow strangers²⁵. In the Bakweri land the colonial authorities legislated against the lease and sale of land by the strangers but to report their intention to the Native Authority²⁶. The transfer of land among strangers in Ngomboku was partly due to their misunderstanding of the Bakossi concept of *mekonde* (appreciation for land). Some mistook it for *nkun* (outright purchase of land), assuming the right of ownership restricted to the indigenes. Where such practices were noticed, some strangers lost their usufructuary rights on land. To the strangers, it smacked hatred as tension heightened between the settlers and their host indigenes. The tension escalated to outright xenophobia in the 1990s.

The re-birth of multi-party politics in 1990 and the re-invention of the *come-no-go* syndrome by Peter Oben Ashu the then Governor of the South West Province in 1996, ushered in xenophobia. It renewed hatred for the North Westerners ('native strangers') resident in the South West by some South Westerners. They were constantly reminded they were in another man's land where they have outlived their welcome. It revoked questions over the right of occupancy on land by the settlers of the second generation. Since then they have constantly received threats of eviction from the lands they occupy. These second generation settlers were born there and had grown up to know that was their land, an inheritance from their parents. It is their source of livelihood on which they depend for their survival and that of their progeny. All this contributed to strained relations between the indigenes and the strangers. The once harmonious relation between both parties in the early years of their settlement was transformed to an uneasy calm. The incessant reminder of their stranger status caused some descendants of the strangers to come together to seek a way out of their predicament.

The descendants of the 'native strangers' and 'native foreigners' came together in an informal gathering to seek protection of their usufructuary rights. Their common group interest opposed to that of the indigenes led to ethnicity in the strangers' quarters. Ethnicity in the strangers' quarters was necessitated by their desire to compete for scarce resource, land in their place of birth and residence. It was aimed at redressing their status, particularly, protecting their inheritance. The association was to approach the Traditional council and or the civil Authority for a redress. However, this lofty idea of these descendants of strangers was never made real for lack of leadership. That notwithstanding, it succeeded in uniting the strangers in the protection of their usufructuary rights. The continuation of their occupancy rights is at the sufferance of the indigenes.

Conclusion

The Bakossi who descended from Asomengoe lived peacefully with one another in what is present day Kupe Mwanenguba Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. The fertility of its soil attracted strangers who settled among them where their relationship remained cordial. As land became scarcer conflicts over land ensued between some indigenous clans and; between the indigenes and the strangers. It was established that the main cause of friction between the insiders and outsiders (strangers) was the unlawful transfer of land from one stranger to another. It provided that a fuller understanding of the customary tenure system will result in cordial inter-ethnic relations.

²⁴ NAB Ag 18/1934 Re assessment Report Balong Clan and Map

²⁵ NAB Qf/a/ 1936 Registration of Land Occupied by Stranger Native before Native Courts 1936

²⁶ NAB Qf/a/ 1936 Registration of Land Occupied by Stranger Native before Native Courts 1936

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