

## GENDER AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN KEDJOM KETINGUH HISTORY OF THE NORTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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### ABSTRACT

This paper contends that gender complementarity through stable institutions in Kedjom Ketinguh history led to successful conflict management in the fondom. Men and women through stable institutions discussed and arrived at decisions that were binding on all. The *Manjong* male and *Fumbwen* female institutions were advisory institutions to the Fon on various issues of public concern. These institutions on their own were also able to manage conflicts among their members and within the fondom. Whenever men were slow to speedily resolve problem, women collectively mobilised to do so in order to avert a calamity. Both *Manjong* and *Fumbwen* acted in ways that helped in the management of conflicts. This was usually in the form of consultations, rituals and reprimand. These issues will be analysed through an analysis of data from oral interviews and the written literature.

**Keywords:** Gender, Conflict Management, Kedjom Ketinguh

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Kedjom Ketinguh is a kingdom in Tubah subdivision of Mezam Division in the North West Region of Cameroon. From settlement, the kingdom established institutions, male and female which worked separately and in complementarity to keep the peace and when this was threatened, to manage conflicts as they escalated. Gender was also an important consideration in decision making processes which included the choice of a leader, succession to family and village headship among other political decisions. Women of Kedjom as a whole have played an important role in redefining policies to keep the peace in the community.<sup>1</sup> The paper examines gender complementarity in the management of conflicts in the political, economic and socio-cultural domains the challenges over time notwithstanding.

Gender is the very essence of socially constructed roles for men and women in the society for the common good. These roles are at the center of the development of human society. The struggle between gender equality or inequality has not considered that the society functions according to constructed roles between men and women. Within the Kedjom Keku society,

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Diduk, "The Civility of Incivility: Grassroots Political Activism, Female Farmers and the Cameroon State," *African Studies Review* 47, 2 (2004): 27-54.

traditional conflict management was more successful when men and women performed functions that were useful to managing in an effective manner conflicts that arose. The importance of complementarity was stressed over the debate about equality and/or inequality. For us to better understand the interplay of gender and conflict management in Kedjom Ketinguh, it is important to conceptualize gender and conflict management in order to contextualize it.

### 1.1 Conceptualizing Conflict Management

Conflicts of various kinds have been persistent and consistent throughout history. Different scholars are all agreed that conflict is an inevitable part of human beings<sup>2</sup> or process of life.<sup>3</sup> Some of them have likened conflict management to conflict mitigation, dispute settlement and conflict resolution.<sup>4</sup> There is however a paradigm shift from preservation of peace to the management of conflicts over the years. The concept of conflict management is under debate in scholarship. Three basic concepts are examined in this paper namely conflict, traditional conflict management institution and conflict management.

There is no single explanation of the concept conflict.<sup>5</sup> Hogan intimates that conflict is a direct and conscious struggle between individuals or groups for the same goal. The defeat of an opponent becomes essential towards the attainment of a goal.<sup>6</sup> Aja on the other hand describes conflict in terms of an attitude, behaviour, action or process that brings about or lead to strains and stresses in relationship between two or more parties or goals.<sup>7</sup> From a general perspective, conflict is disagreement between individuals. This may be mild to a win or lose, emotion packed and confrontation,<sup>8</sup> incompatible individuals or groups interests and/or goals<sup>9</sup> and as well as a result of human greed. For the reason that scarcity of any resource is always a fact of life, there would always be a persistent competition which leads to collusion, and at times even to an intense conflict.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a competition for resources, among others, is a major cause for

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<sup>2</sup> D. Weeks, *The Eight Essential Steps to Conflict Resolution* (New York: Tarcher & Putman, 1992), ix; R. N. Okoh & W. Ewhariemen, "Understanding Violent Conflicts in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria," A Proposal Submitted to the Social Science Research Council Program on Global Security and Cooperation, New York, 2001, 3-4; C. Moore, *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflicts* (San Francisco: London, 1987), ix; N. M. Fraiser, & K. W. Hipel, *Conflict Analysis Moves and Resolution* (New York: Elsevier Science Publishing Co, 1984), 3; J. W. Burton, *Resolving Deep-Rooted Conflict: A Handbook* (Lanham: New York University Press of America, 1987), 3; J. W. Burton, *World Society: A Handbook* (Lanham: New York University Press of America, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Aja Akpuru-Aja, "Basic Concepts of Conflict," in *Clark Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: A Reader*, Edited by Miriam Ikejiani, 12 (Ibadan: Special Books Limited, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Louis Kriesberg, *International Conflict Management Resolution: The US-USSR and Middle East Cases* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Abebe Demewoz Mengesha, Samson Seid Yesuf & Tessema Gebre, "Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms among the Kembata Society," in *American Journal of Educational Research* 3, 2 (2015): 225-242.

<sup>6</sup> M. O. Hogan, *Academic's Dictionary of Sociology* First edition (New Delhi: Academic Publishers, 2006), 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> A. Akpuru –Aja, *Basic Concepts, Issues and Strategies of Peace and Conflict Resolution: Nigerian African conflict Case Studies* (Enugu: Keny and Brothers, 2007), 15.

<sup>8</sup> N. Kirchoff and J. R. Adams, *Conflict Management for Project Managers* (Drexel Hill: Project Management Institute, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Laura Nader, "Conflict: Anthropological Aspect," in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Science* Vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan Company and Free Press, 1968), 230- 241.

<sup>10</sup> Mengesha, "Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms..." 227.

conflicts that may arise between/among individuals and nations at large.<sup>11</sup> Hogan articulated further that ‘in conflict (unlike competition), opponents are primarily oriented toward each other rather than toward the object they seek. In fact, because of the development of strong feelings of hostility, the achievement of the goal may at times be considered secondary to the opponent’s defeat.’<sup>12</sup> Conflict could therefore be seen as a clash between individuals arising out of a difference in thought process, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirements and even sometimes perceptions. These characteristics were manifest in the interactions between the people of Kedjom Ketinguh and accounted for the collective effort of men and women to manage them and keep the society stable.

Conflict management on the other hand involves the ability to solve problems, set goals, compromise, settle personality differences and resolve conflicts.<sup>13</sup> Through this process, negative aspects of conflict are limited while increasing the positive aspects.<sup>14</sup> Conflict management is viewed as a part of a larger process of ensuring peace and order in the human society and should be channelled towards positive effect in every human community.<sup>15</sup> It also involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for management of conflict in any given environment.

Conflict management correctly assumes that conflicts are long term processes that often cannot be quickly resolved, but the notion of "management" suggests that people can be directed or controlled as though they were physical objects. It is also understood that the notion of management suggests that the goal is the reduction or control of volatility more than dealing with the real source of the problem.<sup>16</sup> The term management in conflict is a holistic term that embodies everything about conflict because it carries aspects from conflict prevention to resolution and preservation of peace and this was visible in African traditional societies.

The concept of Traditional Conflict Management Institution (TCMI) is common in Africa because people of the continent made use of this prior to the advent of the Arabs and Europeans on the continent. The family as the smallest unit of the indigenous institutions effectively mediated and resolved conflicts.<sup>17</sup> Chiefs, elders, family heads each at their own level managed conflicts for the collective good. Traditional conflict management was however not uniform throughout Africa. It varied from one community to the other. What is however known of the continent as a whole is the fact that the communal life style is the general norm as opposed to individualism. This communality was very important in conflict management because the integrated nature of African ethnic groups.

Several institutions are involved in conflict management in Africa and include the family, clan, council of elders, age grade, and the *foyn* or traditional ruler. In the family, the husband is the head and more importantly a coordinator of the family settling matters that come up including

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Hogan, *Academic’s Dictionary of Sociology*, 76-77.

<sup>13</sup> Kirchoff, *Conflict Management for Project Managers*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel Remi Aiyede, *Theories in Conflict Management* National Open University of Nigeria, 2006, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Adeyemi Johnson Ademowo, “Conflict Management in Traditional African Society.”

bride wealth and inheritance.<sup>18</sup> The extended family includes parents from the same lineage or ancestry or people from the same family tree or house. In some societies, the extended family includes in-laws and relatives. For instance, the Turkana people in Kenya regard the extended family as the first institution of conflict management.<sup>19</sup> The quarter heads or clan heads, council of elders, age grade and the ethnic group are all involved in the management of conflicts in many African ethnic groups. The ethnic group leader is the custodian of the land, resources and customary laws among others. And any matters arising therefrom and which cannot be settled by established institutions, are brought to him for adjudication. There are theories to explain conflict management.

## 2.0 THEORIES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

There are several approaches that have been developed to explain conflict and conflict management. A theoretical orientation is important as far as this study is concerned. The theories examined and contextualized in this study are the Perspective Theory<sup>20</sup> and the Contemporary Theory.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.1 The Perspective Theory

Schellenberg's Perspective Theory is rooted in three great thoughts of Charles Darwin, Adam Smith and Karl Marx. To him, the aggressive nature of human beings is based on survival of the fittest theory, the development of individual interest and that it is from this individual interest that social interest develops and metamorphosed into class conflict. This therefore triggers growth and development which are principally based on the factors of production and the pattern of distribution.<sup>22</sup> The social conflict opines that the society seems to be in a continuous struggle or friction between different groups. The society is best understood in terms of conflict and it must not be violent but the friction makes us understand the society better. This is explained through Karl Marx's class struggle. As far as social classes emerge, there is bound to be friction.

The Kedjom Ketinguh society falls within this theory as social interactions of distinct individuals and groups give birth to conflicts which result in new social interactions, new groups and the chain continues. This often manifest itself in the political, social and economic domains. Traditional conflict management took place in Kedjom Ketinguh because of incompatibility, perception, interests (individual and group), and competition among others. Management strategies took into consideration the causes of conflicts This aligns with the contemporary conflict management theory which sees conflicts as part of human existence and measures to confront or manage them are deeply rooted in the Kedjom Ketinguh culture and tradition.

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<sup>18</sup> E. Muli (ed), *Conflict Management in Kenya: Towards Policy and Strategy Formulation* (Nairobi: Practical Action, 2007), 43-45.

<sup>19</sup> B. Kabar & M. Karimi, (eds.), *Indigenous Democracy Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanism: The Case of Pokot, Turkana, Samburu and Marakwet Communities*, (Nairobi: ITDG, 2004), 45.

<sup>20</sup> T. Schellenberg, *The Science of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 17-22.

<sup>21</sup> Kirchoff, *Conflict Management for Project Managers*.

<sup>22</sup> Schellenberg, *The Science of Conflict*, 22.

## 2.2 The Contemporary Theory

While traditional theory is based on the assumption that conflicts are bad and caused by trouble makers and should be subdued, the contemporary theory recognizes that conflicts between human beings are inevitable and unavoidable.<sup>23</sup> According to this theory, conflicts emerge as a natural result of change and can be beneficial to the organization or institution, if managed effectively and efficiently. In addition to the contemporary theory is the current theory which considers innovation as a mechanism for bringing together various ideas and viewpoints into a new and different fusion.<sup>24</sup>

This study leans towards the theory that conflicts (though at some point may be caused by trouble makers) evolve, are due to differences in opinion and there are strategies put in place to resolve these conflicts. Traditional conflict management institutions proved to be effective over time. Such institutions were not put in place to deal with recalcitrant individuals but to put order, bring peace and guide against the growth of conflict. These measures originated from the people's culture and tradition. One can therefore say that human society in view of the ubiquity of conflict is the most impressive product of conflict management.<sup>25</sup> This makes us to understand that conflict theories must involve all varieties of human conflicts and types of conflicts that are in existence. Since this study is about gender consideration in conflict management, the structure of gender in Kedjom Ketinguh would be discussed.

## 2.3 Gender Structure of Kedjom Ketinguh Kingdom

The gender structure of Africa is that which ascribes roles to men and women. These roles were important and cannot be underestimated in the development of various indigenous societies in the continent including Cameroon. The contributions of the genders towards social, economic, political and educational developments of African societies cannot also be gainsaid.<sup>26</sup> In fact, traditional African societies attached no importance to gender inequalities because every individual had a role to play both in the family as well as in the larger society.<sup>27</sup> Each gender had its traditional role in the development of the society and thus could not be underestimated or undermined. In other words, the position of men was complimentary to that of women and vice versa.

There was the non-existent of gender inequality.<sup>28</sup> This was because people did not pay attention to who was more important or that the treatment of people were according to sex. It was all about what ought to be done by who and for what purpose. The society was viewed from a holistic viewpoint rather than sex perspective.<sup>29</sup> Each role, regardless of who performed it was considered equally important because it contributed to the fundamental goal of the family

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<sup>23</sup> Kirchoff, *Conflict Management for Project Managers*.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. See also Morton Deutsch, "Subjective Features of Conflict Resolution: Psychological, Social and Cultural Influences," in, *New Directions of Conflict Theory*, edited by Raimo Vayrynen, 47 (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Jacob Bercovitch, *Social conflicts and Third Parties* First Edition (New York: Routledge, 1984), 5.

<sup>26</sup> William, St Clair *Imperialism and Traditional African Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 27.

<sup>27</sup> Muigua, "Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Institutions," 4.

<sup>28</sup> William, *Imperialism and Traditional African Culture*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Muigua, *Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms*, 4

and community survival.<sup>30</sup> Men or women were not condemned to a particular task except of childbearing and who impregnated the women. A child grew up to perform multiple tasks at home and in the society. Though their biology could determine the function of each of them, it was never a taboo for a man to perform womanly duties and vice versa. This implies that indigenous people in Kedjom Ketinguh performed varying roles to maintain the efficient functioning of their society, prior to colonialism. These varying roles included home management, food production, child bearing, child care, protection among others. Gender in this study highlights the roles of male and female without regard for inequality in the Kedjom Ketinguh ethnic group. The claim therefore is that gender inequality came with the advent of colonialism and has eaten deep into the traditional system that today causes a lot of havoc in the society.<sup>31</sup>

The term sex and gender are commonly used interchangeably by feminist scholars.<sup>32</sup> Social scientists make a distinction between these concepts.<sup>33</sup> Sex refers to the biological characteristic of being female or male.<sup>34</sup> Gender refers to masculinity and femininity- the social characteristics and responsibilities associated with being male or female.<sup>35</sup> Some character traits were traditionally associated and were instrumental to certain character traits, skills that were goal or task oriented. Some character traits involved nurturing and sensitivity was traditionally associated with the female.<sup>36</sup> Protection and provision and other hard work were associated with the male. In Kedjom Ketinguh these roles were viewed from the perspective of complementarity. It contributed to harmony in the Kingdom and when conflict arose, it was ably managed making use of the competences of the male and female gender.

Gender roles were associated with social responsibility. Female gender was expected to assume most of the responsibility for child care and nurturing because of their extreme carefulness and patience. The males were expected to put their energy into protecting and providing for the family.<sup>37</sup> The male did more of protective role and provision to the family because women needed to be protected for their procreative activities and propagation of families. Women did not do physically exhausting work not because they were weak but because society expected men to protect them so that they would effectively play the role of nurturing. It is worthy of note that gender roles were helpful in peace and harmony in the society. They kept the society intact and it was a way of managing the society from conflicts and disputes among the people. Gender balance produced a peaceful and almost conflict free environment. This was made possible because each gender concentrated in performing their individual roles rather than the argument of who was strong and who was weak, who had authority and who had not or who was treated right and who was not treated right.

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<sup>30</sup> William, *Imperialism and Traditional African Culture*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Adolf Vubangsi, Kedjom Ketinguh, May 15 2020, farmer, 67 years old.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Veronica Nyingcho, Kedjom Ketinguh, May 23 2020, farmer, 48 years old.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Francis Veshigho, Kedjom Ketinguh, May 22 2020, farmer, 60 years old.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Veronica Nyingcho, Kedjom Ketinguh, May 23 2020, farmer.

<sup>37</sup> M. Mojapelo, "Ngwana'aditlhaka: Early Affirmation of Motherhood," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 21, 1 (2011): 77-87.

Gender roles were a set of arrangements by which society transformed biological sexuality into products of human activity and in which these transferred sexual needs were satisfied.<sup>38</sup> In Kedjom Ketinguh, men and women played different but complementary roles in the smooth functioning of the society. They gave birth to children and it was never a taboo to give birth to a girl child. Rather, it was seen as a blessing because it was believed that the more the female children, the wealthier the parents would become. Female children instead added value to a particular family. Male children would succeed their fathers and female children brought wealth because it was believed that the more one had in-laws the wealthier, he became. This explains why the girl child was brought up to be a wife, mother and the boy child was brought up as father, husband, a protector and food provider to the family. The differentiation in the training of gender was to make sure peace was maintained in the present and future of the family and the society as a whole.<sup>39</sup> This training was actually a way of resolving conflicts as it encouraged peace and harmony among the people.

It should however be noted that the provision of food was actually the responsibility of all. While the male gender cleared the bushes, the female gender worked on farm lands and both planted and harvested the crops when they were ready and brought them home. There were homes that always had problems simply because one partner could not perform his own role. Either the man did not clear the bush or the wife renege on working on the farm land. This often resulted in quarrels among couples and would be resolved by other family members. Due to the complementarity in roles of women and men, a breakdown in any of them created problems and had consequences on the effective functioning of the entire system.

Prior to the advent of colonialism women held positions of prominence within the Kedjom Ketinguh society like elsewhere in the North West Region of Cameroon.<sup>40</sup> They played critical social and economic roles and contributed to the family by processing food, weaving, making pots and cooking food for the family.<sup>41</sup> These activities were done alongside the men and this complementarity was seen in their daily activities. The fact that both worked in defined and complementary tasks helped to reduce any lingering tension and conflict in the family and larger Kedjom Ketinguh society. When a wife was busy in the kitchen, the husband was for example busy fetching and splitting fuelwood. In some activities like trade, men and women were involved in varying degrees. Men could go on long distance trade but women were involved in trade in the local markets. They also prepared food for the men who often travelled to other places to sell and buy items of trade. In some cases, men carried goods to the market and women sold them.<sup>42</sup>

The Kedjom Ketinguh society recognized gender roles in conflict managements of various kinds.<sup>43</sup> These roles were recognized within the family, clan and quarter councils.<sup>44</sup> As far political matters of the community were concerned, women were advisers to their husbands as

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<sup>38</sup> Yakubu, "Violence, Sexuality and the Amazon: Women Warriors in Africa from Dahomey to Liberia," *Sexuality in Africa*, 2010, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Adolf Vubangsi, Kedjom Ketinguh, May 15 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Veronica Nyingcho, Kedjom Ketinguh, May 23 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Francis Veshigho, Kedjom Ketinguh, May 22 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Veronica Nyingcho, Kedjom Ketinguh, May 23 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Adolf Vubangsi, Kedjom Ketinguh, May 15 2020.

they represented them in every sphere of the society. In this way, men were not super humans because women were there to advise them on critical matters concerning the governance of the society.<sup>45</sup> This was a kind of co-rulership not only through advice but also through activities the of women regulatory society. In some occasion, when women overtly controlled their husbands or men, they became husband wives. There were also cases where women performed male roles in their families and so became males by virtue of these acts. Gender roles generally manifested themselves in behaviors, values and attitudes that a society considered appropriate for both male and female. The social conflicts, land issues, succession crisis, regency crisis among others involved both gender in resolving them. Each of them would be consulted on specific issues and their wise counsel was taken into consideration for such problems to be managed in such a way that peace returned to families and the community. This led to social cohesion and the people could concentrate on developing their community.

On the whole, the functioning of Kedjom Ketinguh society was in such a way that gender roles were clearly defined and also complementary. These were however dynamic. Traditional Kedjom Ketinguh society was therefore not built on gender inequality. It was in fact, a complementarity of gender roles in action over time. Each gender had a role to play as a contribution to societal development and conflict management.<sup>46</sup> This implied therefore that men and women were involved in the daily activities of the land that fostered peace and harmony.

## 2.4 *Manjong* and *Fumbwen* in Conflict Management

### a) *Manjong*

*Manjong* was an age-grade social club in Kedjom Ketinguh. Within this club, the teachings of social obligations were emphasized and this was helpful in binding people of the same status in ties of close loyalty and devotion.<sup>47</sup> When a man of the same age-group injured another in Kedjom Ketinguh, it was considered a serious offence.<sup>48</sup> As such, belonging to an age-group demanded observance of the rules, duties and rights. Members of the age-group respected one another and observed the rules and conflicts among age-group members were rare and considered a taboo with dire consequences. Parents of age-mates became peace-makers whenever conflicts arose among their children or relatives.

The age grade system was in existence in Africa and had been recognized and used by leaders to champion causes for the social, cultural, political, infrastructural and economic development of communities.<sup>49</sup> Age grades were groups of persons who, according to societal norms and values, were regarded as people of the same age.<sup>50</sup> Each age grade was given a special name

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Francis Veshigho, Kedjom Ketinguh, 22 May 2020, farmer and grazier, 60 years old.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Adolf Vubangsi, Kedjom Ketinguh, May 15 2020.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Peter Ngong, Kedjom Ketinguh, April 12 2020, farmer aged 69 years old.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/04/age-grade-system-strongest-among-communities-igboland-ohuabunwa/>, accessed October 10 2024.

<sup>50</sup> Age grades do vary from one community to the other. In some communities, persons within a specific period of three, four or even five years age bracket form an age grade. In some communities, they are gender segregated while in others, they are mixed (men and women). But each age grade is clearly distinguished from one another. In some communities, entry into an age grade, often gender separated, is usually marked by an initiation rite which



that helped defined its position and role in the community, relative to other age grades. Members of each age grade knew each other fairly well. They chose their leaders among their members and were expected to meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual or communal interest, and were willing to help one another and defend the community when the need arose.<sup>51</sup> This was the case with age-grades in Kedjom Ketinguh especially with the *Manjong* age-grade social club.

The most important role of this age grade like others elsewhere in Cameroon and Africa included unity among members, security of lives and property, enforcement of law and order, development/execution of community initiatives and projects, crime control, conflict management within the age grade and within the entire community and community warriors in both physical and spiritual warfare especially when externally threatened.<sup>52</sup> Other roles of age-grades generally speaking included their service as agents of change and modernization and sophistication. They were also role models and served as community conscience; became educators and socializing agents; managers of projects; advocates of best practices; power balance in community initiatives; providing voice and support to the poor and the disadvantaged; enforcers of ancestral wishes and protectors of cultural values and norms; and pulling the community ahead and ensuring good value orientation.<sup>53</sup>

Conflict management in Kedjom Ketinguh was tailored towards peace and enhancement of harmony among the indigenous people. It was obvious that one had to know that it was not an easy task as knowledge, wisdom and experience were required in the exercise of their duties. Social responsibilities of the *manjong* were also important in conflict management. The *manjong*, therefore, played a significant role in the management of conflict within the kingdom as its members ensured mutuality and harmony within the community. This was because like age-grades among the Igbo they were forceful in action, cultivated dynamic mindset, enthusiastic in manners, versatile in social engineering, intimidating in the struggle, spectacularly youthful; and blunt in the pursuit of truth.<sup>54</sup> These genuine qualities enabled members of the *manjong* social club a power to reckon with in the management of conflict. The *manjong* had proven quite successful in the maintenance of law and order in Kedjom Ketinguh.

Criminal activities and social dislocations were also part of Kedjom Ketinguh society. Whenever this happened, the people would solicit support from the male age grade. Age grades were an important institution in Kedjom Ketinguh kingdom that contributed to development and peace. The ancestors should be appreciated for putting in place such an institution of importance in the life of the people of this kingdom. Its social engineering activities were helpful in managing and keeping the peace in Kedjom Ketinguh. In all fifty quarters in the

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may be the crowning of a long and complex preparation. In the pre-colonial period, the newly formed age grades had to prove to be matured by defending the community against hostile neighbours or enemies.

<sup>51</sup> Read more at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/04/age-grade-system-strongest-among-communities-igboland-ohuabunwa/>, accessed October 10 2024.

<sup>52</sup> Interviewed with Peter Mbom, Kedjom Ketinguh, April 12 2020, teacher, 43 years old.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Also see <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/04/age-grade-system-strongest-among-communities-igboland-ohuabunwa/>, accessed October 10 2024.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/04/age-grade-system-strongest-among-communities-igboland-ohuabunwa/>, accessed October 10 2024.

kingdom, age grades played an important role in conflict management that was clearly recognized and appreciated.<sup>55</sup>

The *manjong* was therefore regarded as another common institution for conflict management. It was a structure of social organization among Kedjom Ketinguh people. Belonging to a certain age-group demanded observance of the rules, duties and rights arising from such membership. Age-mates respected one another and observed the rules of *manjong* and as such conflicts among male age-mates were limited. *Fumbwen* was another social group that was limited to the female folks.

### b) The *Fumbwen*

Kedjom Ketinguh traditional society was not a typical patriarchal society as women also had a say in the governance of the society.<sup>56</sup> The man literally seemed to be the leader of the traditional society as the one who conceived and executed, while the woman was virtually absent from this aspect.<sup>57</sup> In practice this was not the case. The women were also very active in conception and execution of policies in Kedjom Ketinguh kingdom. The lineage in Kedjom Ketinguh is matrilineal – that is, it is traced to the mother and not the father, through the principle of consanguinity.<sup>58</sup> There existed women's traditional societies and *fumbwen* stood out as the parallel of the *kwifoyn* society at the village level, and performed similar roles in conflict management. It constituted the women council of elders.<sup>59</sup>

Although women social institutions worked mainly as assemblies in grief and performed most funeral rituals for their members and some notables, they equally represented the voice of women in every important matter concerning the life of the community.<sup>60</sup> They spoke up when there was injustice especially concerning farm lands and crops and this helped to resolve a brewing conflict.<sup>61</sup> A major criterion to belong to this institution was age, in addition to proof of having given birth, and membership paid a fee.<sup>62</sup> Membership seats were distributed in the house according to established protocol. Recalcitrant members of the *fumbwen* were sanctioned. This limited conflicts among women and by extension the larger Kedjom Ketinguh society.

The *fumbwen* or women society had their own role in resolving conflicts not only among women but was greatly involved in village politics especially in times of crisis related to succession and land.<sup>63</sup> In 1989 for instance, there was a general outcry in the Leumbweh quarter due to the seizure of farm lands by the Fulani and cattle destruction of food crops. When the situation persisted, the *fumbwen* women association decided to resolve the problem in their own way. They came out en masse and, in their nudity, and moved to the area in conflict. Through this single action of theirs, the conflict was resolved. This was after men had failed to

<sup>55</sup> Interviewed with Peter Mbom, Kedjom Ketinguh, April 12 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Veronica Nyingcho, Kedjom Ketinguh, June 3 2020, farmer, 49 years old.

<sup>57</sup> Interviewed with Peter Mbom, Kedjom Ketinguh, April 12 2020.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Veronica Nyingcho, Kedjom Ketinguh, June 3 2020.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Martin Ngansi, Kedjom Ketinguh, February 17 2020, farmer, 65 years old.

<sup>60</sup> Interviewed with Peter Mbom, Kedjom Ketinguh, April 12 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Veronica Nyingcho, Kedjom Ketinguh, June 3 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Interviewed with Peter Mbom, Kedjom Ketinguh, April 12 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

resolve it. In several instances, women reacted with precision when men either failed or delayed in managing conflicts that could endanger the peace of the society. Apart from the social institutions and their conflict management roles, there were challenges to the effective management of conflicts in the Kedjom Ketinguh kingdom.

### 3.0 MODERN CHALLENGES

Indigenous institutions that were responsible in conflict management with the passage of time began to face some challenges. The *Manjong* social club that used to (re)emphasize social obligations for all its members today face challenges which are either rooted in Christianity or modernity. In the past, members were obliged to observe rules, perform duties and had rights. Today, colonialism and Christian influence have contributed to weakening respect for these rules by bonafide members. Parents of the age-mates who often mediated and managed conflicts as peace-makers are today not listened to by a good number of them. The culture of individualism has eaten deep into the social fabric or marrow of Kedjom Ketinguh so much so that children no longer listen to the wise counsel of the parents. Some children hold on to western notions of human rights and freedom which have made them to put up a dishonorable attitude. The weakening of institutions of moral censure in Kedjom Ketinguh is similar to what has been going on within the Igbo society in Eastern Nigeria where external influences have contributed to the state of things.<sup>64</sup>

The most important roles of age grades which included unity among its members, security of lives and property, enforcement of law and order, development and execution of community initiatives and projects, crime control, conflict management within the age grade and within the entire community and community warriors in both physical and spiritual warfare among others, have in modern times not been fully implemented due to the fact that some people have imbibed Christian values in place of continuous respect for traditional values<sup>65</sup> Christian evangelization emphasizes heavenly rather than community values. Most of these values are at variance with the people's traditional values. Fewer people now enroll into *manjong* clubs and participate in cultural activities that promoted social cohesion. There is now a wide gap among members of the same age grade and this is not helpful in the management of conflicts. Division has ushered in disunity and hatred among people who should be working for the common good.

Conflict management in Kedjom Ketinguh was tailored towards peace and enhancement of harmony among the indigenous people. The *manjong* brought age groups together but western and other influences have instead torn them apart. The main pre-occupation of today is the pursuit of wealth and money at the expense of team work to build a peaceful and society where development will thrive. Social responsibilities of the *manjong* were also important in conflict management. Its members were bound by their rules to promote harmony, peace and concord. They also cultivated the culture of respect for one another and other members of the society. This respect was also for the different cultural institutions and the functions each of them performed for the common good. These genuine qualities enabled members of the *manjong* social club to earn the respect of others which was healthy in the management of conflicts not

<sup>64</sup> Read more at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/04/age-grade-system-strongest-among-communities-igboland-ohuabunwa/>, accessed October 10 2024.

<sup>65</sup> Interviewed with Peter Mbom, Kedjom Ketinguh, April 12 2020.

only within the *manjong* society but also in the community but this is no longer there.<sup>66</sup> *Manjong* has become more or less a shadow of itself and people enroll into it mainly for the purpose of social prestige and not to help in the management of conflicts as was the case before.

The age grade social club was effective in handling criminal activities and other social dislocations in Kedjom Ketinguh kingdom. This was thanks to the foundational work of the ancestors. These age grade clubs followed strictly on the footsteps of the ancestors but things have recently taken a radical turn and criminal activities can no longer be dealt with promptly.<sup>67</sup> This is because of the destabilizing effect of western and other values which are alien to the Kedjom people. People are prepared to drag someone to court or the police if accused of committing a crime that society deemed to be unpardonable. Such modern institutions have replaced the age grade clubs in the dispense of justice to defaulters in Kedjom Ketinguh like elsewhere and people are afraid of forcing others to subscribe to this institution because they might end up behind the bars in a police station.

In the past, Kedjom Ketinguh traditional society was not a typical patriarchal society as women also had a say in matters concerning the society through their own institutions like the *fumbuen* which was a parallel of the *kwifoyn* male regulatory society in every respect and performed similar roles in conflict management as the *kwifoyn* and other male institutions.<sup>68</sup> Their importance was seen in the fight against injustice in matters related to farm land and the crops therein.<sup>69</sup> The situating is not the same today because of changes brought about by colonialism and Christianity. Christian teaching has described such a group like others to be ungodly. Membership seats in *fumbwen* are no longer distributed according to established protocol. In fact, protocols are no longer strictly followed as younger members challenge the elderly which is disrespect and does not promote harmonious co-existence. Some elders no longer deserve to be respected because they do not respect even themselves in their speeches and actions.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this paper we have shown that gender roles were visible in conflict management in Kedjom Ketinguh kingdom in the precolonial past and that colonialism and Christianity negatively affected this gender balance in conflict management. These roles were inscribed in the customs and traditions of the people to the extent that in all socio-political, economic and cultural practices of the people these roles played out without conflict but rather complementarity. The concept of conflict management has been examined to show how the gender actions of the people of Kedjom Ketinguh were in line with practical aspects of conflict management. Similarly, the perspective and contemporary theories were examined as they better inform this study on gender and conflict resolution in the kingdom of Kedjom Ketinguh.

The gender consciousness in Kedjom Ketinguh is worthy of emulation because it contributed towards the stabilization of activities of the people. Through established and revered institutions like the *manjong* and *fumbwen*, the people managed conflicts within each of the

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Peter Ngong, Kedjom Ketinguh, April 12 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Interviewed with Peter Mbom, Kedjom Ketinguh, April 12 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Martin Ngansi, Kedjom Ketinguh, February 17 2020.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Veronica Nyingcho, Kedjom Ketinguh, June 3 2020.

genders as it came up but more importantly lent a helping hand to each other to manage challenges that would have destroyed the very fabric of Kedjom society. Initiation processes into these institutions of respect took into consideration high moral values and failure to abide by the rules of these institutions attracted a heavy sanction and this alone deterred people from a wayward attitude. Besides, the promptitude with which these institutions intervened in brewing conflicts placed them in a category of their own as far as conflict management was concerned.

The advent of Christianity and colonialism with values of individualism and respect for God and nothing else became a destructive force to the effective management of conflicts in Kedjom Ketinguh. Christian converts challenged the relevance of these institutions and described them as ungodly which should be destroyed. The more women were admitted into the Christian church, the more *fumbwen* declined in relevance and respect. In recent times, many young girls are not attracted to the *fumbwen* as an institution of honor and respect. Similarly, the *manjong* which also played an important role of peace and stability and fought to defend the kingdom from external aggression is declining in respect. Some of these institutions today serve more or less a social function only without political and economic functions that espouse communalism. This study has thus proven that there was no gender inequality in precolonial Kedjom Ketinguh society because each gender knew what to do in which ever conflictual situation and was respected for that. They also harnessed the strengths of women and men to work in synergy for conflict management and for the common good until conflicting values came to challenge their very nature of operation.

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**Interviews**

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