

## THE MBORORO, CO-EXISTENCE AND DIFFERENCES IN MENCHUM DIVISION OF CAMEROON

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<https://doi.org/10.37602/IJREHC.2026.7322>

### ABSTRACT

This paper examines socio-economic differences and their impact on peaceful co-existence between the Mbororo and settled agriculturist communities in Menchum Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. The paper argues that enduring socio-economic differences between the Mbororo and the settled agriculturist communities of Menchum division led to difficulties in co-existence and thus conflict between these two distinct communities. The qualitative research methodology has been employed including surveys and interviews as well as a content analysis of written literature. Findings reveals that the socio-economic differences have led to a love hate relationship between the Mbororo and their host communities. The paper has underscored the need for inclusive policies that foster mutual understanding and cooperation and thus sustainable development among the different people that inhabit Menchum Division.

**Keywords:** Menchum, Differences, Co-existence, Challenges, Mbororo, Indigenes

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Menchum Division is rich cultural diversity, thus a complex socio-economic landscape. Among its inhabitants are the Mbororo, a group of Semi-nomadic Fulani pastoralists who live within various indigenous communities relying predominantly on agriculture for their livelihood. This co-existence of different groups presents both opportunities for collaboration and challenges due to cultural differences and competition for scarce resources.

Historically, relationship between the Mbororo and indigenous populations has been marked by mutual dependence as well as conflicts. The Mbororo's pastoral lifestyle necessitates mobility in search of grazing lands and water sources, while indigenous groups have established permanent settlements centred on mainly agriculture as main economic activity. The different economic activities have often led to competition for land and resources, exacerbating tensions and contributing to socio-economic disparities.

Despite the potential for co-existence, the socio-economic divide between these groups remain visible with the Mbororo often perceived as economically advantaged due to their livestock wealth, while indigenous communities struggle with limited access to resources, education and

healthcare. This paper examines the socio-economic differences and informed interactions between these communities leading to challenges in peaceful co-existence.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic status, cultural dynamics and external influences affecting both groups, this research provides insights that can inform policy-making and community development initiatives. By fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding Mbororo-indigenous relations in Menchum Division, this paper is a contribution to the discourse on sustainable co-existence and resource management in Menchum Division of Cameroon.

### 1.1 Location of Menchum Division

Menchum Division is one of the fifty-eight divisions that make up Cameroon. It is one of the seven divisions of the North West Region and lies between latitudes 6° and 7° N and longitudes 9°30' and 11° E<sup>1</sup>. It shares boundaries with the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the North and North West, Donga Mantung Division to the East, Bui Division to the south East and Mezam Division to the South and Manyu and Momo Divisions to the South West. In terms of surface area Menchum Division covers approximately 6230 square kilometres with a population of about 161,998 inhabitants giving a population density of 36 persons per square kilometre<sup>2</sup>. The main economic activity of the people is agriculture. They cultivate crops on the hills, valleys and plains. Topographically, the division is made up of lowlands, intermittent slopes and very steep slopes of over 2,300 metres high<sup>3</sup>. These highlands are prone to soil erosion and poor agricultural production thereby forcing many people to move into the valleys for different agricultural activities.

Administratively, Menchum Division is made up of four sub-divisions namely; Fungom with a total land surface of 2034.5 km<sup>2</sup>, Furu-Awa covering a land surface area of 1157.6 km<sup>2</sup>, Menchum Valley having a land surface of 1040.5 km<sup>2</sup> and Wum central Sub-Division with a total land surface of 256.4 km<sup>4</sup>. The division is made up of over 50 villages ruled by chiefs and sub-villages administered by sub chiefs<sup>5</sup>. The main stay of the inhabitants is crop cultivation, sheep and cattle rearing. The increase in human population over the years led to competition for land for various uses. Formerly fertile up hills are now unfertile because of over use. It has forced farmers and pastoralists to move into valleys where land conflicts have occurred. The soil is exhausted, vegetation depleted and water scarce especially in the dry season. These have exacerbated the problem of peaceful co-existence between the Mbororo pastoralists and the indigenous groups who each need enough land for crop cultivation and cattle rearing respectively. This is recently the case between the people of Bu and the pastoralists<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> J.A. Mohammadou, "The Advent, Organization and Integration of the Fulani in Menchum Community from early 20th century to 2003", ( DEA Degree, Department of History, University of Yaounde, 1984), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Tande Dibussi, "Cameroon: 2005 Census Results Finally Published", at <http://www.Disbussi.com/2010/04/Cameroon-2005-census-result>, accessed on October 15, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Mohammadou, "The Advent, Organization and Integration of the Fulani", 6.

<sup>4</sup> Balgah Sounders Nguh, "Land use Dynamics and Agro-Pastoral Conflicts in Menchum Division, Cameroon", *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (UELS)*, vol.3, issue 3, 2018, 400.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Kam Kah, "Ngekete'mboloh: Land-use Row in Upper Western Menchum River Valley (Cameroon), 1990s-2019," *Somaliland Peace and Development Journal* 8 (2024): 7-21.

## 1.2 Co-existence and Minority: Concepts Contextualised

Co - existence is a state in which two or more groups live together while respecting differences and resolving conflicts in a non-violent manner. Peaceful co-existence is when different people live together harmoniously without any qualms or acrimony<sup>7</sup>. Some scholars argue that, peaceful co-existence was developed and applied by the Soviet Union at various stages during the Cold War in the context of primarily Marxist-Leninist foreign policy. It was adopted by Soviet allied socialist states hoping to peacefully co-exist with the capitalist bloc (US allied States)<sup>8</sup>. According to the antagonistic contradiction principle, socialism and capitalism could never co-exist peacefully. The Soviet Union applied it in relations with the Western world, particularly in relations between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries<sup>9</sup>.

The settlement of the Mbororo in Menchum, their nomadic way of life and economic activities in the 1930s brought about profound changes in the political economy of the area. This was so as their presence introduced new ways of land use patterns and different perceptions about land, resources and cohabitation. This was contrary to the political, economic and socio-cultural institutions established by those communities that received them. Co - existence between the Mbororo and other indigenous groups was slow and difficult due to a number of socio cultural, economic and political differences. Some Mbororo continued to live in seclusion making it difficult for co-existence to become a reality.

## 1.3 Minority

There are several competing conceptualisations of minority. Challand argues that “only groups who see themselves as different, ethnically, religiously or linguistically, and are concerned with preserving their features should be described as minorities.<sup>10</sup>” He argues further that, demands relating to the status of minorities would be meaningless if they were dominant minorities. Dominant minorities are minorities that though, they do not have a major demographic weight, nevertheless wield huge economic and political power. The Mbororo of Menchum Division constitutes such an example of a dominant minority group.

Dworkin and Dworkin drawing inspiration from Wirth, Young, Wagly, Harris, Gelfang and Lee’s discussion of “differential power” talk about a heuristic meaning of minority<sup>11</sup>. They propose that a minority group is a group characterised by four qualities namely “identifiability, differential power, different and pejorative treatment and group awareness.<sup>12</sup>”

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<sup>7</sup> Angela Nyawira Khaminwa, “The Hyper- Polarization Challenge to the Conflict Resolution Field: A Joint BI and Conflict Resolution Quarterly (CRQ) Discussion”, Online exploration, 2003, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Theodore Otto Windi Jr, “The Rhetoric of Peaceful Co – Existence: Khrushchev in America”, 1959 Quarterly Journal of Speech 5781, 1971, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Erikson Richard J, “Development of the Strategy of Peaceful Co – Existence during the Khrushchev Era”, (Air University Review, 1973), 24.

<sup>10</sup> Benoit Challand, “European Identity and External Orders in History Text Books, 1950-2005, (Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society, 2006), 281-298.

<sup>11</sup> G. Dworken and R. Dworken (eds.), The Minority Report: An Introduction to Racial Ethnic, and Gender Relation (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Groups must be readily identifiable in order to ensure that an individual recognises members of his or her own group and members of others. Without identifiability, group solidarity and differential treatment become difficult. What is often overlooked in minority group relations is that there are more similarities than differences between people within the same society. In Menchum Division of the North West Region, salient criteria for identifiability between groups include; language, dress, food, folklore, cultural festivals, traditional political systems and other cultural factors. This research argues that language, or even dress and food in Menchum are not enough to distinguish the Mbororo from the indigenous people through the processes of co-existence.

Power is the use of resources to influence and control others. When the majority control resources, it also controls the life changes of the minority (their access to resources, jobs, education, wealth, food and health care). In so doing, the minority remain dependent on the majority in a colonial type of relationship. Differential treatment or discrimination is what group members actually experience as a consequence of their minority status. It is this differential treatment that most directly affects the life chances and lifestyles of the individual minority group members and becomes the focus of minority protest and movement. Some Mbororos argue that they are considered as second-class citizens in Menchum Division.

Due to this subordinate role, they created a cultural and development association known as the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA) with branches all over Cameroon including Menchum Division. Since its formation, MBOSCUDA has fought for better treatment of Mbororo people and acceptability in their host communities in all the divisions of the North West Region of Cameroon.

Group awareness refers to the perception of common goals that can be achieved only through cooperation rather than competition. However, if individuals in a minority do not see themselves as a minority and subjected to differential treatment, then minority cannot be said to exist<sup>13</sup>. Minority members are aware of something that they have in common with others like themselves. The common traits that they share often form the basis of an in-group feeling, a sense of belonging distinct from the dominant group<sup>14</sup>. This study hopes to assess the forms of awareness within the Mbororo in Menchum, their nomadic lifestyle and economic activities that made the co-existence process a difficult task.

## 2.0 BASIS OF SOCIO -ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

### 2.1 Cattle Rearing and Crop Cultivation

The coming of the Mbororo to Menchum Division from the 1930s led to changes in the economic sector. There was the fusing of pastoral and crop farming activities. The arriving Mbororo were exclusively a pastoral nomadic group. They met the local population who cultivated food crops, owned scanty coffee farms and were also into livestock farming (rearing of goats, pigs, sheep and fowls) in insignificant numbers<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Dworkin and R. Dworkin, "The Minority Report: An Introduction in Racial, Ethnic and Gender Relations", (New York: Holt, Reinehard and Winston, 1976), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Neba, "Modern Geography", 63.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Agriculture was the main stay of the people of Menchum Division before the advent of the Mbororo. It was for commercial and local consumption. Although different communities were involved in nearly all local forms of production, most of them specialised in a particular product and this was dependent on the nature of the soil<sup>16</sup>. Maize was however a common crop cultivated in all villages. It was used to prepare a traditional meal. Every family member participated in farming. While men and grown-up boys cleared the farms, the rest of the work was completed by women and their girl children. Transportation of the produce especially maize was done by every member of the family<sup>17</sup>.

The new comers (Mbororo) into the area introduced their own major economic activity which was cattle grazing. They were not interested in farming like the indigenes. This kept them separated from each other for a long time. The late settlers used horses for transportation of people and their goods. Cattle grazing was their sole economic activity. Cattle was used in the establishment of a family, payment of bride wealth and boys who got married were given cattle to start their life<sup>18</sup>. The differences that existed at this juncture can be explained by the fact that, the Mbororo did not want to get involved in farming.

One of the informants in the person of Abdou argued that their strength was enough to concentrate on cattle grazing<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, the indigenous population did not quickly embrace involvement in cattle grazing because of its negative effects on their farming activities. Cattle was not their common animal and they were not familiar with such an activity<sup>20</sup>. This only helped to sustain the difference between the Mbororo and the indigenous population. In later years, indigenous people began to own herds of cattle. This was in the early 1950s<sup>21</sup>. Their involvement in cattle grazing can partly be explained by the fact that, no major enterprise existed in the area to occupy the teaming youths. By venturing into this activity, cattle theft and conflict with the Mbororo became the order of the day<sup>22</sup>.

People who depended on hunting found it difficult to sustain a living because cattle sent animals away through their noise as they were in search of pasture. Some hunters eventually embraced pastoralism. The drop in the price of coffee, a source of income for some people, pushed them into livestock production on a large scale<sup>23</sup>. It is important to note that ownership of cattle was through different forms and it was a taboo for an indigene to tend cattle in the name of gainakoh. As time unfolded, some of them became gainakoh<sup>24</sup> and through this they were able to own cattle.

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<sup>16</sup> E.K. Karh, "Cattle Economy in Wum Area, 1940-2010, A Historical Analysis" (M.A Dissertation, Department of History, University of Yaounde I, 2012), 37.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Kang Richard, 67 years, Farmer, Weh, 19th May, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Fali Sali, 55years, Farmer, Kuk, 9th December, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Abdou Amidou, 75years, Grazier, Kumfutu, 10th August, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Muwanda Ndong.91years, Notable, Kuk, 10th August, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Alphonse Fuh, 72years, Businessman/ Grazier, Esu, 20th May, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Ndi Alexander, 80 years, farmer, Kuk, 28th May, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Muwanda Ndong.

In the 1950s, Augustine Beng for example, worked as a gainakoh and ended up as a cattle owner<sup>25</sup>. Nyoh argues that, many indigenes acquired cattle through this means<sup>26</sup>. They would sign contracts with the Mbororo where they bought cattle from their monthly pay amounting to 15000 francs CFA. When a certain number had been gotten, they left their Mbororo mentors and settled where they would graze their cattle<sup>27</sup>. The increase in the standard of living of the early indigenes who embraced livestock farming encouraged others to want to be like them and thus the emergence of indigenous grazier – Mbororo grazier conflict.

Besides, this new method also led to cordial relations with the Mbororo in different communities in Menchum Division. They would visit the Mbororo during feasts and other come togethers. From these frequent visits and cordial relations, the Mbororo fell in love with some aspects of the indigenes. The indigenes readily gave the Mbororo banana, a fruit they loved so much. In order to strengthen these relations, the Mbororo offered cattle to indigenes as gifts. Others equally owned cattle by selling their property to raise money to buy, for example, Joseph Tembong and Tong boy of Bafmeng and Alphonse Fuh and Bernard Meh of Esu villages respectively<sup>28</sup>. These positive moves notwithstanding, they also created problems because of the increase in cattle theft which was blamed on the indigenes.

Other means through which indigenes bought cows from the Mbororo was by paying the money bit by bit while the cow was kept with a trusted Mbororo friend. This method was employed by many people such as Chou Cyprain, Wallang Richard, Ntuh Jude, Godlove Kang, Bin Alang, Kompany Chua, Nji Fidelis Muh and Peter Fukah, all local elite beginning from the late 1990s. They got money from their savings<sup>29</sup>. As the number of indigenous people who owned cattle increased, they withdrew their cattle from the Mbororo, obtained grazing permits, land and began paying the jangali tax themselves. It was through the payment of jangali tax that indigenous involvement in cattle rearing in some parts of Menchum came to public notice. During the 1966/1967 fiscal year, of the 15499 heads of cattle counted for jangali tax in Fungom sub-division, 78 belonged to the native graziers.

The decrease in number of cattle from 1966 to 1968 was explained by the movement of the Mbororo away from Menchum on political counts. The decrease in the number of horses resulted from the fact that, horse food in the area was not the best and so horses were moved out by graziers to areas where horses could feed and grow.

However, the Mbororo on their part saw the need to fully engage in relations with the other communities by cultivating crops and not only to rely on cattle herding. Among the crops cultivated were cocoyams, plantains and maize. One reason that made them to become involved in crop farming was decrease in the number of cattle due to lightning and cattle theft. They employed indigenes to work in their rugas (Mbororo settlements in the middle of grazing land).

Since the 1930s, the Mbororo tried to establish reciprocal economic relations with the population of their host communities. The host population entrusted their cattle herds to hired

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Augustine Beng, 72years, Grazier, Bafmeng, 20th July, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Nyoh, "Fulani indigenous Relations", 41.

<sup>27</sup> Karh, "Cattle Economy in Wum, 1940-2020", 44.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Alphonse Fuh, 72, Businessman and Grazier, Esu, 20th May, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Adem Rose Ngea, 50 years, farmer, Kung, 21st May, 2020.

Mbororo herdsmen. Economic relations formed the basis of most social contact between the Mbororo and indigenes of Menchum Division. In spite of all attempts at co-existence, relations between the two groups were frosty and conflict prone. Relations were marred by accusations that the Mbororo allowed their animals to destroy crops, were engaged in stock rustling and were not dependable and trustworthy partners<sup>30</sup>.

Farmer-herder disputes had been a common feature of the relations between indigenes and the Mbororo in Menchum Division. Incidents of crop damage, blockage of water points, and mutual encroachment were frequent and strained the relationship between the two groups. In a public demonstration in 1973, the Aghem women demanded that Mbororo herders should keep their animals in their demarcated grazing zones or be expelled. They argued that, the Mbororo cattle continually damaged their farms and endangered their livelihood as the Mbororo appropriated more and more lands. The same women again mobilised in 1981 in response to excessive crop destruction. This time around, Aghem farmers and Mbororo herders confronted each other violently; property was destroyed and eighteen individuals were injured<sup>31</sup>. Economic activities therefore brought the Mbororo and indigenous group together but created tension between them leading to suspicion and hatred. Community development was another economic domain which the Mbororo and their host communities experienced some differences that affected the process of co-existence of the former negatively.

## 2.2 Land Tenure

The people of Menchum Division had their customary and legal rights to land and the resulting social integration. According to custom and tradition prior to the arrival of the Mbororo, the fons were custodians of all land. As landlords, fons had the right to claim all land in their area of jurisdiction. Under these circumstances, land was not sold because it was common property of the people<sup>32</sup>. When the Mbororo arrived in the 1930s, changes started to be witnessed in the land tenure system. Some fons started to use land to amass wealth by selling it to the new arrivals who desperately needed it for cattle grazing. Land acquisition through purchase became the norm unlike before. The normal procedure of acquiring land according to customs and traditions of the people began to give way because land was increasingly bought and sold.

The change in land tenure system in Menchum Division was closely related to the Cameroon land law. The method of acquiring land in Menchum Division before the land laws of 1974 rested on the traditions and customs of the people. Fons were the custodians of land in their territories and had prerogatives to exercise proprietary rights. They followed the principles put in place by their ancestors to govern land. Any contrary means of acquiring land was accompanied with a sanction, sometimes spiritually performed by their ancestors<sup>33</sup>. Conscious of these drastic effects, most fons remained humble and followed the norms of their lands.

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Umaru, 76years, Herder, Wum, 30th December, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Kingsley A. Eyong, Ernest Dzelamonyuy and Gilbert Mbingek Wensakwi, " The Role of Women in the Farmer-Grazier Conflicts in Aghem, 1972-2020," The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies 1, 3 (2023): 56-60.

<sup>32</sup> V.B. Arnaazee, Traditional Rulers (Chiefs) and Politics in Cameroon History, (Yaounde: Press Universitaire, 2002), 9-13.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Chrysantus Chu, 64 years, Politician, Wum, 17th December, 2020.

Some fons in the Western Grassfields including Menchum Division decided to kick against the norms and started selling land to new comers even before the advent of the 1974 land laws.

The 1974 land laws stated that, any one could claim ownership of land once entitled to a land certificate<sup>34</sup>. This encouraged the Mbororo to buy land from some individuals in the area which was not the case before and conflicts and deaths were the outcome. The case of Big Babanki where His Royal Highness Fon Simon Vugha was assassinated is a good example. He deprived indigenes from gaining access to land in support of the Mbororo. Again, the pressure on land due to population growth provoked a change in the land tenure system in many parts of Menchum Division. The increase in population probably resulted from the fons' attitude of inviting the Mbororo to come and occupy land in their various communities. This was because the Mbororo compensated the fons for residing on their land. The terms for compensation varied from one community to another<sup>35</sup>. This was in the form of dead cows or special invitation during the feast of Ramadan.

As the Mbororo acquired lands and settled, coupled with their tradition of early marriages, illiteracy (in western education) and endogamy, the population of the area was bound to soar. The increase in population was accompanied by the need for land by the indigenes for farming and thus increase competition in the use of land which was common property. The occupation of land by late settlers did not in many cases respect the normal norms of land occupancy in the area<sup>36</sup>. In fact, the presence of the Mbororo and their purchase of land accentuated group differences and conflict with their host communities.

### 3.0 CHALLENGES OF CO-EXISTENCE

#### 3.1 Marriage

With regards to marriage, the Mbororo and the indigenous people of Menchum Division did not always intermarry. Although some factors always facilitated inter-ethnic marriages among different groups in Menchum Division such as closeness, demography and socio- political motivations, this was not always the case between the Mbororo and other ethnic groups<sup>37</sup>. This was due to factors such as a sedentary versus a mobile lifestyle, divergences in marriage practices and notions of cultural superiority on the part of indigenous people<sup>38</sup>. This always militated against inter-ethnic marriage between the Mbororo and other ethnic groups in Menchum Division.

Indigenous groups in Menchum Division often preferred to intermarry among themselves or with other neighbouring Grassfield groups. For example, Esu people would prefer to marry people from Ukpwe or Keghi or Munka than the Mbororos. Both groups are patrilineal and virilocal and follow a bride- wealth system which requires the husband to present the bride's family with goods, money and services as part of the marriage arrangement. Marriage with a

<sup>34</sup> Chu, Fulani Presence and Inter – Community Boundary Dynamics, 96.

<sup>35</sup> N.F. Awasom, "The Hausa and Fulani in the Bamenda Grassland 1903-1960", (Doctorat de troisieme cycle thesis in History, University of Yaounde, 1984), 223.

<sup>36</sup> Chu, "Fulani Presence and Inter – Community Boundary Dynamics", 96.

<sup>37</sup> M.Pelican, "Getting Along in the Grassfields: Inter-ethnic Relations and Identity Politics in Northwest Cameroon", (PhD Thesis, Martin-Luther Universität, Halle- Wittenberg, Germany, 2006), 310.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Mbororo was generally not always easy because they were a nomadic and relatively secluded people. Relationship with the Mbororo was often superficial as captured in the words of Meh from Esu who said that:

The Esu girl's relationship with an Aku [Mbororo] man was that of girlfriend and boyfriend even when they had children. The Esu people do not like to take dowry from the Aku since they didn't want their female children to get married to the Aku. The Aku are destroying the farms, wicked, and too mobile. They can take our daughters as far as Nigeria to sell their cows<sup>39</sup>.

Besides the fear of being deprived of their children and grandchildren, the incompatibility in marriage systems of the Mbororo and indigenous people did not help to promote co-existence between them. While the indigenous people practice a bride-wealth system, the Mbororo practice a system of direct and indirect dowry. The bride is supposed to bring her own possessions into the marriage which are partly provided by her relatives and partly bought with the money contributed by the groom. In both systems, husbands have to come up with relatively huge sums of money.

In the Mbororo community, while the bride-wealth went to the parents, the dowry belonged to the bride<sup>40</sup>. Thus, for someone in any of the indigenous groups to give her daughter to a Mbororo husband was considered a double loss in that, he would not receive bride-wealth and will have no claims to continuous assistance from their son-in-law<sup>41</sup>. Marriage within the same extended family especially marriage within cousins was permitted within the Mbororo community. This was not and is still not the case with the communities that hosted the Mbororo communities. These differences were indeed a bulwark to effective co-existence.

In the Mbororo community, cousins could get married and the idea was to keep wealth within the family as prescribed by the Koran. Islam permitted a man to have up to four wives. As soon as a girl and boy agreed to get married, a day was scheduled to bring them officially into union. This was the responsibility of the Akali and Imam. Neither the boy nor girl was to be present in this occasion but each of them had a representative. Their absence was attributed to the Mbororo cultural aspect of Semtende (shame)<sup>42</sup>. Initially, the bride-wealth was 20,000 francs and a female cow. The amount later changed to 50,000 francs and later on 100,000 francs. During this ceremony, kolanuts and sweets were shared to those present, food was served and milk boiled for the entertainment of guests. Gifts were also expected from friends and well-wishers. Parents of the boy spent more because they provided all needs of the girl. Saturday was when the lady was taken to the home of her husband<sup>43</sup>.

Besides, it was a taboo in the Mbororo community for a recently married woman to have given birth to her first child in her husband's house. Culture demanded that; she must return to her

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Philip Kum Meh, 72years, Farmer, Wum, 26th July, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Pelican, "Getting Along in the Grassfields: Interethnic Relations and Identity Politics in Northwest Cameroon", 312.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> D.Che "The Impact of the Farmer -Grazier Conflict on the Mbororo of Donga Mantung", (Long Essay University of Dschang, 2005), 30.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Amina Abudu, 70years, Trader, Weh, 13 September, 2020.

father's compound to give birth. After delivering, she remained there for a period of one year six months. At the end of this period, her husband gave money for the purchase of household equipment including blanket, dishes and bush lamb<sup>44</sup>. On the day she returned to her husband, a special feast (Mbantal) was organised for family members especially from the husband's side (her in-laws). Generally, a child's birth brought joy to the whole family. Birth control was a rear phenomenon among the Mbororo community and it was highly detested because it was very prestigious<sup>45</sup>. To the indigenous people, it was very normal for a lady to give birth to her first child in her husband's house. After delivery, she could then visit her in-laws or parents. Birth control eventually became a phenomenon among the other groups especially from the 1990s onwards due to economic hardship. The two marriage practices were in themselves a stumbling block to co-existence with the Mbororo by way of marriage.

### 3.2 Religious Beliefs and Practices

Religious beliefs and practices were also key identity markers which distinguished Mbororo from indigenous groups or other ethnic groups of Menchum Division. The Mbororo were Muslims which implies that they believed in Allah and Islamic doctrines. They prayed in the mosque like other Muslims. Women did not go to the mosque on ordinary days except Friday and while in the mosque, they did not mix with the men. The two did not see each other for fear of seduction. Before sedentarization, the Mbororo faith in Islam was nominal and secondary to their cultural attachment to Pulaaku and its resonance with a pastoral lifestyle<sup>46</sup>. There was much to confirm that the Mbororo in general did not perform their daily prayers. The concern for the well-being of their cattle was the principal factor that prevented many of them from performing their quotidian prayers. This in turn allowed partial reading of the Qur'an and its subsequent interpretation. Thus, as time passed, many Mbororo came to practice Islam fully or partially respecting its five pillars; confession of basic faith, daily prayers, compulsory contribution in support of Islam and fellow Muslims, Ramadan fast and pilgrimage to Mecca<sup>47</sup>. Islam was inseparably associated with the Mbororo. When these Muslims entered what later became Menchum Division in the 1930s, some of the indigenes embraced Islam either for the sake of faith or because they appreciated the Muslim way of life, hence, marriage and religion were interwoven. In Aghem, Weh, Esu, Bafmeng, Kumfutu, Zhoa, a good number of indigenes accepted the religion because of love they had for Muslim laws<sup>48</sup>.

Many indigenous people faced difficulties in keeping with Mbororo doctrines and practices. While some welcomed the structure provided by the five daily prayers (Subli, Juhuri, Ashri, Mangrib and Ishahi), others thought that their performance disrupted their usual working and sleeping routine<sup>49</sup>. Most exigent, was the fasting that lasted for twenty-eight days during which

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Hawa Adama, 50 years, Trader, Zhoa, 30th July, 2020; Abdu Issa, 52years, Befang, 15th August, 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Adamu Sule, 56 years, Grazier, Esu, 20th May 2020; Haruna Abdulai, 72years Grazier, Wum, 21st May, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> D.J. Stemming, *Savannah nomads: A study of the Woolaabe pastoral of Western Bornu province in Northern Region, Nigeria*, (London: Oxford University press, 1959; Pulaaku is the socio-cultural of the Mbororo.

<sup>47</sup> S. Aliou "Socio-Economic Assessment", 34.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Joseph Ntam, 78years, Businessman, Zhoa, 10th January, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Subli is morning prayer said from 5:30am to 6:00am; Juhuri is afternoon prayer said from 1:30pm to 2:00pm; Ashri is afternoon prayer said from 3:30pm to 4:00pm; Mangrib is sunset prayer said from 6:30pm to 7:00pm; and Ishahi is night prayers said from 7:00 to sleeping time.

Muslims were allowed to eat and drink only before sunrise or after sunset. Generally, learning to adhere to the religious requirements took time and dedication. No doubt, many indigenous people could not adhere to this Muslim doctrine that they found strenuous and therefore detested it.

However, the indigenes had their religion which was quite different from that of their Mbororo counterparts. They followed their traditional religion, that is, they believed in incantations, like incantations in honour of the god of rain, sun, fertility and moon. They sought for solutions to their problems from their ancestors and performed sacrifices to God through them especially when they were angry. They believed there was a supernatural being below whom were lesser gods<sup>50</sup>. Despite the advent of some religious denominations like Presbyterian, Baptist, Catholics and Pentecostals, the aforementioned situation did not change but some people started blending the two systems or abandoned the former to embrace the latter. This was due to the advent of the Christian missionaries to Menchum Division in the 1920s which led to the preaching about the existence of one God.

The advent of these religious denominations changed some of the indigenous people from a traditional system of worship to Christianity. The first converts in Esu were five ex-soldiers from Fernando Po after the First World War who prayed in churches. However, most of the people were still practicing their traditional religion as some interviewees in Bafmeng, Wum, Mmen, Zhoa revealed that, the choice of a new ruler was decided upon by their ancestors<sup>51</sup>. This was not surprising as Muslims were also divided into Sunni and Shia Sects. The Sunni diverted from the teachings and Sunnah of Prophet Mohammed while the Shia stood for it<sup>52</sup>. Against these religious differences, the Mbororo had difficulties of being able to freely co-exist with people of their host communities.

### 3.3 Death and Funeral Celebrations

A death and funeral celebration were areas of differences between the Mbororo and other ethnic groups of Menchum Division. Both groups believed in the existence of paradise and hell but Mbororo practices in burial and funeral rites differed so much that in their host communities, the indigenes took offense when their converted sons or daughters were buried in a Muslim manner<sup>53</sup>. The Mbororo are usually buried as soon as they are confirmed dead. The body would be with a white cloth, wrapped on a mat and laid on the floor pending burial. No one was allowed to cry or burry him with any magical portion even if the cause of his or her death was attributed to witchcraft. Besides that, only close relatives were allowed to be present during burial and funeral rites were forbidden<sup>54</sup>. Christian burial practices are still compatible with the indigenous people of Menchum Division traditional funeral rites. Mbororo practices in burial and funeral rites differs so much that in their host communities the indigenes take offence when

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Sampson Nfua, 82years, Traditional Ruler, Esu, 13th July, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Joseph Kum, 76 years, retired, Abar, 18th July, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Thaddeus Munchang, 78 years, retired, Befang, 25th July, 2020; interview with Joseph Ntam; interview with George Tarfang; Interview with Zenabu Umaru, 60 years, Wum, 29th July, 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Pelican, "Getting Along in the Grassfields: Interethnic Relations and Identity Politics in Northwest Cameroon", 309.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

their converted sons or daughters are buried in the muslim manner Such an instance occurred in 1991 when Usmanu (Wung) an Esu convert died.

Usmanu was a business man and a local elite in Esu. Upon his death, his Esu relatives and Muslim family claimed the right to bury him according to their respective religious traditions. It was eventually agreed that since he considered himself a Muslim he should be given a Muslim burial. His corpse was then covered with white cloth and laid in the Hausa chief's compound and then buried in the Muslim graveyard in Esu. A close relative of the deceased captured the differences in burial systems in these words:

The women complained that it is not good to keep somebody on the ground. They prepared it with their own fashion to keep the dead person on a bed and to come and see the person. Also, they only allowed the family members to his face; that is not the same with our tradition. They kept the corpse in a separate house and also separated the Muslim and the other mourners. I would have preferred them to join the two groups, because we are all the same people. But the Hausa do not cry, although it is a normal thing when you lose a person. We know, it is their fashion and you cannot force them to cry. It is not because they do not feel the loss, it is just their fashion<sup>55</sup>.

Mbororo informants on the other hand stated that, by no means could they have allowed Usmanu's relatives to bury him. As they argued, the latter suspected that Usmanu was killed by witchcraft and wanted to put magical portions in his grave that should find and punish his murderer; a practice they considered irreconcilable with Islamic doctrine. Moreover, Muslim women argued that the Esu indigenous lifestyle of mourning the dead was incompatible with Muslim etiquette of bereavement, and hence it was necessary to separate the two groups of mourners. In the end, Usmanu's burial was successful and no lasting grievances remained between his Esu and Muslim relatives. As this example illustrates funerals occasionally became a bone of contention where religious differences and competing claims to an individual identity played out<sup>56</sup>.

On the part of the indigenous population, death was a departure ceremony to join the ancestral kingdom. Death was usually announced through gun firing, screaming, weeping and the beating of drums. The body was washed, dressed and laid in state. If the person had been initiated into various sacred societies and sanctuaries through specific rites of passage, he or she was de-ritualised in order to liberate the body from powers bestowed by the rites before the body was laid in state. Before sunset, burial was done by close relatives and friends. Corpses were buried with articles like pipes (for smokers), bags and other things needed to continue life in the other world. While burial was done, mourning went on. In the case of an elderly person, sons-in-law were obliged to contribute to a common pool of resources to mourn the dead. They were expected to provide a goat or pig, at least twenty litres of palm wine, a fathom of cloth and gunpowder depending on the ethnic group. Other relatives and friends contributed corn, groundnut, oil, meat, wine and other food items to celebrate the dead person and entertain mourners, and dance groups. Initially, mourning lasted for a month. It was later reduced to eight days and then to three days in order to avoid unnecessary waste of time. All these were

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<sup>55</sup> Pelican, "Getting Along in the Grassfields: Interethnic Relations and Identity Politics in Northwest Cameroon", 312.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

flexible and depended on the ethnic group. During mourning, patrilineal relatives differentiated themselves from the matrilineal family.

### 3.4 Land Conflicts

Inter-ethnic conflicts that led to poor agricultural performances and aggravated the poverty situation of most communities in the North West Region was as a result of land conflict<sup>57</sup>. Research has successfully documented conflicts over land in the North West Region of Cameroon. Balgah and Zeh assessed the recurrent land use conflicts within Menchum Division<sup>58</sup>. Among these conflicts are farmer-graziers conflict which had been perennial for several decades. Farmers were taken to court by cattle herders and the court cases hardly favoured them<sup>59</sup>. In the North West Region, information on land use conflict was replete in literature spanning from intra-village skirmishes over land boundaries or limits to potential clashes within villages between opposing farmers and mobile pastoralists. This transformed some areas of the long known Grassfields into conflict-ridden zones including Menchum Division<sup>60</sup>.

The Grassfields had long been a zone of conflicting interest between mobile and sedentary pastoralists and the dominant arable farmers. Thus, land conflicts are not a new phenomenon in Menchum Division. There were shifts towards violent confrontations between farmers and graziers, and between graziers and graziers and at times resulting to death and destruction of property. There were also changes in the nature and type of the underlying causes responsible for such confrontations in the area. Competition over scarce land resources posed challenges to agricultural activities in the Grassfields as farmers and herders struggled for land for cultivation and grazing practices respectively<sup>61</sup>.

Most if not all indigenous graziers learned the art of cattle rearing from the Mbororo but these indigenous graziers ran into conflict from time to time with the Mbororo which was one of the reasons why co-existence between the Mbororo and the other communities in Menchum remained problematic. Each group accused the other for causing problems. While indigenous graziers often blamed the Mbororo for their cattle theft, the Mbororo graziers on the other hand pointed an accusing finger at indigenous graziers for reasons that were not very explicit<sup>62</sup>. In Bafmeng for example, the Mbororo blamed the indigenous cattle rearers for keeping the Aku cows (white type) which ate much grass and was responsible for the poor health of the other species since the cattle often left little pasture. Similarly in Esu, the Mbororo blamed the regular cattle disease on the few indigenous graziers on grounds that their cows were exposed to animal diseases<sup>63</sup>. In reality, the problem between the Mbororo and indigenous graziers like the farmer-grazier conflicts was often as a result of the shortage of grazing land. The tussle over

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<sup>57</sup> F.C Ntangti et al., "Land Cover Changes, Protected Areas and Agro-Pastoral Conflicts in Menchum, N.W Cameroon", 42.

<sup>58</sup> S.N. Balgah and A.F. Zeh, "Land Use Dynamics and Agro-Pastoral Conflicts in Menchum Division, Cameroon Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning (1) 1, 1 – 12 doi: 10. 11648/j.larp.20160101.11.", 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ntangti et al. "Land Cover Changes", 42.

<sup>61</sup> Manu et al. "Effects of Farmer-Grazier Conflicts on Rural Development: A Socio-Economic Analysis", 113 – 114.

<sup>62</sup> Nyoh, "Fulani-Indigenous Relations," 88.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

the best pieces of land always led to animosity between the Mbororo and indigenous graziers. We can therefore by way of evaluation surmise that the greater involvement of the indigenous entrepreneurs in cattle rearing only further aggravated a conflictual relationship between the Mbororo and their host ethnic groups.

Again, following the resettlement of victims of the Lake Nyos disaster in the 1980s, both Mbororo and indigenous graziers were displaced from Ipalim to Aloh but some of them came back in the 1990s following the order of some administrators<sup>64</sup>. Mathias Ndong was one of those who returned to Ipalim with his cattle. According to the new arrangement, all graziers who were to graze their cattle at Ipalim were to construct fences around their rugas. This new regulation was followed by Mathias Ndong who constructed a cattle proof fence to avoid farm damages<sup>65</sup>. In spite of respecting the new instructions of the administration, Alhadji Kela in 1994 petitioned Mathias Ndong for disturbing his grazing activities at Ipalim. Following the visit of the S.D.O for Menchum Mamadou Balla to the disputed area, there was a resolution that Mathias Ndong as an indigene of Ipalim should be given land by the Fon<sup>66</sup>.

The decision to ask the Fon to allocate a piece of land for the cattle of Mathias Ndong to graze was not kindly received. This was because the two herds of cattle of Mathias Ndong were merged without enough pasture at Ipalim. This exacerbated antagonism between him and the Mbororo. In September 1994, Giwa decided to move Mathias Ndong to Aloh but the latter rejected on grounds that most of his cattle were pregnant and disagreement persisted<sup>67</sup>. The refusal of Mathias Ndong to relocate to Aloh made Alhadji Kela to threaten him with expulsion from Ipalim and other misfortunes<sup>68</sup>. In less than a month, Mathias Ndong lost five children and eight of his cows were stolen. Kela was accused of masterminding this because he had promised hell to Mathias Ndong. The conflict between Mathias Ndong and Alhadji Kela left graziers at the mercy of the administration. The administration of Menchum Division had failed to intervene in this fracas in a timely manner and to provide a pertinent solution to this stand-off between an indigenous grazier and Mbororo cattle herder. The absence of a permanent settlement for the Mbororo for a long time did not help matters. It only fuelled conflict between indigenous graziers and their Mbororo counterparts and made peaceful co-existence a pipe dream throughout the period of this study. Also, cattle theft was another economic factor that made co-existence between the Mbororo herders and their agricultural community in Menchum Division a nightmare.

### 3.5 Marginalisation and Political Representation

The Mbororo of Menchum Division were marginalized politically. In the 1930s, the British colonialists in Cameroon transformed the socio-political role of the Mbororo group leader (Ardo) into the administrative function of tax collector. Thus, the Ardo was subjected as a subordinate to local Grassfields chiefs and palace hierarchy in their Native Authorities. Also, the Mbororo were deprived from a politically subordination independent minority status and classified as “strangers” rather than “natives” by the British administrative headquarters in

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<sup>64</sup> DAW, File No E28|09|vol. 1, Farmer Grazier, 1986.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

Nigeria after an attempt to evade political subordination to acquire autonomous representation<sup>69</sup>. Also, the Mbororo were considered politically marginalized when Ardo Sabga and Ardo Umaru of Wum – the two most prominent Mbororo leaders participated in the West Cameroon House of Chiefs until its closure in 1972<sup>70</sup>.

Mbororo representation in party politics in Menchum Division was comparatively insignificant to that of the other ethnic communities. Between 1950 and 1961, Mbororo graziers were not active in party politics of Wum Division due to pastoral lifestyle and illiteracy as far as western education was concerned<sup>71</sup>. In later years Mbororo graziers came to the understanding that they needed protection and so they embraced politics which gave them the opportunity of interacting very freely with their political friends from the ethnic groups of Menchum Division. Although the Mbororo were not very active militants in political parties up to 1961, one of their own in the person of, Ardo Umaru supported the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) party of Dr E.M.L. Endeley in the elections of 1959<sup>72</sup>. The party advocated for integration with Nigeria. His support for the KNC was based on the fact that a vote for integration with Nigeria would emancipate the Mbororo from discrimination in Menchum Division. This was unfortunately not the case because the KNC party lost the elections to a pro-reunificationist party – the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) of John Ngu Foncha.

In 1961, just before the plebiscite Cameroon's first lady Germaine Ahidjo visited Wum Division. When she arrived Wum, she met with Ardo Umaru at his residence and discussed closely<sup>73</sup>. It was rumoured that she came with a message from her husband to deliver to the Mbororo graziers in Wum to remain calm since there were to be released from their subordination to Native Authorities in collecting taxes as stipulated in the new French administrative and legal system. It is also believed that the first lady was in Wum to encourage the Mbororo to participate in the political debate that was to reunify the two Cameroons in 1961. Some people like retired Senior Superintendent of Police Fukah Peter, Alhadji Amadou Madaki, Hon J.C Kangkolo, Hon. Simon Kuchah and Mua Ben Tam held that, since Ahidjo was a pro-Mbororo he sent the wife to reassure Mbororo graziers that their security was going to be guaranteed.

Despite Germaine Ahidjo's visit to Wum, some Mbororo were still frightened with plebiscite campaigns leading to reunification of the Cameroons. Consequently, they left for Nigeria with their cattle and families. Those who stayed back, took part in the 1961 plebiscite vote<sup>74</sup>. Germaine Ahidjo visited Wum on two occasions. The first was in 1961 and the second in 1973 with her husband Ahidjo during the solemn inaugural ceremony of the defunct Wum Area Development Authority (WADA). Among other leaders present at the ceremony were Hon. Augustin Ngom Jua, Hon. Fidelis Nji, Hon. Josepha Mua, Hon. J.C Kangkolo and Patrick Mua<sup>75</sup>. Between 1961 and the early 1990s, Mbororo nomads in the area played a passive and

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<sup>69</sup> J.A. Mohammadou, "The Mbororo Problem in North West Cameroon: A Historical investigation," American Scientific Research Journal for Engineering, Technology, and Sciences 33, 1 (2017): 6-7.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Alhadji Macki Idrisu, 79years, Grazier, Wum, 17th August, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Ardo Umaru, 73years, Grazier, Weh, 20th August 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with George Tarfang.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

hidden role in politics. Most of the Mbororo envisaged formal education as insignificant to their mode of livelihood. No doubt, state administration was an inaccessible asset to the unschooled Mbororo, thereby limiting their chances of representation politically. Also, their interaction with the state was limited to local meetings with divisional communicating government policy since they largely settled as either minorities in “native” communities or disperse in peripheral settlements which was a grave advantage to their host communities who claimed to represent them politically.

The reintroduction of political pluralism in Cameroon saw the creation of many political parties and different councils in the early 1990s. These parties were implanted in all the nooks and crannies of the national territory. During this period, the Mbororo were actively involved in party politics in Menchum Division under the leadership of Ardo Umaru. Among the prominent parties in Menchum Division were the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM), Social Democratic Front (SDF) and National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP). The NUDP was a pro-Muslim party, and a majority of the Mbororo in Menchum Division were either members or sympathisers of the party<sup>76</sup>. After the controversial presidential polls of 1992, a majority of Mbororo decamped from the UNDP to join the CPDM party even though their representation was marginal, and did not occupy positions in higher echelon of the party hierarchy. When the NUDP became part of the presidential majority government, they were threatened by indigenous people militating in the SDF for betraying democratic rules<sup>77</sup>. These threats made them to join the CPDM and be protected from supporters of the SDF who were mostly from communities that hosted the Mbororo<sup>78</sup>.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this research has highlighted the significant socio-economic disparities and co-existence challenges between the Mbororo and the indigenous people of Menchum Division. The Mbororo, traditionally a pastoralist community, face barriers to integrating into the local socio-economic fabric due to differing cultural practices, economic activities and historical marginalization. Meanwhile the indigenous communities, primarily engaged in agriculture and traditional livelihood, experience their own set of challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare and infrastructure, which exacerbates socio - economic inequalities.

While there are clear tensions in their co-existence stemming from competition over land resources, cultural misunderstanding, and historical grievances, there are also opportunities for collaborative solutions. Promoting mutual respect, fostering inter-cultural dialogue and implementing inclusive policies could reduce these conflicts and bridge socio-economic gaps.

In light of these findings, it is crucial for local authorities and policymakers to design targeted interventions that prioritize equitable resource distribution, support for both agricultural and pastoral livelihoods and the recognition of both communities’ rights and cultural heritage. These actions, combined with community-led initiatives, can create a pathway towards

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Sariki Adamu Buba.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

peaceful co-existence and sustainable development for both the Mbororo and indigenous people of Menchum Division.

Future research should further explore practical models for enhancing inter-community cooperation and assess the effectiveness of current policies in addressing these challenges.