Power Politics in Moghamo Clan of Cameroon: An Analysis of the Succession Squabbles in the Royal Family in Ashong; 1900-2013

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Abstract
The paper seeks to trace the origin of the conflict in the royal family in Ashong and to succinctly discuss the forces that initiated, fuelled and have sustained the conflict for over a century. The paper proceeds to examine the tacit role exhibited by the administration in resolving the conflict as well as the consequence on peace and security in Ashong and Moghamo at large. The paper further attempts a solution to the conflict. For concrete investigation and analysis, data was collected through oral interviews, observations, archival reports and newspapers. Following the investigation, the paper posits that the Ashong royal conflict is perhaps the oldest in the North West Region of Cameroon. That the disagreement in the royal family of Ashong has its origin in the manner in which the sixth Fon chose to select his heir among his sons, and was made complicated by the British Administration. The hatred that ensued evolved into a conflict that divided the king-makers and the villagers into two camps each supporting one of the claimants to the throne. The paper further pins that the split within the royal family has been exploited by political elites of the area and the administrative as well as traditional instruments have not worked effectively to salvage the situation. The outcome has not only created longstanding and bloody split between them but also among the villagers thus leaving the village divided into two camps.

Key Words: Ashong, Moghamo Clan, Power Politics, Succession Squabbles, Royal Family.

Introduction
The North West Region like other places in Africa have witness the scuffle for power in chieftaincy conflicts since the colonial and post-colonial era. Whereas in most cases the contenders to the chieftaincy throne belong to different lineages or families, there are isolated cases where the contending parties belong to the lineage of the royal family. A peculiar situation where this scenario has occurred is in the Ashong royal family of the Moghamo Clan in Batibo sub-division. In this case, at each point in the history of Ashong since 1943 there have been two personalities within the royal lineage purporting to be the fon/chief of Ashong. This conflict over the fonship of Ashong has led to division within the royal family and invariably turned the villagers to cooperate in factions. The effort of the various administrations to settle the dispute has proved futile. The traditional instruments of Ashong village remain the vital force to resolve the conflict and restore peace and security but this also has proved futile. Without any lasting solution to the tussle the paper upholds the 1994 administrative decision to create third Class Chiefdoms in Ashong but pins that “Cental Ashong” should be partitioned in to at least three sub-chiefdoms under a paramount chief.

Traditional Framework
Ashong is one of the 22 recognized chiefdoms in the Moghamo Clan. The moghamo people are found in Batibo sub-division of Momo-division located in the North West Region of Cameroon.1 Ashong is situated in the South-East of Batibo and is about 13 kilometers from Batibo Town. It is located on the Bamenda Bambutos plateau and shares borders with Pinyin in Santa sub-division to the northwest, Bamumbu in Lebielem division of the South West Region to the east, Guzang and Bessi to the west and Enyoh village to the south; all in Batibo sub-division. The original settlement is what is presently called Ngaku-nun. But currently there are sixteen quarters namely Ngaku, Njen, Kon, Awen, Akurenjoh, Akundi, Akurndeh, Akungwock, Akumomoh, Akurowah, Gufon, Mbemi, Akuto, Akugong, Akurokweck and the Bororo/Fulani settlement.2 These quarters constitute what became known as Upper and Lower Ashong.

Ashong has a population of 7568 inhabitants as of 1992 following a census conduct by the Baptist mission in order to open a health center. This figure is broken down as follows; Kon and Njen had 1017, Fulani settlement had


146lower Ashong 2189 and upper Ashong 4216. Ashong is hilly and characterized by valleys and streams. The hilly and stony nature of the terrain made it difficult for a very long time for vehicles to use the existing roads except when motorcycles started penetrating the area. However, in 2010 the road to Upper Ashong was graded and it made the area accessible to vehicles but that in Lower Ashong remained stony and ungraded. The natural vegetation hitherto consisting of a distinct rain forest and savannah has been punctuated with compound and eucalyptus trees. Again, human activities such as the burning of grass and felling of trees for fuel and cultivation have caused the soil to lose its fertility.

Ashong has a temperature of about 22°C and 24°C. The low temperature has been the result of high altitude and the appearance of frequent radiation fog. This often reduced the visibility to less than thirty meters cube between July and September. It experiences one of the heaviest rain fall in Batibo sub-division. The rainy season begins around mid-March until early October. The weather is often bright between March and May. During this period a person can see as far as the forest in the neighboring villages in Lebielem and Manyu divisions.

In Moghamo like in many parts of the North West, the Head of traditional Authority is the Chief. He exerts power over the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the chiefdom. The Moghamo chiefdom is a homogenous entity founded mainly on kinship. Severally, the head of the most powerful lineage becomes the chief. He is the incarnation of the custom and tradition of the people and a revered figure. He lives in a large palace that provides quarters for his wives, retainers and lodges. The chief is endowed with many privileges and his authority is exercised via the inner Council, made up of the seven King-makers (Kwifor) and the traditional council.

Chiefs are also upheld as auxiliaries of the government machinery and successive administrations have enacted laws to govern chieftaincy. There was the 1977 decree that replaced the 1960 and 1933 decrees operating in Sothern and French Cameroon respectively. The decree organized traditional authority in the Republic of Cameroon in five to first, second and third class chiefdoms based on land and population size. Ashong was designated a second class chiefdom and there qualifies to have a number of third class chiefs.

In Moghamo, chieftaincy is patrilineal and hereditary like in many chiefdoms of the North West. Before the throne becomes vacant the chief is required to designate the heir from among his sons who in some cases is presented as the crowned prince or known only by King-makers until the throne is declared vacant. However, when the throne becomes vacant without an heir the king-makers are expected to select a candidate from the royal family for enthronement and present him to the administration. A dispute only ensues over the throne if more than one person is presented to the administration to be appointed chief.

Ashong village is believed to have been founded by Njonghokom. According to the tradition of the people it is said that Ashong people migrated from Ngwenjin, a place located between Widikum and Ngie. They were called Mengwenji, which means Ngwenjin people. When they left the site in Widikum they established their first settlement in Batibo. The need for more land provoked further migration to Guzang where they created their second settlement. While in Guzang, a land dispute arose between the Guzang people and the Ngwenjin people over an empty piece of land on which the Ngwenjin people settled. In order to settle the dispute Njonghokom and Munje Tebit (one of the first settlers of Guzang) had to take an oath. The oath was to be sworn by each leader to claim ownership of the land and the person found guilty was to die. Njonghokom considered the matter and later changed his mind the night before the day of the oath swearing and migrated with his people to another place called To-oh-kuh in Bessi. This third settlement was created around the Seventeenth Century.

As the population increased, Njonghokom migrated with his people to what became known as Ngaku-nun in present day Ashong. The place was named in honour of NjonghokomasAsong, which in Moghamo means to beat. This was so because their leader Njonghokom always disciplined his people by beating. The name Asong was

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6 Nkwi, Traditional Diplomacy, p.40.
8 Decree No. 77/248 of July 1977 to Organize Chiefdoms in Cameroon
10 Guzang was founded by two men Njong and his uncle Munje Tebit who were descendents of Akumbeka.
11 Interview with Sam Tabo Forchibi, Chief-Maker Lower Ashong, 30 December, 2012, aged 100 years old; Interview with Christopher Mbah Mbafor III, Fon of Ashong, 26 June, 2012, aged 47 years old.
modified by the British administrators as Ashong. When Njonghokom died his son Tenjoy Idang was chosen by the people as a ruler over them in honour of his father. That was how children became successors to their biological father in this lineage and his family became the royal family in Ashong. Tenjoy Idang's son Tekwek Keh succeeded him and Tekwek was succeeded by his son Wenong Nwateh. Wenong Nwateh was succeeded by Tche Mukok who was succeeded by Tembeck Toh. Tembeck Toh was succeeded by Enoh Tembeck.

It was during the reign of Enoh Tembeck (1870-1900) that conflict originated between his two sons Akamanda Cheoh and Tebi as Akamanda Cheoh would invade Ashong in 1906 to take over the throne from Tebi leading to the beginning of open confrontation in the Royal family. However, the succession continued from father to son until the eight Fon Teyim became Childless and that was the only condition under which a brother could succeed a brother. It was as a result of this arrangement that Mbafor Alias, one of the full brothers of Teyim was chosen to be the successor and he took the title Mbafor I and became the ninth Fon in 1925. During his reign the conflict surfaced and escalated into serious confrontations that have lasted for close to 100 years with varied ramifications.

Events and Manifestation of the Conflict

The genesis of the conflict in the Ashong Royal family goes back to the reign of Enoh Tembeck (1870-1900) who was the sixth Fon. Two versions exist as to who Enoh Tembeck handed over traditional power in Ashong. The first holds that the conflict that ensued was between his two sons Akamanda Cheoh who was very ambitious and his direct follower Tebi who became the successor of Fon Enoh Tembeck. The story goes that Fon Enoh had forty grown up children and by 1900 it was incumbent on him to choose his successor. Given the number of his children it is said that he decided to employ wisdom to select his heir from among his sons so as to ensure peace in the palace after his death. But on the contrary his action produced over 100 years of rivalry in the Fonship/Chiefship of Ashong village. When time came for the Fon Enoh Tembeck to take the very important decision regarding his successor, he informed the chief-makers/king-makers and equally discussed the matter with his children. In the discussion he told his children he was going to organize a contest to the throne and any of his sons who would win the contest would become his successor. This method deviated from the practice of his predecessors. According to Christopher Mbafor, the current Fon, "his aim was to reduce tension among his sons and to ensure that only the smart son should be his heir." But unknown to him this was going to produce a boomerang effect.

Thus, one evening in 1900 at about 7pm, Fon Enoh removed the symbol of authority from a kingly bag and throws it in a nearby bush. This symbol was a precious stone. He later instructed his sons that whosoever would find the symbol of authority must have been chosen by the gods and would succeed him as Fon. While some of his sons took it as a joke others took him seriously. About thirty minutes after a serious search, Tebi screamed with joy that he had found it and their father kept his word. He proceeded to introduce Tebi to the villagers as his successor amid drum-beats and a cheering crowd.

When this occurred, Akamanda Cheoh became furious and in executing their daily chores like fetching of water and wood he would threaten and beat up Tebi at the slightest error despite the fact that he was the heir to the throne. Fon Enoh was not always happy with Cheoh's actions and perceived that Tebi's life was in danger. In consequence he decided to exile Cheoh from Ashong. Cheoh left and settled at Echi a quarter in Bessi. He later left Echi for Bali. After living in Bali for six years he, with the support of some heavily armed Bali warriors embarked on a home-coming expedition to overthrow his brother Tebi who had succeeded their father as Fon of Ashong in 1900. This expedition took place in 1906. Tebi was not aware of the plot but when he was attacked he quickly organized a counter attack with support received from some brave men in Ashong that led Cheoh and his men to be defeated. The result was that many deaths were recorded; there was destruction of houses and those captured were taken as slaves.

Cheoh was reported to the then German administration as the master planner of the war in Ashong. He was tried and found guilty and it led to his execution in Ashong by the German administration around 1906. He left behind a son Peter Enohgang in exile who was protected by his father's allies in Bali Nyonga. In September 1926, Chief Mbafor I who had succeeded his brother Teyim who was childless, decided to reconcile with his late uncle by signing a document in the presence of the Divisional Officer of Bmenda Dr. Jeffreys which permitted his cousin Peter Enohgang to return to Ashong. This laid the basis of the second conflict over the throne within the Ashong Royal Family.

The other version holds that Chief Enoh Tembeck had two sons who contested for the throne: Cheo and Tebi. When he was old he needed assistance from Tebi so he promised him the throne but at his death he gave the throne to Cheo. According to them Cheo was very brave and had even taken a section of his father's subject to a

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12 Interview with Forchibi, 29 December, 2012.
14 Interview with Mhafor III.
15 Idem.
16 Interview with Peter Akoru, Businessman, Batibo, Aged 51, 30 December, 2012.
settlement at Echi where he crown himself chief but Tebi was docile. Again, he fought in the German expedition against the Bafut Chiefdom and earned the title ‘Commandant’ that was pronounced in Ashong as ‘Akamanda’. They claim that the tussle for power was caused by Enoh’s own flattery that promised the throne to Tebi but at his death handed it to Cheo. In the squabble that followed Cheo overpowered Tebi. Tebi died in 1912 still laying claims to the throne. He left behind two sons Teyim and Mbafor. Teyim inherited the private estate and claims to the throne.17

He resorted to intrigue and conspiracy to oust Akamanda Cheo from the throne. He sought the alliance of Chief Galega of Bali that was threatened by Akamanda’s bravery. They both accused him of ‘anti German propaganda’ and reported him to the German military officer in Bamenda and he was eventually convoked and executed without trial in 1913. His son Peter Enongang feared that a similar fate might befall him so he fled to Ejeck especially as Teyim threatened and asserted his authority to the throne with the support of the population. But Teyim died in 1925 without an heir and the throne was passed to his brother Mbafor. At this time the British Administration had been instituted and chiefs were assigned amongst other duties to collect taxes from the villagers. Chiefs Mbafor I, Sama of Ambo and Mba-ambuck of Guzang were accused of embezzling tax money. They were arrested, tried and imprisoned. The government deposed them and requested the people of Ashong to present a credible candidate for the recognition. At this time Mbafor’s sons were not mature for the throne and Peter Enongang who had been on exile had returned and it was unanimously agreed that the throne be returned to him. Although this version claimsthat when Enongang returned from exile he settled as a loyal subject under Mbafor I and was only awakened by the opportunity that ensued to request for the crown and to defend it.18

The first school holds that when Peter Enongang was recalled from exile Mbafor I handed over the collection of taxes to his brother Tiku and his cousin Peter Enongang out of trust.19 While Enongang performed this role, the first chief- maker Neakoh fell apart with the Fon for granting independence to Ewen a nearby village that acted as asource of food to Ashong Palace. He was also aggrieved with the Fon for detaining his father Tekor Akum. With the support of other chief makers they influenced Enongang to claim the Throne from Mbafor I by continuing from where his father Cheoh had stopped. Enongang like his father would hatch a plot against Fon Mbafor I. On 11 October 1937, Enongang reported to Dr. Jeffreys, the Senior Divisional Officer for Bamenda that Fon Mbafor I had hidden some taxable males. However, Fon Mbafor had granted certain privileges to some notables and slaves of the palace including the exemption from paying taxes since they were already rendering services to the Fon.20

Following this accusations, in 1939 Fon Mbafor I was sentenced to five years imprisonment after he was found guilty of offences against the Native Revenue Ordinance on the account that he hid taxable males and stole government tax money. He was stripped off his duty as tax collector and Peter Enongang was appointed in his stead by Dr. Jeffreys.21 Tiku, Mbafor’s brother was equally relieved of his assigned function to collect taxes by the Fon on the basis that since he was Mbafor’s brother he could still behave like the Fon. Consequently, Dr. Jeffreys recommended to the Senior Resident in Buea that same year that Peter Enongang should be recognized as the village head of Ashong for the purpose of tax collection.22

Although Menget holds the view that on his return from prison in 1943, Mbafor I reoccupied the palace as chief of Ashong and performed all the duties and rites pertaining to his chieftdom but was not allowed by the British administration to collect taxes as before; the account submitted by the secretary of state for interior shows that in 1943 the Administration went further and removed Mbafor from his office of chief of Ashong contrary to Ashong tradition and recognized Enongang as chief of Ashong by administrative decision. The report continues that in 1965, in spite of persistent petition by Mbafor’s family Enongang was again recognized by the West Cameroon Government on the recommendation of the administration and gazetted as No. 41 in West Cameroon Notice 264, West Cameroon gazette no. 50, vol. 5 of 27 November, 1965. According to the report, Enongang died in 1968 after having ruled Ashong for about 25 years.23

On the contrary Menget says Mbafor was still respected as chief by his people while Enongang remained the government tax collector. He also claims that it was after the death of Fon Mbafor I in 1951 that Enongang later invaded Kassang a quarter in Upper Ashong and enthroned himself as Fon. Then he made kingmakers who supported him. In 1953, the British administration recognized him as Fon but he was not enthroned traditionally. This

21 Menget, “Ashong Chieftdom,” p. 9; File no 1b1971/1, Chieftaincy Dispute in Ashong Village of Batibo Sub Division, Momo Division,1971, NAB,p.1
23 File no 1b1971/1, Chieftaincy Dispute in Ashong Village of Batibo Sub Division, Momo Division,1971, NAB,p.1
was because Mbafor I had a son who according to tradition was to inherit the throne from his father.\(^{24}\) This brought confusion in Ashong and when Enongang died in 1968 a chieftaincy dispute was declared in the royal family between David Ajeck Mbafor and David Chesami Enongang; sons of Mbafor I and Peter Enongang respectively.\(^{25}\)

This was the third phase of the conflict and it had evolved from first cousins to second cousins. Following the death of Mbafor I and Peter Enongang their two sons clashed over the vacant throne of Ashong Village. Each of the rivals wrote petitions in 1968 and 1969 to the West Cameroon government that existed in the Federal Republic of Cameroon calling on them to intervene and declare the rightful heir to the vacant throne.\(^{26}\)

### The Period of Requisitions: 1968-69

Before discussing government’s effort to resolve the problem, it is relevant at this point to examine the petitions presented by the parties contesting the position of chief of Ashong. There were two sets of petitions sent to the Prime Minister for consideration. The first set was written by Mbafor’s Supporters. They were made up of five out of the seven chief makers of Ashong under the leadership of P.N. Neakoh. Their petition was written on 10 December 1969 in which they declared that on 15February 1967 “one” Enongang who was not a traditional chief, but a tax collector elected by a whiteman died and on 6 May 1968 D.A. Mbafor was traditionally installed to succeed the late chief Mbafor of Ashong.\(^{27}\) Mbafor’s installation was done in 1968 because after the death of his father the Traditional Chiefmakers sent him to school and Enongang was made regent.\(^{28}\) Thus it became expedient to install a new chief following the death of Enongang.

They also reported that traditional rites were performed on the clan court in Momo Divisional Office (D.O.) following the installation and finally in Widikum Council Office Mbengwi. Meanwhile, after the above performances two out of the seven traditional chief makers who had not joined the five in the installation took one D.C. Enongang to the D.O. on 8 May 1968 introducing him as a chief in Ashong village. This action caused confusion and they accused politicians like Adamu Mbah for causing havoc to the village and others out of the village for perpetrating the conflict through bribery and corruption. They accused the government for not making concrete effort to solve the problem. Following the confusion that reigned, on 19 June 1968 the Divisional Officer of Momo Division visited Ashong village to witness the aftermath of the installation.\(^{29}\)

On that same day 10 December 1969, D.C. Enongang equally reported the dispute to the Honourable Prime Minister S.T. Muna. In his letter he stated that since his father the late chief of Ashong died in 1967 there has been no peace in the village.\(^{30}\) This goes to strengthen the same view point raised by Mbafor’s supporters in their petition which observed that although Ashong is the second largest village in terms of size and population after Batibo in Moghamo clan; there has been suffering due to economic and social stagnation caused by the chieftaincy dispute.\(^{31}\)

According to Enongang, his father had been chief for about 30 years and on 27 November 1965 he was named in the Gazette among the Moghamo chiefs. He posited to inform the Prime Minister that even before then, on 12 October 1956 his late father had taken him alongside all his brothers to the Moghamo clan council and introduced him. He said in attendance were six quarter heads namely Neakoh, Neibo, T.N. Tangwa, A Fongo, Neatud and Wole Mbemi including two Tamfotolo and Akameg. He said that all the quarter heads signed a document supporting him as the next chief of Ashong and that they also signed the circular from the Ministry of Local Government in 1967 confirming him as their next chief. The names of the ten royal family members in attendance were Tita Williams, Tita Sam, Tita Douala, Tita Mhato, Tita Achu, Tita Tamba, Tita Joseph, Tita Tifu, Tita Tamba Isaac and Ben Acha.\(^{32}\) A clear look at the genealogy of Ashong Dynasty reveals that all these individuals do not

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\(^{24}\) Mengetl, “Ashong Chieftdom,” pp.10-11. It is important to note that Mbafor I’s successor was not enthroned traditionally following the death of his father because he was sent to school.

\(^{25}\) Interview with Mbafor III; File no P1147/S.7, Chieftaincy Dispute in Ashong Village of Batibo Sub Division, Momo Division, 1971, NAB, pp.1-3.

\(^{26}\) Interview with Mbafor III; File no P1147/S.7, Chieftaincy Dispute Gwofon Division, Prime Minister’s Office Buea, 1b(1967), 10/5/67, pp.1-3.

\(^{27}\) File no. P1147/S.7, Chieftaincy Dispute Gwofon Division, Prime Minister’s Office Buea, 1b(1967), 10/5/67, p. 4.

\(^{28}\) File no 1b1971/1, Chieftaincy Dispute in Ashong Village of Batibo Sub Division, Momo Division,1971, NAB,p.8.

\(^{29}\) File no. P1147/S.7, Chieftaincy Dispute Gwofon Division, Prime Minister’s Office Buea, 1b (1967), 10/5/67, pp.21- 22.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) File no. P1147/S.7, Chieftaincy Dispute Gwofon Division, Prime Minister’s Office Buea, 1b (1967), 10/5/67, NAb p 22.
belong to the royal family. Again comparing the names of the quarter heads mentioned in Enongang’s Petition and the names of those agreed by D.C. Enongang and D.A. Mbafor as quarter heads in 1971; shows incompatibility except with Neako. 33

He argued further that during the days of his father, the father of David Mbafor was sentenced to prison and when he returned he lived in peace with his father for about six years before he died. According to Him, the son of Mbafor I intend to take over the throne because he is a wage earner and has promised to sell all his properties to become the chief of Ashong. 34 It was on account of these petitions that an inquiry into the Chieftaincy conflict in the Royal Family of Ahong was slated from the 24 to the 27 of October 1970 as authorized by the Honourable Prime Minister in his endorsement no. P.1147/S.7/19 of 6/9/69 vide page 112 file C2:1063. 35

Inquest into the Chieftaincy Clash in Ashong Royal Family

The hearing opened on 24 October 1970 before 12 noon in the former Court Hall currently used by the police at Batibo and lasted for four days. The commission of inquiry to investigate the dispute set up by the West Cameroon Government had the responsibility to submit its findings to the West Cameroon Executive Council for consideration and peaceful resolution. In regard to this a commission of five men of integrity and well-versed in local government issues known as the Lainjo Commission was set up with V. T. Lainjo as chairman. The other members were traditional rulers like Chief G.T. T. Mba of Batibo, Chief T. Kima of Bakebe in Manyu Division, Chief Ndikum of Akum in Mezam Division and Chief J. Nfor of Nkambe in Donga-Mantung Division. The inquiry was carried out in the presence of the two contestants to the throne D.C. Enongang 40 years old and D.A Mbafor35 years old at the time of the inquiry. The seven traditional chief makers of Ashong village present at the inquiry included Neako, Elias Tebi, Jacob Njee, Michael Monuh, and Tam for Toro Njong, Tayong Suta and Smith Enojeck. There were also quarter heads, senior chief sons, compound heads, policemen and court messengers who controlled the large crowd that attended the inquiry. 36

When the inquiry began, the Chairman explained the role of the government in the selection of a chief and the functions of the committee in the following words that:

...Government does not make chiefs. The people make their own chiefs according to their native laws and custom and report to their Divisional Officer. If the Divisional Officer reports to the Government that a chief has been installed according to the native laws and custom and there was no dispute, the Government may decide to recognize and gazette the chief. If any dispute arises and the people cannot settle their dispute peacefully according to their tradition, and the Divisional Officer reports the dispute to Government, the Government may in turn refer the dispute to the Chieftaincy Advisory Committee whose duty is only to enquire into the dispute and to report to Government for a decision on the matter. 37

As the inquiry started, the committee interrogated the two contestants alongside their witnesses in order to gather credible facts regarding the dispute and to make informed recommendations to the Government. The first contestant that was questioned was D.C. Enongang and his two witnesses Adamu Mba and Tita Sam aged 40 and 48 respectively. From the interrogation Enongang and his witnesses put forth the following arguments to support their claim to the throne.

Firstly, Enongang said his late father Chief Enongang ruled Ashong for 30 years and died in 1968 without any body challenging him. Secondly, the Government had recognized his father and gazetted him chief in 1965. Thirdly that he was the actual son of Chief Enongang who had handed the throne to him by a written will and not to D.A. Mbafor who is not related to him. His fourth argument was that succession in Ashong was from father to son that is hereditary. Fifthly, that he was installed chief in accordance with Ashong native laws and custom by those entitled to do so. Lastly, he said the seven chief makers agreed by both parties mentioned earlier installed him and signed the installation document. However according to the Commission’s report only two traditional chief makers Michael Monuh and Jacob Njee admitted that they took part in his installation and signed documents. The rest Neako, Tam for Toro Njong, Eno ajek, Tayong Suta and Elias Tebi said they did not take part in the installation but had

33 File no 1b1971/1, Chieftaincy Dispute in Ashong Village of Batibo Sub Division, Momo Division, 1971, NAB, p.1
34 File no. P1147/S.7, Chieftaincy Dispute Gwofon Division, Prime Minister’s Office Buea, 1b (1967), 10/5/67, NAB, p 22.
35 File no 1b1971/1, Chieftaincy Dispute in Ashong Village of Batibo Sub Division, Momo Division, 1971, NAB, p.2.
36 File no 1b1971/1, Chieftaincy Dispute in Ashong Village of Batibo Sub Division, Momo Division, 1971, NAB, p.3.
37 Ibid. p. 3.
signed a document which was explained to them in confirmation of Ashong history as demanded by the Ministry of Local Government.\textsuperscript{38}

After Enongang had presented his urgings, the committee decided to examine the validity of the will that gave him authority to succeed chief Enongang his father. Of the five individuals who were found to have appended their signatures on the will, Mathias Acha who was 60 years old denied his thumb print and only one, Michael Monuh had traditional right in designating a chief in Ashong. The other two Mba Anoh and Ajong Fongo who admitted to have signed the document were declared by the approved chief-makers that they were not chief-makers and they could not take part in any chief-making affair. The last of the five, Sama Mba was declared by the chief-makers as an impostor. He was impersonating as one of the senior chief sons but his real name was Misach Achu. Sama Mba himself was absent during the hearing.\textsuperscript{39}

A further investigation of the validity of the will revealed that the Divisional Officer Bamenda had in his letter No. B. 3047/584 of 5/9/56 rejected the will as illegal. The committee therefore rejected the validity of the will. The committee proceeded to interrogate Enongang’s witnesses. Both men Adamu Mbah and Tita sama based Enongang’s entitlement to the throne on the grounds that his late father was a gazette chief and that succession in Ashong is from father to son. Tita Sama went further to uphold the view that all chief-makers, quarter heads and chief’s sons agreed to the installation of D.C. Enongang and that he was introduced to the court, the Divisional Officer and to Mbengwi Council. Despite these, they both recognized the fact that D.A. Mbafor’s father had been chief before he died. Although Adamu Mbah claimed that Late Mbafor got to the throne of Ashong through “a wrong channel”. That is he was made chief in the absence of Enongang who had left the village and was a wanted person. Meanwhile Sama said Mbafor had been dethrone by the white man because he ate Government tax money.\textsuperscript{40}

During the inquiry, Michael Monuh and Jacob Njei who were present when Mbafor I declared his successor denied that they were not present when Mbafor I was naming his successor. These men who had before now supported Peter Enongang’s plot against Mbafor I continued in their support for Enongang’s son David Chesami Enongang who became Enongang II.

The report of the commission recognized David Ajeck Mbafor as the rightful heir to the throne. Following their recommendation the Government declared in March 1971 that D.A. Mbafor should be recognized as the Fon of Ashong,\textsuperscript{41} Enongang II and his ally Adamu Mba recognized Mbafor II as chief of Ashong. This recognition ushered in a brief moment of peace in Ashong as Mbafor II equally recognized Enongang II as chairman of the traditional council. The seventh traditional king-makers that had been divided in favour of Mbafor II and Enongang were brought together but the peace lasted only up to 1974.\textsuperscript{42}

**Fuelling of the Dispute**

Many factors accounted for the return to anarchy in 1974. First Enongang II had not recovered from the shock of the defeat in 1971. Second the pro-Enongang’s king-makers namely Joseph Mukum Monuh, Jacob Njeck and Joseph Tenyi Abi all from upper Ashong felt that any recognition of Mbafor II as chief meant a betrayal to the will Enongang I handed to them before his death. Again, Neakoh who had been replaced as chairman equally envied the position and his alliance with Mbafor II only helped to weaken Enongang’s position as chairman of the traditional council. Most importantly, by 1972 it became incumbent on Enongang II to transfer the traditional symbols to Mbafor II as requested by the administration. Enongang’s resistance to hand over the traditional items led to his removal as chairman of the traditional council and his seat was thrown out of the palace by Neakoh. Following this action Enongang swore never to respect any further administrative decision. The outcome was a prolonged struggle that dragged until Enongang II died in March 1994.\textsuperscript{43} It is said that Enongang II on his dying bed requested that Mbafor II should organize his funeral alongside that of his father, Mbafor I.\textsuperscript{44} In this regard, when Enongang II died in 1994, it was expected that the conflict in the royal family would come to an end and peace would return in Ashong but this was not so as the conflict took another dimension. It is important to raise herethat Mbafor II did not organize the funeral of Enongang II alongside

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item File no 1b1971/1, Chieftaincy Dispute in Ashong Village of Batibo Sub Division, Momo Division, 1971, NAB, p.3.
\item File no 1b1971/1, Chieftaincy Dispute in Ashong Village of Batibo Sub Division, Momo Division, 1971, NAB, p.3.
\item Ibid. p. 6-7.
\item Correspondence from the Gwofon Divisional Officer to the People of Ashong, March 1971.
\item Enow, “The Ashong Chieftaincy Succession Dispute”, pp.14-16.
\item Ibid., pp. 19-31.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
that of Mbafor I when his father died as requested by Enongang II perhaps because that would mean he had recognized him as chief.

The fourth and current dispute developed between Reuben Enoh Takwe who became Enongang III, the brother to Enongang II and Christopher Mbah Mbafor the son of Mbafor II. This conflict ensued from the fact that following the death of Enongang II in 1994 one of his close notables Adamu Mbah insisted that Enongang should be buried as a Fon against the diseased will. He again propagated the continuation of Enongang’s lineage by trying to influence the enthronement of any of his two sons as Fon of Ashong. These men escaped in obedience to their father’s testament that none of them should carry on the dispute with the Mbaforos. To continue in his diabolic plan to get a successor Adamu Mbah instigated Enongang II’s brother, Reuben Enoh Takwe to succeed Enongang II. He therefore went ahead to take over the compound (palace) of Enongang II in Kasang in 1994. This however was not in line with the Ashong custom and tradition since late Enongang had two grown up son who by tradition should be enthroned in his stead.45 What puzzles me is the inability of Ashong tradition to fight this war and declare the winner.

Meanwhile when Mbafor II passed away, his son Mbafor III was declared successor over the throne. On the day of his enthronement R. T. Enongang III sent a gang of boys and some misguided Ashong men to terrorize those who supported Fon Mbafor. The men also seized the property of some people like goats, pigs and took them to the palace of R. T. Enongang. They equally destroyed properties belonging to allies of Fon Mbafor III. Another area where the dispute was manifested was when the funeral celebration of Mbafor II was being announced in the market of Ashong in 2000. R. T. Enongang sent his men to attack and capture the juju or masquerades and the men that accompanied them to diffuse the information. He succeeded to capture thirteen men who were taken to his compound where they were rough handled and four others were injured in the market.46

Furthermore, during the funeral celebration of Fon Mbafor II at the palace of Fon Mbafor III on March 17, 2000, roads which led to the palace were blocked; food, drinks, animals and money were seized from those going to the palace and a certain woman Christina Aneb was brutalized and she sustained serious injuries. Even a traditional dance group from Bali fell in the hands of one of these gangs and their instruments, food, drinks and money were looted and taken to Enongang III’s compound. Again, one female dancer was kidnapped to Enongang’s compound where she was raped.47

**The Tacit Role of the Administration in Resolving the Conflict**

Attempts at resolving the conflict in the Royal family of Ashong span five different administrations: the German, the British, and the West Cameroon Government in the Federal Republic of Cameroon, the United Republic of Cameroon and currently the Republic of Cameroon. This notwithstanding the conflict has persisted and is ongoing with the last incident occurring in 2013. When war broke out in 1906 due to the invasion of Ashong by Cheoh Akamanda the German administration killed him by firing squad with the hope of putting the conflict to rest. However, when Mbafor I decided not only to bring back his cousin Akamanda’s son from Bali but equally gave him the very important function as tax collector, conflict resurfaced between them in 1937.

The then British administration responded to the problem discussed earlier by imprisoning Mbafor I in 1939 and he only returned to Ashong in 1943. Beside imprisonment, he was stripped off his function as tax collector and Peter Enongang was recognized by the British as the sole tax collector in Ashong. Before Mbafor I died in 1951, Enongang had been recognized as on of Ashong by the British. This is so because when Mbafor was released from prison in 1943 the British Administration took no steps to reinstate him on the throne although the people of Ashong felt he was the rightful successor. Consequently the British refusal to uphold the tradition of the Ashong people did not only sustain the dispute but paved the way for impending crisis that ensued in 1968/69 after the death of Peter Enongang in 1967.

The next face of the dispute arose during the period of the West Cameroon Government that existed under the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The declaration of a dispute between the contending parties was submitted to the West Cameroon Government first by the Prefect of Momo Division in 1969. He informed the government that the parties had been requested to complete the form on the Recognition of Chiefs Law, 1960. Consequently, on 8 July 1969 a Chieftaincy dispute was officially declared in Ashong, Momo District in Momo Division. The dispute was over the person entitled to be chief of Ashong. This time the rival claimants were David Ajeck Mbafor (Mbafor II) and David Chesaam Enongang. Both claimants paid the sum of 50,000 FRS each on 15 June 1968 and 14 July 1969 respectively in order to be heard by the Chieftaincy Advisory Committee (CAC). On 9 August 1969 the Hon. Prime Minister, S.T. Muna directed the dispute to be referred to CAC for investigation. Despite the spirited effort of the Lainjo 45 Identity Withheld aged 72 years old.
47 Legal Department Batibo, ‘A Complaint “.
Commission and the result of their findings in 970 that declared Mbafor II as the rightful heir to the throne of Ashong, and endorsed by the government in March 1971 the dispute was never completely resolved.48

This was so because, although Enongang recognized the chieftaincy status of Mbafor II for a brief moment his denial to submit traditional symbols of power to Mbafor II caused the administration to intervene through punitive measures like torture, molestation and detention to resolve the issue between 1974 and 1993. In March 1974 when Adamu Mba and Enongan staged the first act of subversion against Mbafor II the Divisional Officer (D.O.) for Robertson Amah requested for their arrest and they both paid their maiden visit to the Bamenda Mobile Intervention Unit where they spent two weeks under severe torture.49 Their release was on condition that Enongan II hands over the traditional symbols to Mbafor II but since he was not reinstated as chairman of the traditional council he vowed never to respect the terms of his release.50

In June 1974 GuiliumNske North West Governor gave him an order to return the symbols within a day. He obeyed but handed incomplete symbols to Mbafor. This led to the renewal of his detention at BMM under inhuman treatment. He was then brought to Ashong in chains in an open-back land rover to his Kassang palace where a serious search was conducted and the remaining symbol of power collected. To put an end to his subversion behavior a Provincial Order was released on 5 June 1974 to confirm Mbafor II as the Chief but Enongan claimed he was unaware of it. Consequently, the Senior Divisional Officer for Momo enacted a ‘Prefectoral Order ‘in November 1975 reiterating the 1974 decision. Enongan and his supporters as from 1976 resorted to writing of petitions to the administration against Mbafor II. However, the petitions received negative responses and on 4 April 1977 the Minister of Territorial Administration responded by warning them against any further petitions. 51

By October 1979 due to the continuous writing of petitions from both factions, the S.D.O. for Momo requested that the D.O. for Batibo Solomon Baltimore Diffang should investigate and submit a full report on the conflict. The fact finding commission was set up by the D.O. and in their report they recommended that a compromise should be reached which should permit Enongan to be recognized as a sub-chief under Mbafor II.52 Still in 1982 the new D.O. for Batibo Thomas Chama Eki made a similar proposal by requesting that upper Ashong should be accorded the status of a third class chiefdom under Enongan as compensation since he only inherited the problem.53 Although Enongan and his faction favoured this decision Mbafore II did not approve of it certainly due to previous experiences.

In order to hasten government procedure to recognize Enongan as a third class chief he was projected in and out of the village as the chief of Ashong. In 1983 in a bid to construct a large palace hall in Kassang a committee was set up under Adamu Mba to raise funds. Chief Mbafor II found this an act of subversion and reported to the administration. Adamu Mba received warnings from the Governor of the North West Province, S.T. Muna, Hon. Acha Francis and the S.D.O. for Momo James Elinge Ndive allin May 1983. In June Adamu Mba responded to the S.D.O.’s warning by acknowledging to have given up his support to Enongan for the struggle to power.54 On June 14 1983 the S.D.O. then summoned a meeting in upper Ashong to which he invited the entire population and Enongan II paid homage to Chief Mbafor II. During the meeting the S.D.O. dissolved the existing traditional council in upper Ashong and requested Mbafor II to form a single and representative traditional council.55 This union was again short-lived as both Enongan and Adamu Mba agreed to it simply because of previous threats and molestation. Besides, Enongan II was neither compensated with the position of third chief nor was he reinstated as chairman of the traditional council.

However, it was only on 20 March 1987 that the pending traditional council was formed and installed by the D.O. of Batibo Peter Tontu Akondoh although the members from upper Ashong declined to participate. In June 1988 the notables of upper Ashong went ahead to request for a traditional council but the D.O. informed them that the letter

48 File no 1b1971/1, Chieftaincy Dispute in Ashong Village of Batibo Sub Division, Momo Division,1971.p.3.
49 “Batibo Sub Divisional Orders vis a vis the Ashong Chieftaincy 1971-1996”
55 “Minutes of June 14th 1983 meeting held at Ashong with te population by te S.D.O. for Momo Division, Jeme Elinge Ndive”; “Letter from Enongan II to the S.D.O. Momo dated July 11th 1988.”
was subversive but forwarded it to the S.D.O. However, no action was taken. Since they failed to create a traditional council for upper Ashong, Enongang’s faction devised other means to keep the conflict alive. This time they decided to celebrate the death of Cheoh Akamanda and Enongang I in the month of July 1988 but it could not be done in the premises of a non-chief consequently it renewed the question of legitimacy of Mbafor II. They succeeded to secure authorization from Assistant D.O. and the S.D.O. for the celebration to take place 56.  

This minimal success spurred them to organize the ‘nere dance’ in the “palace” of Enongang II. The ‘nere dance’ is a traditional dance reserved to be organized in the palace of a chief. Chief Mbafor saw the episode as a challenge to his authority and took the matter to the Batibo court of First Instance following the failure of the D.O. Peter Tontu to stop the celebration. The matter was between Chief Mbafor II as first prosecution witness against his subjects in the case of “The People versus Enongang D.C. and Seventeen Others”. The Enongang’s were charged with “Assuming the title of Fon of Ashong … taking part in unlawful assembly… and violating sub-divisional order”. The first hearing took place on June 20 1992 but it dragged on following a series of adjournments. However, the court decided finally that “… there is a bitter chieftaincy dispute in Ashong requiring the Minister of Territorial Administration … to resolve peacefully”. The court equally banned the dancing of “Nere’ in any part of Ashong without the approval of the Fon of Ashong and the administration”. But the defendants were discharged and acquitted. 57  

Chief Mbafor unsatisfied with the judgment appealed to the Bamenda Court of Appeal in 1994 but before the judgment was released Enongang II had fallen sick and later died on 28 March 1994. 58 Contrary to the earlier mentioned fact that Enongang on his dying bed declared that his sons should not continue with the struggle Shaibu Mbah Enow has stated that “In his will, he appointed Ruben Enoh Takwe as his successor”. But another source mentioned earlier reveals that ‘it was Adamu Mba’ the father of Shaibu Mbah Enow ‘that instigated Ruben Enoh Takwe to re-activate the struggle as Enongang III’. On 25 August 1994 Bell Luc Rene the North West Governor called a meeting of all Ashong indigenes through their representatives in Bamenda to find solution to the conflict. 59 The outcome was the creation of ‘the Ashong Central Third Class Chiefdom’ through a prefectoral order signed by the S.D.O. for Momo John Niba Nchotu on 6 September 1994. The chiefdom comprised upper Ashong, lower Ashong, together with Njen, kon and the Fulani. These third class chiefdoms were to pay allegiance to the second class chief of Ashong. 60  

Initially the solution was acclaimed by all but it was doomed to fail since it did not precise who was to be designated as the third class chief but only assumed that it would be given to Enongang’s Successor as compensation or as recommended previously. However, Enongang could not be designated the third class chief because it needed to go through public consultation to allow the king-makes to present the candidate. Thus, it was presumed that during the public consultation; the pro-Mbafor King-makers who were in the majority would straight away refuse to sustain the choice of Enongang III as the third class chief of Ashong Central. This was logical because making Enongang III third class chief of Ashong central meant that Chief Mbafor would have no base and so he would perhaps not recommend Enongang III for the position. At the public consultation scheduled for 24 January 1995 the pro-Enongang’s refused to show up and it was a fiasco. 60 Another consultative talk was programmed for 24 March 1996 but it was later postponed indefinitely. On 17 May 1996 1500 pro- Enongang supporters staged a march to the D.O.s office in Batibo in what they termed “Presentation of the Third Class Chief for Ashong Central”. They presented Enongang III as their candidate to the D.O. Etah Ashu Mbokaye who received them with promises that were never honoured.  

**Conclusion**  

After 1996, no serious effort has been made to resolve the dispute but there have been sporadic attacks on the Mbafor’s by the Enongang’s that led to court cases after the death of Mbafor II in 2000. A case in point was an incident that occurred in 2013 in Upper Ashong when Fon Mafar III and the D.O. of Batibo Dolingo Bikinn Di visited a boundary site that was involved in a conflict with a neighboring village without taking any security measure against eminent attack. The youths of Upper Ashong who do not recognize Mbafor III as their chief, got him seriously beaten but for the swift intervention of R. T. Enongang to stop the attack. This incident continued to portray that the disagreement between Upper and Lower Ashong would continue to produce far reaching consequences which would embarrass all parties to the conflict if concrete effort is not made to settle the quarrel amicably.

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57 Batibo Court of First Instance, “Court Judgment BM/132991: The People versus Enongang D.C. and 17 others” September 1993.
59 Bell Luc Rene,” Speech Presented during a Meeting Held in the Governor’s Conference Hall Bamenda to Resolve Ashong Chieftaincy Conflict”, 25th August 1994; “Minutes of the Meeting Held at the Governor’s Conference Hall August 25th 1994”.
60 “Minutes of the Al Ashong External Elites Meeting Held in Bamenda July 15th 1995.”
So far there is ample evidence by both the Mbafor’s and the Enongang’s to lay claims to the throne of Ashong. This research is not out to prove that one party is right and the other is wrong. The research set out to unravel all the intricacies involved in the squabble as a way of informing stakeholders to the dispute. We have been able to present the arguments of the Mbafor’s and those of the Enongang’s as well as the different efforts made to restore peace and harmony but which have fallen short of achieving that goal. The humble opinion expressed in this paper is that there is a very serious chieftaincy crisis in Ashong that has span over a century. That the conflict is not only rooted in the royal family but has dragged to engulf the indigenes of Ashong and divided them in to the two opposing camps. The tussle has also divided the land into Upper and Lower Ashong as well as dividing the original King-makers who are lineage heads between the two camps. Again within the lineages there has been several splits as the head of the lineage will support one camp and his family members supports the other.

Moreover, there is an outburst of bitterness amongst each party when discussing the question of the throne of Ashong. This is so because, while the Enongang’s accuse the Mbafor’s for conniving with the German administration to kill their cherished and brave ruler Akamanda Cheowho succeeded Enoh Tembeck, the Mbafor’s hold that Akamanda Cheoh was not a successor to Enoh Tembeck. According to them Tebi whose down line became the Mbafor’s have been the heir to the throne since the death of Enoh Tembeck. They argued that Peter Enongang who became Enongang I was never traditionally installed when Mbafor I was imprisoned by the British Administration but acted as regent after the death of Mbafor I in 1951. Meanwhile the Enongang’s argued that the British had deposed the Mbafor’s and installed Enongang and put him in the gazette of 1965 as chief of Ashong.

Whatever the case it is clear that if this conflict has dragged for so long its resolution will have to be a win-win situation and not a zero-sum game. Any attempt to settle the dispute that will not cause both sides to lose something may never be able to work. The inspiration here is that in 1971, the Lianjo Commission after a thorough investigation of the dispute declared Mbafor as the rightful heir but peace was never restored. Again, in 1994 Central Ashong was raised to third class chieftedom under Chief Mbafor but this too never worked perhaps because had Enongang been given this position Mbafor would remain as a figurehead. The researcher therefore recommends a middle ground between these two options to resolve the dispute.

The proposal is that since Ashong is made up of Central Ashong, Njen, Kon, and the Fulani and Njen, Kon, and Fulani are third class chieft裨 in the Chief of Ashong Mbafor III; the 1994 decision to create third class chieftdom in Central Ashong should be upheld but with some modification so as to ensure the interest of both parties are considered. Firstly, Central Ashong which is made up of Lower and Upper Ashong should be partitioned in to three with the appellation Ashong I, Ashong II and Ashong II. The name Lower and Upper Ashong should be erased from the history of Ashong. Ashong I could be designated as the seat of the second class chief who is the lead chief of Ashong Village. Ashong II could be given to the Enongang’s as compensation for the struggle since they only inherited the squabble. Ashong III could go to one of the remaining descendants of Enoh Tembeck namely Mbabbot, Mbakuro and Mbapen among others.

In this way the new Ashong village that will emerge will constitute Ashong I, II, and III including Njen, Kon and Fulani. Each will have its own traditional apparatus and will pay homage to the second class chief of Ashong Village as the lead chief. Once a structure of this nature is instituted there will be no vanquish and no victor but both parties would have surrendered a measure of their claim for the sake of peace, security and development to return to this once great village in Moghamo Clan rugged by conflicts for over a century.

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