

NDIEH CELEBRATION

(The Bakossi Thanksgiving)

BY CHIEF NHON GEORGE N. ENONGENE

INTRODUCTION:



The Ndieh celebration is the Thanksgiving Ceremony in Bakossiland. The Bakossi believe that the dead are not exclusively dead; they play the mediator between the Living and God. In the summer of every year, a particular day is designated for the people to commune with the ancestors. Each village decides their celebration date. The chosen date is announced by no else but *Sango Muankum*, the cultural Policeman, the governor, the judge, the overseer, the landlord, the god of the land, to say the least. He will give tall orders to the entire community to have the whole road network cleaned, and sanctions all the women to stock food at home and reserve their best harvest for the august occasion.

The voice of *Sango Muankum* is louder than an amplifier and it is as petrifying as it is obligate and compelling and not without metastasis. His speed is supersonic, and he can travel through the whole Bakossiland in a split second. As a kid, I used to imagine from his loud and vigorous voice how gigantic and frightful he can look. However, I was thrown at a loss, and kept wondering whether he is human or spirit, but I have reason to believe he is a spirit. His metallic rules are hardly breached, and his fines are hefty as well. He is arguably the most esoteric and mysterious of Bakossi jujus. When he is out there, all lightings (lamps and electricity) are abruptly shot down without contest because he works and walks better in darkness and light is said to impair his sight and vision and he levies very lofty fines to defaulters. He never comes out during full moon. If he does, he limits himself to the opaque and sinister shrine, the same holds if he decides to come out during the day, which however is rare except there's something very ominous and emergent. You can only see him if you are initiated in his world, and the fee is no sinecure, and paying the fee is no guarantee that you will see him. If you are stubborn and head strong, you can hunt him for nine days and nights during initiation before you can behold his tail. Initiation into this judicial juju society is synonymous to a military academy. Whenever I think of him and his activities, not only does my heart skip some beats, but I also sweat profusely. This is one of the highest ingenuities in Bakossiland that I know of.

SIGNIFICANCE OF NDIEH

The Ndieh celebration holds an important slot in Bakossi folklore. In those days, when a given year was famine stricken, during the Ndieh, the ancestors were evoked, palpated besought, pleaded with and the following year there was abundance. Kids who could not pass exams, when they were given the Head Mimbo, the ensuing semester, they passed their exam in flying colors. Women who had child bearing problems, when they brought a blessed plantain from the Ndieh, kept it under the bed, roasted it after three days, ate it with palm oil and stepped into the bed with their husbands, miracles happened. Businessmen whose businesses were deteriorating, when they got ancestral blessing, business started booming. Bad omen, mishaps, misfortunes were washed away to the hinterlands and the evil pond (Ndip'eyuk).

NDIEH AT HOME

At home every village decides when to hold the Ndieh; however, it is very often than not during the month of November or December for every village. Every village has a shrine which is contoured by special giant trees with three entrances, the significance of which are still obscure and wrangling to me. In the middle of the shrine is a specialty hut built of a thatch roof and fern sticks walls from the Muanenguba forest. The interior of the hut is clad with the bark of special trees laced with special grass and thatches. This hut also has three doors as well and the custodian of the hut enters the cabin going backwards. The reason for this demeanor is mysterious and I will not afford to bore you with the particulars.

In Washington DC, initially we matched our Ndieh calendar with the home calendar every November. However, November seems to be cold enough to be annoying especially for the kids at the heart of winter. So, we moved it to October for suitability and comfort reasons. We pleaded with the ancestors for this amendment.

THE WAKE OF THE NDIEH

The custom requires the grandees of the community to meet at the shrine in the evening following the Thanksgiving Day to perform specialty rituals. The best farm harvests, palm wine, kola nuts, the most delicious cuisine and special plantains are brought into the shrine for ancestral blessing. During this Ritual, a skillful cultural orator evokes the ancestors, pleads with them and presents our wants and cravings such as education, jobs, wealth, marriages, births, happiness, and peace. All these pleas are sighed in a series of odd numbers. This is graced with a concatenation of cultural poetic lyrics. We queue to and from the shrine singing praises to the gods of the land. The rest of the evening is spent wining and dining, and discord has no room during this time of the year as this could derail the ancestors. The following day, all the community roads lead to the shrine.

THE LITANY OF ANCESTORS

The Litany of the Ancestors is the highlight of this Feted Thanksgiving. This libation is a kind of cultural prayer channeled through the ancestors to the Almighty God. The Bakossi believe that the dead are not really dead. When we commute to commune, we palpate the ancestors, we feel their presence, and we table our turmoil, our pain, our cravings and all to them.

Ah hey Mbuog! Assembly Nyeah
Ah hey Ekoose! Assembly Nyeah
Nye hey'meh hane! Assembly sheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
Ampeh! Assembly sheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
All the ancestors of Bakossiland
From North to South
All the roads have been cleaned and cleared

All the nine drums have been beating in cadence and tempo
And we start from Ngoe himself the founder of the land
And all his sons and their offspring
Bring along with you the Ngwem and Muesee
And fill these with all the blessings and good stuff

Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
Abongoe eh
Anongoe eh
Asumengoe eh
Etanengoe eh
Mbuongoe eh
Mekundamengoe eh
Menamengoe eh
Ngemengoe eh, neh
Nguelngoe eh
And all their descendants
From North to South



Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
Ancestors, you are the pacesetters of what we're doing here today
Today's deliberation is ours
It is known around the world and beyond

That America where we live today is an elephant

*The Bakossi have not yet gotten a share of this elephant
That is why we're pleading with you today
That every Nkoose in America
Should grow from strength to strength*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
In the past people showcased their might
By the strength of their fist
Winning wars and holding the enemy captive
And brandishing a Red Feather on their Hat
To betoken prowess and greatness*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
Today's prowess is exhibited in education
And talents
Assembly is it not true? Yeahhhhhh*

*Wealth was measured by the number
Of domestic animals owned
Such as cows, goats, cocks, hens*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
Today education is all and all
It brings enlightenment
As well as wealth and health*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
That is why we are pleading with you today
Those who have graduated from schools
Small as well as advanced degrees
Seeking employment and guidance*

*America is going through a financial turmoil
Unemployment is increasing in geometrical progression
Ancestor, make sure for ever y five people employed
There is one Nkoose amongst them
So that in future we can also
Get represented in the inner circle*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
Some of ours are still in schools
We are pleading with you, when they take their tests
Let them do it once and for all*

*We plead for our relatives in Cameroon
Who graduated from schools and are jobless
Some of whom are seeking visas to the West
A simple knock at the Embassy door
Tantamount to a visa*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
Those who are already here in the West
Seeking employment papers
We pray that you loosen their knots
For the growth of Ekoose*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
The man who has a representation in the inner circles
At home and abroad
As well as a regent at the home's Nchib
He will always chew the cud from two fronts
Can he ever be a loser? Assembly nooooooooooooo!*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
We supplicate for Education, Employment, Wealth, and Health
Marriages, Births, Peace of mind, Enlightenment, and Growth
So that Ekoose can also grow. Assembly not so? YEAH*

*This generation of ours was molded by our parents
Who are toiling in cocoa and coffee farms at home
Though the value of these crops has been panel-beaten to nothingness
We are beckoning on you today, to bless their harvest
Let these plants bear fruits from their roots to the leaves*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Bless wine flow peacefully
Those who cultivate cocoyam, cassava, corn, plantains
And other subsistent crops
We implore that you bestow your ancestral blessings on these crops
So that orphans can survive*

***This is how a good community should look like!
Not so Assembly? Yeahhhhhhhhh***

***Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
Medicinal herbs used to play a significant role in Ekoose
We pay reverence to our then traditional doctors:***

***Elias Ebwelle'Ajuerh of Ekambeng
Ferdinand Nkumbe and Victor Ndialle of Muasum
Sango Nja'Mbulle of Paola
Abraham Kambe of Muabi
Fabian Saah of Muabi
Sango Etah'Elah of Muabi
Sango Long Boy of Muelong
Sango Ekukwe of Nyan
Nicholas Nsughli of Mbid'Elah
Sango Ndape Ebwelle of Muagwekan
Sango Alunghe'Ekane of Njom
Sango Epie'Ndelle and Ngub'Ndalle of Muaku
Sango Ngolegambe of Epenebel
Sango Mbine of Nkach
Sango Epie'Megalle of Ebonemin
Prophet Adolf Ngolle of Nkach
Alias Ndongo Bedimu***



***Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
We are beseeching you
All the good knowledge of herbs, foresight and intuition
That you were clad with
Kindly hand these down to us
So that when we dream
We see a particular herb that cures a particular disease
Assembly not so! Yeah***

***Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
As you all know, the Bakossi man is very hospitable
The little we have we eat and share with the stranger
Do you associate a Bakossi man with greed?
Assemble! Nooooooooooooo!***

***Ancestors, the type of jobs we do here in America
Are over stretching us
And we have little or no time to visit our wives for continuity***

This translates enjoyment into sorrow

*When the white man deceive us with five dollars
He takes back four dollars in the name taxes and bills
The one dollar left we usually split it and send part home
For the vertical and horizontal growth of Ekoose
Assembly am I lying? Noooooooooo!*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
We are craving you for good jobs
So that we can have time to multiply
The Ekoose population
Assembly not so! Yeahhhhhh*

*We also have young men and women
Seeking marriage and prosperity
But our young men have opened the doors
For Akata boys to hold our daughters ransom
We plead for a reverse of this demeanor
Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
We thank you for the good things that happened to us last year
We are still asking for more
You are not unaware of the insatiate nature of man
You are our sole mediator to God the Almighty*

*We also had some mishaps last year
We entreat you to cleanse the Bakossiland
Of all bad omen
So that we can prosper
Assembly not so? Yeahhhhhh*

*One fowl with seven chickens
Three cocks and four hens
Two cocks slaughtered for stranger entertainment
The lone cock and the other four chickens
Will sustain production continuity*

*So that Ekoose should continue to grow
Cameroon should grow as well
Even America which has become our abode
Should continue to prosper
Assembly not so? Yeahhhhhh*

*Anyone who says he does not love the Bakossi man
Or who wishes the Bakossi man ill luck
And sees a good thing going the Bakossi way
And looks on the Bakossi man as a chimpanzee in human dressing
That kind of person will never see sun light
Assembly not so? Yeahhhhhh*

*Nzom'peeobeeeh! Blessed wine flow peacefully
Anyone who wishes to throw a Bakossi man
On thorns or burning grass
Will inadvertently throw us on lush grass
From which we will grow from strength to strength
Assembly not so? Yeahhhhhh*

*Epoll, Mbonghee, Nkolengo,
Ah hey yu!*

After the libation, there is an interlude of cultural lyrics and Mbwen. During this ritual of Mbwen, every participant recounts his appellations, retraces his achievements, setbacks and unusual occurrence in his life to grace the occasion. This is usually spontaneous and spur of the moment.

THE KOLA NUT PUZZLE

The kola nut talks in Ekoose. When a man stands up to throw the kola nut, he needs to have not only a level head but also a clean mind and coherent talk. If you want to throw the kola nut without reconciling thought and physique, this imbalance throws you out of the loop. You have to put yourself together, to say the least. The kola nut has four and sometimes five pieces. For it to say yes, one of the four or five pieces will face to a different direction and the other four or five will face towards the same direction which is either up or down. Do not take the kola nut cheaply in Ekoose, it is a mind reader. Those who throw the kola nut are chosen from each clan, village or quarter depending on the magnitude of the occasion and representation. If you speak incoherently before throwing the kola nut, the kola nut will be incoherent.

HEAD MIMBO

Head Mimbo is blessed wine on which libation was done; it is given to those who chose to drink it for ancestral blessing laced with a piece of kola nut that said yes to our ancestral request. In the distant past, kids who failed exams, when they got the head mimbo, the ensuing semester, they just went right through. Women who had child bearing trouble, when they were given the head mimbo, and a plantain from the Ndieh, put this plantain under the bed for three days, roasted it and ate with palm oil. When they stepped into the bed with their husbands, miracles happened. Nsooooooooooooo! Businessmen whose business were dwindling, when they were given the head mimbo, business started booming. Nsooooooooooooo!

After the Head Mimbo ritual, everyone takes a blessed plantain home, keeps it under the bed and roasts it after three days and eat with palm oil for ancestral blessing.



There is some controversy that exists between some religious believers and traditionalists. Very often than not, believers look at Ndieh as demonic, profane and sacrilegious. However, before the arrival of the missionaries on the African coast, Africans believed in a Supreme Being, and they worshiped this Supreme Being in various ways depending on the milieu. The Bakossi worshiped God through the Ndieh before

colonialism. America is a very religious and pious country, but they do have a memorial day. On this day they visit the tombs of their Dead Ones for whom they had too much love and evoke their souvenirs. The Memorial Day has a common bond with Ndieh, but the church is politely ignoring these fine details and erroneously gives culture a blasphemous and impious label.

(Formatted and edited by Martin Akwensioge for website)