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## Religious and Cultural Woes of the Ethnic Bimobas, Who is to Blame

**Dr. George Nangpaak Duut**

Lecturer, Department of Industrial Art, Bolgatanga Polytechnic, Ghana

**Martin Awinkeligo Harold**

Lecturer, Department of Industrial Art, Bolgatanga Polytechnic, Ghana

**Timothy Dakonnam Duut**

Tutor, Demonstration School, Tumu, UWR

**Kenneth Dam Sakoalia**

Tutor, Salaga Senior High School, Ghana

**Adamu Fuseini Naajar**

Regional Culture Coordinator, Ghana Education Service, Bolga, UER

### **Abstract:**

*The study on the theme, Religious and Cultural woes of the ethnic Bimobas, who is to Blame, was settled upon following the extensive consultations in trying to establish the root cause of cultural decadence in the area. The rapidity of life style alien to the norms and values of the indigenes was a bother to all concerned people. The study was purely descriptive and made extensive use of interview with focus groups and individual. Photographic evidence was solicited to support certain facts in order to obtain the desired findings. The research identified significant factors that culminated to the problem, some of which include lack of anthropological skill during the propagation of Christianity. It is suggested for the consuming indigenes and well-meaning people to join hand in resuscitation the cultural value of the people.*

**Keywords:** Koni, Koant, Desecration, Najong 2, Northern Territories, Missionaries, Jok, Tradition, Bimoba

### **1. Introduction**

For over two (200) hundred years of the presence of the Wesleyan, Bremen, and Basel Christian missionaries' contact in the Gold Coast, the northern territories specifically, the Upper Eastern part, the people were first introduced to Christianity in 1907 by the Catholic missionaries which spread to the western part. The north-eastern corridor of the territories was still fallow for forty-two (42) more years that was about mid-way of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The advent of colonial rule created a favourable environment for the missionaries to introduce Christianity. They enjoyed full protection from the colonial administration which increased the efficiency of the field workers and the deep intensification of the religious missions (Nukunya, 1992).

The advent of Christianity has been a blessing to some ethnic areas following the massive infrastructural and social development it brought to the people. In most areas where the religion was first introduced, hundreds of people benefited from sponsored education and health care over decades. Health facilities and educational institution for instance ranging from basic level to senior high school levels were provided by the missionaries to the benefit of the people. In the Upper East Region where the orthodox Christian Missionaries were very conspicuous, it appears almost all the Saints in the Bible have schools named after them at various communities. It is also evident that almost all the communities that the Catholics sited their missions there had benefited from the construction of Community Social Centre infrastructure.

One would want to wonder talking about Christianity within the Bimoba area in Northern Region of Ghana, whether people got it all wrong or it was a deliberated attempt to derail the cultural orientation of the indigenous people. Christianity is said to have come with a mission to convert people to get salvation into heaven. Did that mean what the indigenous people earlier practice was of Satanic? The Bimobas area has had its share of influence of Christianity which is worthy of evaluation over the last 70 years (1949 – 2019).

I would wish to be permitted to make a brief comparison in order to advance the focus of this paper. Whereas in the Upper West Region, the Catholic Doctrine was strategically fused into the core ceremonies of the indigenous practices such as funeral, naming and marriage, other places did not have that anthropological foresight, thereby shelving the cultural life of the people. The people then ended up running a parallel kind of life style where funerals for instance have to be performed in two (2) forms: the Christian way and the traditional way. It is even humiliating that Christian families tend to perform the traditional funeral rites in secrecy, purported to be against the Christian teachings.

In the Upper West Region, among the Dagarba people, a funeral is performed concurrently with Catholic Mass on the same venue and same day. The chief mourners and the closers bereaved ones can be seen in Figure one (1) in traditional bereavement costume. The figure below is a typical funeral scene of the Dagarba people where traditional funeral objects are placed at the sides of the shed on which the casket platform is erected. The pots signify the sex of the

diseased person. This Christian-traditional integration was brokered by the early Catholic missionaries during the Priesthood practice of the late Cardinal Derry of the Tamale Ecclesiastical Province of the Catholic Church.



*Figure 1: A Catholic-Traditional Funeral of the Dagarba.  
Source: Researcher's Field Work 2017*

This kind of scene is yet to be recorded among the ethnic Christian Bimobas in Northern Ghana. Figure two (2) below is a typical example of the researcher (to your left) in a mourning state of the deceased mother in April 2014. There was no customary attire to distinguish the closely bereaved person from the sympathizers.



*Figure 2: The Researcher at a Christian Funeral Scene  
No Feature of Traditional Element  
Source: Researcher's Field Work 2014*



*Figure 3: A Funeral Scene of the Christian Bimobas  
It Did Not Have Features of Any Traditional Elements  
Source: Researcher's Field Work 2014*

## **2. Historical Profile of the Bimob as Prior to Christian Missionaries**

The discussion under this sub-heading places premium of two aspects of the cultural life of the Bimoba people, which are their Identity, and the Biblically mentioned Betrothal System of Marriage

### *2.1. The Identity of Bimoba (S) By Name among Other Ethnic Groups*

The Bimoba people were among the last to migrate from Fadam in Burkina Faso to their present locations in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century after several transits (Barker, 1986). Like other Africans had their cultural practices encompassing their belief systems, knowledge, art, morals, drumming and dancing, law, customs and tradition marriage systems, and habits

acquired by an individual within the society. The people's concept of God was imbedded in the goddesses and gods generally called deities and were worshiped through the ancestors. Their venerated ancestral abodes were cast away by the influence of the missionaries.

They were noted among other ethnic groups for the practice of a sacred and traditionally coded 'Bush school' system called *Koant*, through which individual male and female adult Bimobas passed through for three (3) consecutive months and given tutelage from experts (*Konjakpera*) on moral ethics and socio-cultural habits before graduation. Trainees then acquired their names based on their assessment output and turn out performance. The concept of the 'school' among the other northern ethnic groups was not understood and therefore considered by the 'Whiteman' as occultism, because of the conserved formative training methodology which restricted any non-initiates to comprehend its mysterious concepts, principles and operational systems. But the fundamental point we must all understand is that, every organisation is governed by rules and regulations, which that system was no different.

The system had its identification marks, passwords, names and ranks. So, the *Koant* was one such organisation that had initiation names, initiation marks, informatics (language and terms) and passwords only known to its members, no matter their origin (Ellison, 1935 & Pierre-Marie, 1974). Names acquired by males through the training included Duut, Laar, Konlan, Lambon, Kombat, Konbian, and for females, were konjit, Dunwaak, Konduuk, and Tanjon. While men went through the initiation for three months, females took four months to complete. It was a strong belief that 'anybody who mentioned the old name (after initiation) of an initiate would be punished by the gods' (Fuzzy, 1979, and Barker, 1986). Apart from willful request for initiation by both males and females, the cultist also inducted girls who were betrothed to their male counterparts but had some misgivings and discrepancies.

## 2.2. The Betrothal Marriage

Pastor TonLaar (2014) and Konlan Kpeebe have variously discussed this topic in their books but the gap that both them omitted is what I want to educate my cherished readers on. Though the system had its own flaws, it equally had some merits. In the wisdom of Bimoba philosophy, human beings (first class creatures) are governed by the Nurture-Nature syndrome; so, every individual belonging to a nuclear family is 'catered for, but not reared like an animal'; this statement was made during my interview with (Bat-Kombat) a.k.a Mutik (2009) on the rationale of betrothal marriage. His explanation to the rationale was consonant with Bishop Emeritus Peter Akwesi Sarpong's assertion in his book entitled "Peoples Differ" and J. A. Boadi (in Christianity or Traditional Beliefs and Customs?) that, *two individuals of different backgrounds need acclimatization in their course as husband and wife* (Boadi, 2001)

So, the betrothal system made adequate room for the acclimatization (gradual integration) of the girl in her husband-to-be's family house for better assimilation into the family. The system therefore required of any betrothed girl to be periodically sent to the husband's house at her tender age. As a researcher, though I briefly witness a few of the system, my findings, which can be attested by aged indigenes than me show that, a betrothed girl needed not less than three visitations of that nature. During these times that the girl learned the dos and don'ts of the new family that she would live in the future. Counselling and other customary rites were performed until the girl became fully matured for marriage. The system did not allow any bolt-away of the girl with the husband and there was also the strict curbing of defilement and unwanted pregnancies (Assimeng, 1990). Further discussions on the marriage system will be dealt with in subsequent papers.

## 3. The Advent of Christianity among the People

The Assemblies of God (AG) Christian Missionaries were the first to introduce Christianity among the Bimoba people who occupies a total land size of about 800 square kilometres in the then Northern Territories in 1949 by Pastor Shirer, Lehmann and McCorkle. Among the renowned Lady missionaries was Madam Charles Spencer (Barker, 1986 and Pastor Tonlaar, 2012). Their first stop was Nakpanduri in the early 1950s where they established a Church. The next Church outstation was sited at Tobaaluk by then, now known as (Najong no. 1) in 1952 through Jabong Samson. That same year, through another enthusiastic young man by name Kombimbang Konlan who converted to Christianity and was named Elijah, a chapel was built at Najong by then, now known as (Najong no 2). He equally explained to me how the two Najongs came about; it was as a result of a jovial argument between the two converts over the possibility of calling Tobaaluk as Najong. And to cut matters short, to ensure unity in the faithful, the White Missionary assign the Tobaaluk as Najong No. 1. The rationale was that, Samson did not want the name Tobaaluk to enter the 'Big Books' (Encyclopedia of AG Christian Communities) because, the community was under Binde, which meant that would have been attached to the name. He concluded that, in pre-colonial documents, they used to mention the names of those Communities at public gatherings as Ben-Tobaaluk, then Gbankoon-Najong. So that was how come we now have Najong 1 & 2. The two communities have since grown and leaved in harmony as far as proximity is concerned and is almost merging up. Within three years, they had established chapels at Jilik, Bunkpurugu, Paknaatiik and its environs because the whole of the Bimoba area was a virgin-grounds to Christian religion. Islamic religion was equally non-existent except a handful of Yuroba and Hausa, Mosshi traders in Nakpanduri and Bunkpurugu who practiced Islam. Some of the renowned AG - Trained Pastors who excelled in the Ministry were Pastor Miss, Pastor Jeremiah, Pastor John Sabaan, Pastor Ton-Laar, and Late Pastor Simon Jato who rose to become the Principal of the Pastoral College at Kumbungu.

Despite the fact that the Assemblies of God Missionaries operated freely for fifteen (15) years before others came, they did not assimilate any part of the indigenous cultural practice such the mode of worship and adornment of the people into the Christian form of worship; and also failed decouple Bimoba culture from its religion, though, anthropologists hold it that religion is part of the culture of a people (Conrad, 2002). It is therefore obvious to indicate that there was a

deliberate agenda by the Missionaries to impose a foreign religious culture and tradition onto the people. Although, they did not approach it the Islamic Jihad way to compel people. The Missionaries' trajectories were on a discourteous tangent. They woefully failed to appreciate their style of worship and refused to fuse the Christian doctrine into the Bimoba culture; and so, the first of all tried to demonize and debunked the indigenous cultural practices, in order to get the natives to convert to Christianity (Dakabsuk, 1988)

The Catholicism was the next to come in 1968 at Garu as the Holy Angels Parish in the then Upper Region. It then extended its Parish's apostolate jurisdiction to the Bimoba peoples within the Northern Region led by Rev. Fr Jacques Morin of blessed memory and Rev. Fr Charles Akabote, and native of Sirigu near Navrongo and Francis Baratin of the SVDs (Society of African Missionaries). Among the first indigenes to join them in the pastoral work were Daniel and Deniel (both ethnic Bimobas in Upper East Region), Robert Yankpen Jarik-Laar and Simon Biirteeb (both from the Northern Region).

The Missionaries, while based at Holy Angels Parish in Garu, first opened main outstations at Nakpanduri and Najong no. 2 in 1969 where people from their catchment communities worshiped. According to Simon Biirteeb, they did not forbid the drinking of *Zom-Koom* (Suspension of millet flour) the use of *Pito* (traditional alcoholic drink) and did not also perceive it as associated with the worship of idols. They welcomed the drumming of local tunes such as Kontaar, Kombena and Jangbabong with Christian songs during Church services. It is believed that the Catholics would have successfully integrated some of the similar practices into Christian functions especially funerals and naming ceremonies as was done among the Dagarbas. Unfortunately, there was no Priest anthropologist to facilitate the fusing of the similar elements into the practice of Catholicism. For nearly a decade of extensive service by the two catechists, numbers increased in hundred with more communities desiring for outstations. This necessitated the creation of a new Parish in 1980, sited at Bunkpurugu.

Prior to the creation of the Parish in the area, the Missionaries built the monumental Chapel (St. James Catholic Church) at Najong no. 2 following the level of embracement of the Catholic doctrine in 1972. For nearly one decade, the outstation's Chapel served as a centre for liturgical conventions on the Catholic calendar for the area. Due to the size and uniqueness in the architectural style, the Chapel still contains large number of worshippers at a goal and remains a tourist attraction in the whole Bimoba area.

The Catholics who were already operating in the local languages at Garu, took keen interest in the bible translation exercise in collaboration with the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT). They encouraged and enrolled majority of the youth in the literacy programme in which they learnt to read in Moar (Bimoba language). This project which was scheduled for evenings, found grounds to succeed since it did not interfere with the main occupational duty hours of the indigenes. Most of the overgrown youth who had missed out in the enrolment into former education graduated from the local literacy classes and joined the main stream former education. They excelled in the Middle School Leaving Certificate Examination (MSLC). Some of the Converts who got training to practice as Catechists were by names: Simon Biirteeb, Justine Sapaat, Kanpaatib Konbian, James Mokta, John Laar, and John Yuagbat.

### 3.1. How Come, The People Suddenly Lost Touch of Their Culture and Traditions?

The account given by Konbinbang Konlan of Blessed memory (figure 4), popularly known in the Assemblies of God faith as Elijah about the introduction of Christianity was sad. He noted that when the Assemblies of God Christian denomination was introduced to them, the use of traditional instruments such as drums and other accoutrements in the Christian worship was prohibited. The only traditional musical instrument that was allowed was the *kpalongo* drums. Social functions that involved ritual ceremonies to offer moral value training and entertainments to the youth were all labeled as satanic, leading to their extinction in the practice in modern times. The only prescribed training that was meant for the youth was Bible reading and singing choir practice with choral music played using jazz drums which were also brought by the missionaries.



Figure 4: The Late Elijah Kombimbang Konlan  
Founder of AG Christian Denomination in Najong  
No. 2, In an Interview with the Researcher  
Source: Researcher's Field Work April, 2014

A Christian did not have to take part in any of the nine (9) traditional varieties of dance (Siak, kontaar, jok, kombenn, sankpatima, saakpeta, gunguann, biok and lonni) in praise of God (Naajar, 2016) in a Church environment. A Christian of the Assemblies of God did not have to drink from a calabash; the calabash was in fact, associated with the

pouring of libation and the drinking of locally brewed alcoholic beverage called thepito. Attendance at funerals and the participation in customary rites were considered as paganism and branded as fetish.

The indigenous people used ornamental accessories like rings, waist-lace, necklace and bangle. They wore those accessories at prescribed parts of their bodies such as neck, finger, wrists, ankles and waist for various functions; but this aesthetic and therapeutic adornment culture had to throw away due to their perceived satanic connotation and idolatrous functions. While the necklaces were replaced with strings or chain connected with cross, the finger rings were replaced with another kind, which is meant for only married couples. In spite that not all the communities embraced the religion, the inter-community proximity and exogamous marriage system all suffered from the scorn that was extended to the traditions of the people. The converts began to refuse to attend and also pay homage to traditional authorities, thus creating a serious extended family break-up and conflict between the traditionalists, converts and the missionaries (Nukunya, 1992, & Duut, 2006).

Other religious denominations that influenced the social orientation of the people in the area in the 1980s and 1990s were the Baptist church, the Pentecost church, Church of God and the evangelical Presbyterian (EP) Church. Barker, (1986) described the general attitudes of the people "as open to change; favourable to Christianity" and as many as 98 villages and towns as by the year 1986 were listed with various Christian denominations adding that Islam had made no headway among Bimobas since mosques at Bunkpurugu and Nakpanduri were attended primarily by traders from outside the area. Of course, some of the 'late-comer' Missionaries including the Assemblies of God, the Lutheran, the Catholics and the Baptist were those who explored the hinterlands to assemble members from the cottages for their denominations. We shall then continue reading to discover the particular denomination that came in 1949.

#### 4. Achievements of the Christian Cabal

##### 4.1. Agriculture

Indeed, the Lutheran missionaries having operated since 1969, kudos to Rev. P. Sipes and Demoss who in 1975, introduced agriculture extension services in the area (Barker, 1986). They started fertilizer distribution to farmers with high yielding variety of guinea corn (*popularly known as naga-white*) and groundnuts. Apart from engaging a lot of the youngsters into the catechetical work, majority of the out-of-school youth took into serious guinea corn farming in which they made money from high crop yield. The presence of the project offered periodic jobs to Form Four leavers who came home during the long vacation holidays. The AG-100 Yamaha model of motor bike also became dominant and almost attracted every youngster to want to own it in future.

The permanent extension service officers were recruited from the locality. They educated the farmers on food security, bullock traction, general farm management and the manufacturing of bullock yokes and accessories. It encouraged farmers to restock their animals for milk harvesting and leather production. The Lutheran Mission again made some attempts to trace Bimoba farmers at Kwaso, and Goaso in Brong-Ahafo and Ashanti regions of Ghana, aimed at expanding membership upon finding out that the faith was gaining good appeal.

##### 4.2. Health Care

Very unfortunately, the area has not had significant benefit from any of the religious organisations in the field of medical care over the past decades. Notwithstanding that challenge, after operating for three (3) years then in 1952, the Assemblies of God missionaries established a general and maternity clinic at Nakpanduri, staffed originally with Missionaries. The clinic has survived over the years with native Ghanaians now managing it (Ton-Laar, 2012). However, the checks conducted on the facility in this research indicates that it has since remained a clinic due to insufficient funding and perhaps poor management policies, coupled with other better alternative competing health facilities.

The Catholic Dioceses of Navrongo-Bolgatanga on the other hand, under its Diocesan Health Development Services (DHS) policy, established a Hospital at Binde under the supervision of Rev. Fr. Bonette. The policy made room for outlet Health Centres at Gberuk and other places. The project which took off smoothly, however, run into problems of litigations over management ownership between the traditional rulers and the Dioceses. Recounting the unfortunate situation in an interview with the researcher, Mr. James Tobiga, then Executive Secretary of the DHS, lamented how the area would have benefited from the package, concluding that, after a long while of the legal battle without success and hope, the Diocese pulled out of the case, relinquishing its interest. The Ghana Government then inherited and absorbed the facility it into the main stream Ghana Health service (Tobiga, 2017 in a personal conversation).

In the 1970s the Baptist missionaries had earlier opened a medical centre at Nalerigu (Mamprusi area) which had been in full swing service in the area, so their interest in coming to the Bimoba area to establish churches was aimed at expanding the search network for potential missionaries to continue their Christian Missions in the future. They therefore did not make healthcare a priority in the Bimoba area.

##### 4.3. Provision of Education and Literacy

Let's acknowledge that, the missionaries did establish some schools as part of their social interventions in the area. With the Catholics, they were able to establish the Our Lady of Hope Kindergarten, Primary and Junior High School in Bunkpurugu in 2011. The other educational institution which they established was the Roman Catholic (R/C) Primary and R/C Junior High School at Kpemmar, a suburb of Nakpanduri but the date of establishment could not be obtained due to some documentary challenges. The Presbyterian missionaries were ahead in the provision of educational institutions; they also established a Basic School and Junior High School some years ago, and in recent years, the Presbyterian Senior

High/Technical School in 2014 all in Nakpanduri. The Assemblies of God group also opened a Basic and Junior High School in Nakpanduri but the date of establishment was not possibly obtained due to some difficulty in locating some documents. The EP Church which in fact, was the latest to come in the early 2000s established the also Primary B Primary School at Najong No.2. There are a few new Spiritual churches whose influence on the people has not yet been noticed.

#### 4.4. Elimination Of involuntary Marriage Of Under-Aged Girls, And 'Lust-Polygamy'

One key success with the advent of Christianity was the drastic reduction in the practice of involuntary marriage and 'lustful polygamy'. Polygamy, among the then generation of Bimobas was to repopulate in order to address the manpower shortfall during the infamous slave raiding (Der, 1998). 'Lust-polygamy' was a kind of polygamy in which there was mad rush for wives by polygamous men (men who were already married to two or more wives but still found ways to confiscate other peoples' wives). Some writers argue that polygamy in some cultures is purposely to reduce adultery, fornication and premarital sex, that of the Bimobas. So, the preaching of one-man, one-wife as a Christian requirement has helped in the drastic reduction of the practice. While we celebrate the positives, it is also worthy to mention that, the adoption of the system of marrying one wife has retarded the population growth need in the Constituency as compared to the rapidity in population growth in those days. Family lineages and villages have not seen any significant growth over the period under review (Ghana Population and Family Census, 2010).

On the part of involuntary marriage of under-aged girls, the Christian teachings on marriage enlightened young ladies to stand against all forms of forcible marriage that did not favour them. The forms of marriages among the people were the betrothal system (just like the Jewish tradition), marriage by exchange, by elopement, by capture, and lastly by *ask-for-hand*. The most unfavorable marriage that grossly violated the rights of the under-aged girls was Marriage-by-Capture; that system however was a very old slave-captive fashion that had been faced out, and replaced with the elopement which was 'mutual' (Duut, 2006). The spade of forcible marriage of under-aged girls has now been a thing of the past while the insistence of the payment of bride prize which used to be a girl has totally been abolished.

#### 4.5. The Reduction in Superstition, Sorcery and Witchcraft Culture

It is worthy to mention that, Christianity has had tremendous positive impact on the natives; the practice of sorcery and was gaining grounds considering the level at which people sort the powers from neighbouring ethnic groups in order to *protect* their survival needs from the life forces and physical enemies (Duut, 2006). The practice, among them was however, somehow thwarted in the negative angle following the scourge of rampant accusation of bewitching of one another for prolificacy, offspring, ruminant stock and landed wealth. All those problems were purported to take place in the spiritual realm. On the flip side, a lot of poisonous substances for purposes of eliminating unsuspecting victims were developed, but had to be discarded and discontinued following the massive conversion of the youth into Christianity (Ibid).

#### 4.6. Mediation in Conflict Resolution

Records show that the Catholic Church had been very conspicuous in the broking of peace at conflict flash-point and the sustenance of peace-building and conflict resolution since its inception. It could be recalled that the Peace and Justice Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Navrongo Bolgatanga mediated dispassionately in a conflict between the people of Kambatiak and the people of Gbankoni which led to the signing of a lasting peace treaty (Communique) to end the impasse. The peace dialogue which was held at Pusu-Namong near Bolgatanga was followed by periodic visitations to the chief with appeal for calm and reconciliation for sustained tranquility in the area. The Team has facilitated the amicable settlement of numerous land and chieftaincy disputes across the Northern part of Ghana.

The signing of the peace treaty which was presided over by the then Diocesan Administrator, Msgr. Anamooh, was witnessed by very high ranking dignitaries: from the Nayire's palace was Mainaba Sule Yakubu, (Nayiri's Representative) and renowned Bimoba Chiefs including Alhaji Abuba Nasimong (Paramount Chief of Bukpurugu Traditional area), Mr David Kansuk Paramount Chief of Nakpanduri traditional area), Hon. Emmanuel Kwame Duut (MP for the then Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo Constituency), Very Reverend Kevin Rand (Parish Priest of Bunkpurugu), Mr James Lamis Nawang (Kambatiak Representative) and Mr. John Dindiok (Gbankoni Representative). The principal signatories to the treaty were the *Kpambara* (Chiefs) of Gbankoni - *Kpambar Nangbor Pokabiuk* and *Kpambar* of Kambatiak- *Nawang Konlanbong* (The Diocesan Link, 2010).

## 5. Failures of the Missionaries

### 5.1. The Desecration of Koant by the Assemblies of God Missionary

According to a principal life witness' account, Chamba Jarik-Laar, (1987) of blessed memory and confirmed by Rev. T. Y. Tonlaar, (2012), August 20, 1960 was the darkest day of cultural defilement in the history of the Bimoba Koant cult system and that marked the beginning of the destruction of Bimoba Cultural heritage. It happened that on that faithful day, the daughter; Dindiok (by name) of a member of the Assemblies of God church, known as Jabong Sampson, by then a convert in the church, who had been betrothed to one Kangman Konlanbong was being initiated at her husband's house in Najong no. 2. The Missionaries upon hearing that, Sampson's daughter was given up for marriage under the betrothal system and to be initiated, they managed to convince him to disclaim the deal, thus considering it as "primitive and pagan" (Fosu, 1986).

Jabong Samson was therefore advised to try breaking the in-law ship tie, to forcibly retrieve the girl who was by then going through the Koant initiation training at the camp. It must not be forgotten that betrothal system among the

Bimobas was consistent with the Biblical Doctrine and had been in existence since time immemorial even in (Jarik-laar, 1987). If Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus was betrothed to Joseph according to Jewish tradition not a sin, why should the case of Dindiok be a sin among the Bimobas?

Led by then Bunkpurugu Chief Nyaankpen who was also a member, in addition to the three Pastors namely Namyela Panka, Musah Babotin, John Kombat and an un-named lay worker, they 'stormed' the premises trying to rescue Dindiok from her matrimonial home and more importantly, the initiation camp. Again, from Chamba Jarik-Laar, my informant (of blessed memory), it was a nasty scene that they had never experienced such scenario! On the part of the missionaries' move to desecrate the Koant (bush school) system, and following the violent resistance from the Fuling-Kong family that was directly at the centre of the impasse there was a counter-attack by Police enforcement where the Police raided the community and ransack several of the round huts in search of any male they met. According to Pastor John Sabaan Yaajen (a retired Pastor) who was by then a youngster, he saw one Policeman wielding a very short gun (Gbajinjing) in a hot chase of some of the males. They arrested men numbering forty-seven (47) and bundles them to Gambaga police cells for interrogations and trial. For nearly a decade, of the incident all adult males had been declared wanted.

### 5.2. *The 'Koant' Desecration and Its Impact on Bimoba Cultural Identity*

The repercussions of that infamous incident on the Bimoba name identity has been 'negative' because it has made Bimobas to grossly lose their name identity right. This Koant system that was a cherished system which offered unique name identity with specific initiated and acquired names including Duut, Laar, Kombat, Konlan and Lambon among others has been halted and completely gone extinct. So many people of the ethnic group are found solely stringing Christian names to the extent that some are most likely to be ethnologically classified or identified as Jews. Following the wide publicity of the incident, the superfluous condemnation of the practice, and the stigma placed on all already initiated members (Koni), indigenes from the area erased and shelved their initiated names from official documents and replaced them with concocted Christian names. The declaration of all potential initiates and their accomplices as 'wanted' (by the Police), put fear in all youth to shun the practice and to hide their native origin and names as well at public gatherings.

### 5.3. *The Run-Down of Human Capital of the Clansmen*

Due to the Police man-hunt for other males in and around the community that faced the confrontation with the Christian missionaries after arresting forty-seven (47), there was a massive migration into exile of the adolescent and adult male. Majority of them took refuge to undisclosed destination in the southern parts of the country with their families who ended up dying without any successful trace of their descendants and properties in diaspora. The rest of the people who were arrested by the police reinforcement, through molestations and torture, also died shortly after their release from detention, leaving their widows and children. An account given by Chamba Jarik- Laar and Chamba Buoli Nankaab notes that Chamba Kanmagan, who was by then the family head, vowed not to live to see himself being tortured; he therefore committed suicide by poisoning himself. Namganchenn and Jamon were said to be visually impaired, yet, they were not spared by the wild Police patrol team who suspected that they were accomplices.

The next generations were told that the few elders who survived the torture had declared any *Whiteman's doctrine* probably including formal education which was just setting in, as a "persona non-grata" to be patronized by the descendants. It is believed that there was a curse invoked on any person or groups of persons from the family who would accept to serve as a missionary in the Assemblies of God church. This snow-balling effect travelled into the early 1970 where descendants of the family at home and abroad was said to have withdrawn their children from schools purported to be teaching the Bible knowledge. It is however ironical that a son of the family was able to defy all those odds to rise through the ranks to become the first Roman Catholic Priest among the ethnic Bimobas in present-day Northern Region.

### 5.4. *'Killing' of the Bimoba Culture Including Traditional Drumming and Dance Performance*

The scorn associated with the use of traditional musical instrument in Churches and at Christian funerals permeated the introduction of jazz music otherwise called brass band in modern times. The addiction of the use of these instruments created an easy entry of the audio cassette music which in total has swallowed the drumming and dancing culture of the people. Consequently, most youth hailing from the area have lost touch with the use of traditional music instruments and equally feel shy in participating in traditional drumming and dancing. The jazz music has virtually replaced native instruments as inherent source of entertainment and social performance. Recorded spinners and brass band have become the order of the day when it comes to social gatherings like durbars and festivals. What that means is that all Bimoba forms of music have been migrated from 'analogue' drum performance into Electronic form and played on sound systems for dancers to only dance.

There has also been a run-down of almost all indigenous cultural practices among the people which the traditional leaders are trying best of every possible means to resurrect. Traditional training for funeral undertakers known as Bayai (in Moar) plural or Bayaak (singular), the griot and praise singing, drumming, and other forms of social functions that offered entertainments such as Gunguann (male-centred dance), Jok-waanu (male-centred dance drumming & wrestling training), Saakpeta (female-centred varieties of performance), Jabena & soka (male-centred military training on spear, bow & arrow shooting) social-cultural training such as Lanbont-maanu (juvenile drama), Tianii/Terimii & Tianbukitkai (story telling debates), Barjok-yinu (idiomatic expression and proverbs) have all suffered the serious setback.

Compared to the outdoorings of participants of Dipo among the Krobo of the Eastern Region of Ghana the outdoorings of Kompaani (Graduands of the Kont system) would have been the prime source brisk tourist attraction in

modern times. After the last batch of the males graduated in 1959, which was a year before the incidence, nobody in the whole Bimoba area within Ghana showed interest in initiating anymore as the Christian converts continued to express disinterest in the exercise. The habit of the youth taking into apprenticeship to learn creative and fine arts such as carving, weaving and praise singing (Biok-faanu, Yanyinnu nen Loni faanu) violin players were not left. This was the starting point where the ethnic group lost the continuity of all its indigenous creative performing artists including singers, weavers, drummers, dancers, comedians, diviners, and soothsayers.

Do we know how people got appellation name? How does one acquire the names such as Otuo Srebuo (gun laughing at a stone) and Opambuo (stone cobbler) among others in Akan culture? They acquired those names by their bravery deeds. The Akan have also encountered the presence of the missionaries, even fought with the colonialists and imperialists yet Akan names are the most populous beyond every culture. Among Bimobas too were appellation names like Parojoor, Tamatuk, Daantatonn, Chinchengann-kpalchant, Masak, Mak, Miankpan, Kakilibuni, Funfomdi, Taanbara, Gbingber, Gbingbertann, Bonjakib, Lankomm, just to mention a few. These names were appellations for young men who excelled in terror and demonstration of mastery of the social activities that were trending. Then during the performance of Sakijuann of Jok, the ladies will be singing praises while mentioning the names in chorus. All these things have vanished into the thin air.

Why is it that we cannot boast of our brand of the smock? It was because those days, only our parents could afford the fabrics and they were also solely the performers of traditional rites and ritual – pouring of libation among others; and here was the case they were indoctrinated to associate it with the worship of idols. So, we all grew up not inheriting the skill producing smocks and have also lost our identity when it comes to smock classifications.

The later days Christian denominations have also come and we are yet to feel their impact; as to whether they are development oriented or not, nobody can vouch for now. So far apart from the construction of Chapels and in few cases, Pastors' residences as their landmark structures in their communities of existence, there is nothing more to boast of. There are insignificant initiatives on educational institutions and healthcare under their administration - living the area very deprived.

##### *5.5. The Spirit of Communalism among Family Lineages and In-Laws*

The people had been brain-washed to the notion that their cultural practices was satanic and not consonant to Christian doctrine. So, all communities listed earlier above that had accepted the religion were no more patronizing any communal gathering that might warrant the sharing of meals and pito drink which were normally served in calabashes and earthen-ware bowls. If at all they would take part in any meal, then it was tea beverage and served in plastic cups. Anybody who had planned to embark of communal farming for the in-law have had to make room for two (2) types of food being the popular Tuo-zaafi (*for the non-faithful*) and tea for the (converts).

The usual marriage relationship that used to exist among the Bimoba ethnic clans declined sharply following the sharp contrast that was created between Christians and non-Christians. It became a 'Taboo' for a person of Christian background to propose to another person who did not belong to the same denomination.

##### *5.6. The Practice of Native Medicine and Crafts*

The Bimoba area, which was noted for being the hub of traditional medicine but lost that status due to the negative perception that was attached to it by the then fast-growing Christian population. Renowned herbalists like Gbambiok of Nasiabok, Naajoak and Najook-daano of Nyankpanjina, Daantanton of Kambagu, Kpeeroa who hailed from Kparik in neighbouring Togo, Nankaab-Jakperuk of Najong number 2, and many others ended up dying with their expertise in native medicine. No single youngster was willing to understudy in order to sustain the practice of native medicine. Other herbalists from the Upper East Regions especially who relied on the area for the extraction and supply of herbal raw materials for their pharmaceutical formulations had to turn their attention to other places.

Traditional artisans in the field of weaving of mats and fans, making of pottery and carving of sculpture specifically became redundant following the non-patronage of their production by the fast-growing Christian population. The situation has led to the extinction of craftsmen and women in the area especially due to hereditary deficiency; the youth did not find it godly to inherit them as their career.

##### *5.7. Failure to Provide Sponsored-Education, Educational Institutions and Social Amenities*

Again, unlike the Upper East and West Region of Ghana where the Catholics established schools, sponsored people to enroll in education and built community centres as part of their developmental responsibility, the Bimoba area (of the northern region) did not benefit from the construction of a single Community Social Centre. In spite of the fact that they were the third to come after the Assemblies of God and Lutheran Missions, and had good number of patronages by the year 1986 (Barker, 1986). It is sad to note that, it was after 31 years of existence of Catholicism in the area, that only two schools were established in Bunkpurugu and Nakpanduri. Compare this output with the Holy Angles Parish in Garu which by the year 2007, it had opened "4 Day nursery Schools, 6 Kindergarten Schools, 6 Primary Schools, 4 Junior High Schools, and a Vocational School" (Diocesan Link, 2010, pp13. Interestingly, the Priests whose efforts yielded these fruits equally served in the Bunkpurugu Parish before their repatriation to other nations abroad.

In my opinion, based on the brief interviews I made, it appeared that some things went wrong with the setting of priorities because the Catholic Missionaries had very excellent mouth-watering packages for communities and cities that accepted Catholicism. I advance my argument because, again according to the Diocesan Link, "the Catholic Church



considers it a duty to educate young people as part of her responsibility in evangelization Gravissimum Educationist (GE3):641" (ibid) at communities of her existence.

None of the missionaries did give partial or full sponsorship to any student in pursuit of higher education of a sort, unlike the case of Upper East and West Regions where hundreds of lay faithful were sponsored to study abroad. The case of sponsoring seminarians in the Catholic faith was no different as the area witnessed the only priest in the person of Rev. Robert Yankpen Laar (ordained on December 17, 1983) who was sponsored by a German couple during his formation to the priesthood. The gross failure of the missionaries to establish mission schools in the area has been the prime enemy leading to the underdevelopment of the area; this is because, as stated earlier, the lack of mission schools prevented potentials from external contact for pen pals and philanthropists. It would have opened new windows for external linkages and avenues. Enrolments in primary and middle schools would have increased to brighten the educational attainment of indigenes

For nearly 70 years of the existence of Assemblies of God and varying numbers of years of existence of other denominations, a woefully negligible number of schools were also established as listed earlier; in fact, disappointing! According to Nambont, (1988), the only Government schools were located at the major towns namely Nakpanduri, and Bunkpuruguby 1960, then Binde in 1966 and Bimbagu in the late 1970s. This implies that, all pupils from surrounding villages such as Yunyoo, Jiimbale, Bunbuna, Najong, Gbankoni, Kambatiak, Kambagu and the rest had to cover not less than six miles to get to the nearest school, and sometimes had to reside in those communities.

## 6. Way Forward

It is incumbent on all stakeholders as a matter of urgency, consonant with the UNESCO Policy of safeguarding both Tangible and Intangible cultures across the world to tackle the issue with passion and the sense of belongingness as a measure to restore and rejuvenate the 'accepted' indigenous cultural practices, moral values and virtues. Hence, every traditional area, divisional, community, suburb or neighbourhood, lineages and families in the catchment area and diaspora are encouraged by these findings to embark on what was christened in 2012 as 'Culture Resuscitating Programme', during a Bimoba social function in Bolgatanga, Upper East Region.

The propagators of the programme admit that despite there will be an extreme difficulty to re-invent the Koant Initiation System to acquire names (konsana), they call on all indigenes and affiliates to continue to name their children using the indigenous 'Bimoba Identity Names' such as Duut, Konlan, Lanbon, Konbet, Laar, Laari, Suuk, Gaani, Dindiok, Dubik, Labik, Laabik, Kombatik, Konlanbik, Dunwaak, Tanjon, Konduuk, Konjit, aside the Christian and other borrowed names. There are other proverbial names that must also not be left out in the exercise.

The programme mandates all heads of families and traditional areas to ensure there are elements of life indigenous music and dance performance at local social functions (especially funerals and durbars, rallies and whatever) using indigenous life instruments like Gingana, Yeri, Siyaari, Sayaki, Samboi, Naamiak, sawalikirii with life drummers doing the drumming act; and at every 15 minutes, dancers and drummers should switch to other styles, ensuring that all the nine (9) different dances are performed. We are all witnesses to how other ethnic groups pour out at gatherings in their full traditional regalia with typical instruments and accoutrements to perform varieties of dances.

Let us all relegate the soft (recorded) music to our Chamber & hall accommodation abodes where life performances cannot take place. Let us use our reordered music on pen-drives and memory cards on our ghetto-blasters and woofers, in our private cars because no life performance can take place in the car and allow open-yard events to be done with life performance. As it stands now, one only finds people dancing to a tune emanating from loud speakers; but who, and where the drummers are, remains a big question for each well-meaning ethnic Bimoba to provide answer.

Let us also re-discover our brand of smocks first by encouraging the weaving of specified coloured-fabrics and the crafting of the smocks itself to popularize the brand before we embark on adorning in them. Let us encourage the speaking of the dialect (Moar) at all family homes wherever we find ourselves. It would be a disaster to test some typical Bimoba men, women, boy or girl to read the recently translated Bimoba language (Moar) Good News Bible. So, we are all encouraged to purchase the Moar primers, learn to read, and teach our children how to read in Moar. Modernity is a welcomed element in cultural dynamism and the Bimobas deserve to be modern, however, the traditional and culture cannot be allowed to be swallowed up by this 'menace' where all forms of traditional music and drumming have been migrated into Electronic form and played on sound systems for dancers to only dance.

By this paper, we appeal to the Bishop of Catholic Dioceses of Navrongo-Bolgatanga to reconsider the request for the opening of a Catholic Senior High School whose proposal was submitted in 2012 by the Parish Priest and leadership of St. James Catholic Church Najong No.2, to be named after the founder of the Najong No.2 Catholic Chapel in 1972. The chief and people have allocated a vast land for that dream to come true.

## 7. Conclusion

The study sought to outline the contributions of Christianity and the level of influence on the ethnic Bimobas. Inexhaustive findings kept unfolding, requiring all and sundry to synchronize the strategies for the betterment of the people. There is the need to recognize the potentials and shortfall of religious missions among the people and call for re-awakening of cultural and artistic groups to reverse the trend to help guide and preserve the inherent and intrinsic cultural values, spiritual and educational needs of the ethnic Bimobas in Ghana.

## 8. Acknowledgement

It is prudent to give credit to the Catholic Missionaries whose approach to introduce Christianity was a bit anthropologically friendly and flexible. This approach, in fact was seen by the protestant denominations a 'paganic'. The Catholics doctrine had most of its hymn conforming to the traditional drum pitches specifically *Konbena and Kontaar*. So, all Catholic outstations could be heard singing Christian songs with either of the two traditional music. With the Protestant Churches, this was 'Haram'. I can state without hesitation that a lot of the Catholic faithful suffered these Protestant-perceived humiliations anytime they were found among them.

Nevertheless, all well-meaning Clergymen of the assemblies of Ghana deserve credit for their role in contributing their quota towards achieving the objective of the cultural resuscitating programme. It is very evident to see dynamic leaders of the church adorning in our envious traditional outfits (the smock) at Christian gatherings and social functions and freely mingling with indigenes at social functions.

All other Christian denominations are applauded for their roles in helping the ethnic group to restore the dignity and sustenance of their cultural heritage. All opinion leaders and resource persons who have granted me one-on-one interview in order to make this article a success is hereby acknowledge.

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