

Research Article

# Communication Dynamics and the Regulation of 'Conflivivality' Interactions Among the Fang: The Ôbangam and the Agnôs as Models for the Reappropriation of Endogenous Knowledge.

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Ôbangam and Agnôs are two concepts taken from the Fang cultural context. The first expresses that solidarity principle which forces an individual to systematically take his parent's side. The second reflects an anchored dynamic in the relationships between siblings in the event of conflict, with the logic of excluding any external mediation. This article unravels the Ôbangam and the Agnôs as manifestations of commitment. Of this custom of knowing how to live through conflict and conviviality, this results in the neologized term "conflivivality."

**Keywords:** Ôbangam, Agnôs, Involvement, social interactions, « conflivivality ».

**INTRODUCTION**

In a politically organized community, it is customary for the perpetrator of a crime to be punished according to the law in force. Naturally, this calls for a certain impartiality in resolving the situation in question. This way of operating is shared by the Fang people, as by others, where the law is a social value. This explains why conflicts between individuals are referred to the body that judges social problems, the village 'Abaa' or traditional chieftaincy (instituted by the colonial administration), depending on jurisdiction. However, as law and justice are concerned, there is also another approach recognised by the Fang, which establishes 'Obangam' as a spirit of absolute solidarity. From this perspective, it would seem that the Fang people derive from their social organisation a logic that imposes partiality as a normalised reflex to act in defence of one's brother. Unconditional bias is established as a norm. In the same way as 'Obangam', the Fang also recognise Agnôs or 'conflivivality' as an instrument for managing relations within a sibling group.

This article sets out to theorise and make intelligible the models taken from these ancestral practices, which still govern fratro-fraternal relations today. To do this, it first clarifies the concept of 'Obangam' and 'Agnôs', and then explores the possibilities of

inserting them into situations of communication and social interaction in relation to interpersonal relations, with a view to inter-state and even inter-continental relations. We begin with a brief overview of the Fang-Beti-Bulu people, known as Ekang.

**1. Research Objective**

The primary objective of this study is to theorize and render intelligible the endogenous models of social regulation—specifically **Ôbangam** and **Agnôs**—which continue to govern "fratro-fraternal" relations within the Fang community. By decoding these ancestral practices, the research aims to analyze how "unconditional bias" and "conflivivality" function as normative communicative frameworks. Ultimately, this article seeks to provide a scientific basis for the reappropriation of local knowledge systems as viable alternatives for contemporary social management in Africa.

**2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research is grounded in the **Anthropology of Communication**, utilizing the concept of "**Conflivivality**" as a central analytical lens. It moves beyond the Western paradigm of impartial justice to explore a **communicative rationality of solidarity**. The framework interrogates the dialectic

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between institutional law (represented by the colonial-style chieftaincy) and the symbolic, ritualized space of the *Abaa*. By framing *Ôbangam* as a "normalized reflex of defense," the study draws on theories of **social mediation** and **cultural identity** to explain how partiality is established as a communicative norm for group preservation.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a **qualitative and ethno-communicational methodology**. It relies on an analytical and descriptive approach to decode the symbolic interactions and discourse within traditional Fang regulatory bodies. Through the observation of social palavers and the analysis of oral traditions, the methodology focuses on the **ritualized communication** that occurs during conflict resolution. This approach allows for a deep mapping of how *Agnôs* (conflivivality) and *Ôbangam* (absolute solidarity) are operationalized in real-world communicative events to maintain social equilibrium.

### 4. EXPECTED RESULTS

The study anticipates several key findings:

- **Theorization of the "Agnôs" Model:** Providing a formal communicative definition of "conflivivality" as a sophisticated mode of interaction where tension and cohesion coexist through specific rhetorical and ritual strategies ;
- **Validation of the Logic of Partiality:** Demonstrating that *Ôbangam* is not a disruption of justice, but a structured communicative system of resilience that prioritizes community integrity over abstract legalism ;
- **Rehabilitation of the "Abaa" as a Communication Hub:** Identifying the village palaver hut as a vital socio-technical device for mediation, offering more culturally resonant outcomes than exogenous judicial systems ;
- **Epistemological Shift:** Contributing to the decolonization of Communication Studies by showcasing how African endogenous knowledge offers unique, effective models for managing complex human interactions.

## I. SOCIO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF FANG PEOPLE

### 1. *Origins*

This article does not go back over the migratory movements of the Fang, but we feel it is necessary to give a brief presentation of the origins of these people, who are currently found in certain Central African countries. Despite an abundant bibliography tracing their migratory route from Egypt, studies on the origins of the Fang do not yet agree perfectly on where they come from. Indeed :

The legend of the Mvet and some historian-researchers (from Gabon) claim that the Fang came from Egypt and migrated along the Nile. When they arrived in Cameroon, the most tired and the least courageous decided not to continue the migration and to settle there, while the strongest and bravest crossed the rivers. Some crossed the River Ntem to Gabon, while others crossed the River Kyè to Equatorial Guinea. (Akare Biyoghe, Béatrice: 2024, p. 40).

For more explanations, view ( ONJI'IESONO, 2015)

## II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF ÔBANGAM AND AGNÔS

At first sight, the spelling of *Ôbangam* may be different depending on whether you are in Gabon, Cameroon or elsewhere where the Fang-Beti are found, because the pronunciation of the word differs here and there. But it's the same thing. As for the concept of *Agnôs*, it is difficult to find variations in pronunciation in the languages of the Fang cultural area.

### 1. *Ôbangam*

As mentioned above, this term is used in the languages of the Fang cultural area. Etymologically, the word *Ôbangam* or *Ôbangame* is made up of *Ôban*, which means group, troop, in the sense of a coalition of people united for the same cause, as if to fight together, as a sign of the union that makes for strength.

And *Ngàm*, which means the camp, the party, the team. This shows that the two words together

represent an interpersonal communication situation, with two antagonistic or belligerent parties.

As a result, it is possible to understand the word *Ôbangam* as part of an environment of defence in the event of conflict or crisis, and by extension, of belligerence.

For the Beti, *Ôbangam* is *Ibôm kama*. The meaning of the latter can be determined by breaking down the word as follows: *Ibôm* meaning caning, physical correction and *Kama* evoking the notion of group. It refers to the punitive treatment inflicted by a group of people on a third party, in retaliation for a conflict between the group and one of its members. The *Ôbangam* is therefore accepted as the natural reflex to defend one's brother systematically and in all circumstances, rightly or wrongly. It also evokes a fraternal coalition formed to confront threats. In other words, in the event of a conflict, you are obliged to stand by your brother's side, without calling out for help. It also means taking your brother's side, without obeying a logic of justice but rather of teamwork. Logically, it means joining forces to defend the cause of a member of the group or to protect the common interests of the group, clan, ethnic group, etc.

According to Cyriaque Simon Pierre Akomo Zoghe (2013), making *Obangam* means joining forces. It is in this sense that a Fang proverb exalts the *Obangam* as follows: "*Eyeng biang ka'a obangame we na éne atek*". This literally means: if the totem has no bias, it is weak. To better understand the spirit of this philosophy, the explanation is that everyone must defend their own in all circumstances. In this context, to be mine means that a relationship unites us; a blood or fraternal bond. By extension, the person with whom we develop a relationship can be considered to be ours. This is the original context in which *Ôbangam* is applied.

## 2. The Agnôs

The Agnôs is mainly part of the frater-fraternal relationship, and forms the backdrop to relations between uterine brothers, which are at times convivial and at other times conflictual. It is from this reality that the term 'conflivality' was born as a neologism built around the combination of conflict and conviviality, to take on the meaning of a relational existence within a sibling group, understood as brothers and sisters of the same parents, where it is natural to experience situations of discord. However, *Agnôs* also evokes the ability or obligation of brothers in conflict to find common ground themselves, without external control or mediation by a third party. They are invested with a

sense of honour so as not to create a definitive communication breakdown between them because they are related by blood. They have an obligation to ensure the continuity of family togetherness.

In this approach, everything remains within the family, with no external intervention. This endogenous mechanism is directly in line with the idea of "dirty laundry being washed in the family". One of Agnôs' original principles is to be conscious of not spilling her brother's blood. It is in this sense that a Fang proverb rightly illustrates it in these terms: "*Monenyang mbôt a ne meki m'ôyem: abim, ô mini; abim avo'o, ô tui ôsi*". Literally, this means that a brother is like blood flowing from a wound on the tongue; some of it will inevitably be swallowed and some will be spat out. This metaphor is based on the cohabitation of the tongue and teeth in the oral cavity. Teeth can bite and injure the tongue. However, the two will not give up "living" together because of this conflict. The tongue often helps to clean teeth of debris. So the wise thing to remember is that you have to be tolerant when you live together, because each needs the other to flourish in a sibling relationship.

Seen from this angle, *Agnôs* is therefore inherent in *Agnang* (siblings, in the sense of brothers and sisters having been nourished by the same mother's womb). This clearly means that it is in the context of *Bobenyang* (siblings with the possibility of polygamy) or more precisely *Bobenyafô'o* (children of the same mother and father) that *the Agnôs* manifests itself.

To sum up, *Ôbangam* and *Agnôs*, observed in Fang-Beti-Bulu communities and understood as objects to be questioned and theorised from a heuristic approach, are intended to be understood as endogenous instruments for managing interpersonal relations. The *Ôbangam* manifests itself at a macro-community level as a code of conduct that requires the Fang man to take the side of his brother (close or distant cousin, brother of the same clan with a kinship link) in the event of a conflict with a third party. The *Agnôs* is established as a situation that enshrines the peaceful coexistence of conflict and conviviality in a family's frater-fraternal relations. This term refers to a situation of conflictual communication between brothers born of the same parents. Without any external intervention, these brothers naturally return to the conviviality that remains the foundation of a well-experienced sibling relationship.

## III. EXPRESSIONS OF OBANGAM AND AGNÔS

In several Fang regions, there is a rallying cry that is used as a motto. Fang people sometimes greet each other by chanting the following slogan: "*Moñang mbôt: mintègn mi nnem ya obangam*". Literally, this means that you have an unshakeable attachment to your brother and the natural pact of *Obangam*.

### 1. *Obangam in Fang communities*

Among the Fang, siblings are known as *Agnang* or *abum a nyiè*. It is the natural bond that unites brothers from the same mother, with the image that they were nourished by the same breast. Between brothers, it is normal for everyone to stand together in self-defence. But to speak of *Obangam* between these people is first and foremost to consider that everyone has a duty to protect the weakest member of the family in the face of adversity or rivalry developed by the other children of the village or region. One of the principles governing the *Obangam* is that none of these brothers should evolve on the fringes of the family. In addition, the law of numbers is an important consideration. The number of individuals is often a deterrent in interpersonal relations. When there are several children in a family, alluding to polygamous households by way of example, the family represents a force in the village community. It would be difficult for one of the children in this household to be attacked by another without attracting serious reprisals. In this type of configuration, the smallest families in terms of number of children operate strategically by joining forces with the largest, thus developing a social relationship based on a "non-aggression pact". Alliances are formed between families for reasons of defence and security. To ensure that such alliances last over time, they are maintained through various models. The strongest group imposes itself on the others. Behind its duty to protect the smallest, it also has rights to enforce:

- No opposing or challenging the viewpoint of the strongest group;
- Always give precedence and favours to the stronger group. This sometimes means enlisting the minority to work in the fields for the stronger group.

It is within this relationship model that many families in Fang villages evolve, and this *Obangam* logic can last over time, sometimes for a lifetime. In concrete terms, while the children are playing together in the village courtyard, for example, an argument may arise between two of them. At that point, the existing camps spontaneously form and regroup, initially with a view to calming things down. But if the situation degenerates, each group will defend its members. The crisis becomes

widespread if one of the members of a group exercises a de facto power. This is known as *Ebulandum*, or general brawl. It is at this point that the number of people involved can be significant or unfavourable for the different camps.

On the other hand, if *the Abââ* or the traditional chiefdom - both in their role as bodies for the peaceful resolution of conflicts - are not directly involved in these situations, then the case is considered unlikely to degenerate and cause divisions within the village community. All the more so as children's disputes are generally settled at this level. Recourse to the customary court as a dispute resolution body is not necessary. Given that the *ôbagaméen* spirit inhabits each member of the Fang community and is known to all, this can be situated at the level of situations arising from 'joking alliances' (Niagalé and Fahiraman, 2017 a.).

. The Fang are familiar with 'joking kinship'; this is *the Avusoo* established between two clans, each knowing that situations that shock one clan can be mocked by the other, without this creating clan conflict. The concern here is "to safeguard social cohesion. When traditional mechanisms are mobilised, the aim is above all 'to preserve the interests of the group or community and not to promote or defend individual rights' ( Niagalé and Fahiraman, 2017 b.).

## 2. *International scope of Obangam and Agnôs*

### 2.1. *Socio-cultural aspects*

African countries have become states whose territories were drawn up by the former colonial powers. One of the social consequences of this has been the dismemberment of several ethnic groups. In fact, several countries sharing common borders are home to the same peoples, who are divided but maintain natural fraternal and historical relations, forming identical communities on a cultural and social level. This proximity also gives rise to identity-based withdrawal, with the aim of reinforcing, if not stitching together, the original fraternal links. In Central Africa, for example, the Fang-Beti-Bulu, known as Ekan, are often in a position of *Obangam*, showing solidarity in certain positions that affect the honour and dignity of the people. Ekan interests are protected by cross-border groupings, using social networks to develop group communication, with evocative names deliberately chosen to illustrate this point of view: *Biè-Biè* ("Just us"), *Mone Ntumu* ("Ntumu man"), *Bine Yevôl ayong mintae* ("We are Yevôl, a clan of solidarity") *Ayong Esakôran ese* ("All the *Esakôran* clan together"), and so on.

## 2.2. Safety

In international relations, alliances or agreements of various kinds (political, economic and military) exist between states. It is perhaps driven by the same *Obangam* reflex that the countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea, under the aegis of the United States of America, have drawn on the Fang social and cultural universe to name a military exercise *Obangame*. Following a brainstorming session between officers, who each proposed an operational concept in their own language that would faithfully reflect the idea of pooling individual efforts and resources to fight a common enemy, the name *Obangame* was chosen. It turned out that it was only in the Ekgang languages that this concept existed as a social reality. Former Cameroon Defence Minister Edgar Alain Mbeng'o, who chaired the *Obangame* military exercise, declared that "*in Beti and Fang languages, this term means 'solidarity', 'mutual aid' and 'synergy'*". He spoke of the need for the countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea to join forces to develop a common strategy to combat maritime piracy, kidnapping, trafficking in arms, drugs and other narcotics, the diversion of crude oil and all the other scourges that infest the Gulf of Guinea, making the maritime coastline of many states insecure. According to Guy Mvelle:

Faced with an increasing number of threats in the Gulf of Guinea, particularly maritime piracy, the "small states" in the area are choosing to act within the framework of regional organisations. This move reflects their increasingly assertive desire to build a form of strategic autonomy and reduce their dependence on the major world powers - an initiative that fits into a more global approach emerging in Africa, based on the Africanisation of defence and security issues on the continent(2020, DOI: 10.3917/ris.118.0035 p. 35-46)

As a result, the armies of the Gulf of Guinea countries inherit the term as a military practice or manoeuvre constituting "Regional exercises such as 'OBANGAME Express' are important to ensure that planning, coordination and communication work as intended to counter these threats that our countries face."

## **IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ÔBANGAM AND AGNÔS**

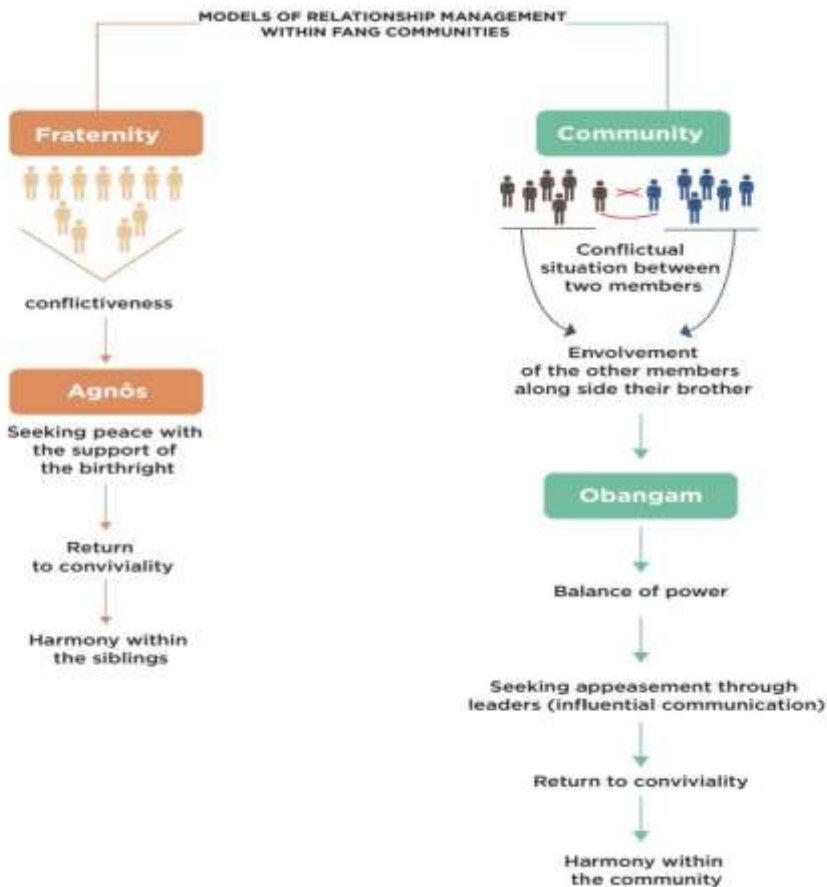
*Ôbangam* and *AgnôS* are not necessarily universally applicable models. It would be difficult to accept them as elements of knowledge without indicating that they are rooted in a specific knowledge environment. They are two concepts based on local knowledge and practices specific to a particular community, the Fang. However, it is possible to link them to the theory of cognitive justice. According to Shiv VISVANATHAN, it is necessary to recognise "the right of different forms of knowledge to coexist; this plurality must go beyond tolerance or liberalism and advocate an active recognition of the need for diversity. It requires the recognition of knowledge not only as methods, but also as ways of life.

Knowledge is seen as anchored in an ecology of knowledge in which each piece of knowledge has its place, its claim to a cosmology, its meaning as a form of life". Cognitive justice is not a lazy way of insisting that every piece of knowledge should survive as it is, where it is.

From another perspective, *Ôbangam* and *AgnôS* tie in with the theory of communities of practice developed by Etienne Wenger, which is defined as: "Groups of people who come together to share and learn from each other, face to face or virtually" (Wenger, *La théorie des communautés de pratique: apprentissage, sens et identité, Résumé de lecture commenté Solange St-Pierre*). For this author, the theory of the community of practice is rooted in the social theory of learning. He postulates that there are close links between the quest for meaning, practice, community and the impact of learning on identity. For WENGER, the community of practice is a group of people who share an interest or passion for a common practice and who learn to do it better by interacting (community) on a regular basis. This implies the commitment and participation of each individual within the community. For Wenger, "The process of engaging in a practice involves the whole person, both their actions and their thoughts". It also involves concrete actions because: "In one way or another, tasks must be accomplished, relationships relaxed, processes invented, situations interpreted, objects made and conflicts resolved." And: "To be able to engage in practice, you have to live in a world where it is possible to act and interact."

Interacting within the framework of conflict management in Fang communities is therefore based on the two major principles of *Ôbangam* and *AgnôS*, as explained throughout this article. For a better

understanding of these concepts, we propose the theoretical model below:



*Source: author's diagram.*

**CONCLUSION**

After reading this article, the result that emerges is twofold. Firstly, it clarifies the concepts of *Obangam* and *Agnôs* drawn from the Fang cultural area. Secondly, this research has enabled us to theorise the two models by proposing a summary diagram. Simply put, *Obangame* means systematically siding with your Fang brother, whoever he may be. Solidarity and mutual aid are shared, and a Fang cannot suffer where or next to his brother, because these are the values bequeathed to him by his ancestors. This says it all about the spirit that is truly rooted in Fang society. If the logic of ensuring the security of the group and defending its interests guides the *Obangam*, it is ultimately possible to insert this principle into the framework

of conflict resolution. One of the advantages is that *Obangam* leads to stronger coalitions to confront an enemy with a shared strategy. However, the scope of *Obangam* still needs to be circumscribed so that it does not become a means of expressing a form of biased justice. It would be better understood as a deterrent to any attempts at aggression by groups trying to destabilise an established order while threatening the interests of the community. Putting the *Obangam* model into practice in a variety of situations would help to secure the development process of family or social entities in the face of external threats. In the same vein, the *Agnôs* is seen as an internal mechanism for the peaceful management of relations between siblings. It is this vision that this article sets out to highlight

in a different way or to theorise, thus proposing the sharing of this traditional knowledge from the Fang cultural area as a model that could inspire an

analysis from other angles, from a heuristic point of view.

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**Oral source :**

Assako Abui Jean Lebon, (56) Esakôran from the village Evés, Ma'an (South Cameroon), traditional scholar met on 14 May 2017 at Elig Effa in Yaounde at his home.

**Explanation :**

Afa'a Biboo came from the village of Ekoumedoum and settled in Efoulan, in the department of Vallée du Ntem, arrondissement of Ma'an, some fifteen

kilometres from Ma'an, in the southern region of Cameroon. He was regarded as a wise and enlightened man who recounted the epic of the migration of the children of Afiri Kara, tracing the long march of today's Fang-beti people from the banks of the Nile in Egypt to Central Africa. He disappeared mysteriously, without a trace, one day in the early 1970s, aged around 90. He is said to have often predicted that no one would see either his body or his grave. This legend is still alive in the region.