

Coordonnateurs du numéro :
Albert JIOTSA & Saliou ABBA

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Éditorial

Confronté à un environnement conflictuel qui semble s'auto-reproduire, le Cameroun a le défi de réaliser et/ou préserver la cohésion sociale via un processus fécond de manifestation et d'incarnation de valeurs socio-identitaires constructives. Au regard du paysage socio-culturel camerounais, il existe un foisonnement étonnant de pratiques et de vécus liés à l'expression des identités humaines. L'on en vient parfois à se demander si cette pluralité insaisissable de mœurs, de par leur nature et leur ampleur ne contribuerait pas à transformer fondamentalement les relations interhumaines. À partir du lien qui existe entre la gouvernance locale et la stabilité des institutions socio-traditionnelles, il importe de retracer la dynamique qui se trouve à la base de la construction d'une identité nationale en contexte multiculturel. Dans chacune des quatre aires culturelles que compte le Cameroun (les Soudano-sahéliens, les Sawa, les Fang-Beti-Bulu et les Grassfields), de nombreux mécanismes institutionnels assurant à la fois la redistribution équitable et la gestion transparente du bien communautaire ont toujours été à l'avant-garde de la stabilité et de la cohésion sociale entre les peuples. Ce numéro spécial de la Revue Internationale des Sciences Humaines et Sociales, marque un point d'orgue sur l'analyse de ces mécanismes institutionnels en évoquant les différentes mutations qu'ils ont connus à travers le temps. Bien plus, il contribue à éclairer la lanterne de l'opinion sur les risques liés à une mauvaise appropriation des attributs identitaires communs dans un contexte de préservation de la cohésion sociale.

MFORTEH Stephen AMBE

Professeur titulaire des Universités
Chef du Centre National d'Éducation
MINRESI - Cameroun

Traditional Democratic “states” (Babungo and Ide): Lessons for governance, political stability and peace in Cameroon

**Godwill Kungso Ndzofa Eno, PhD,
The University of Dschang, Cameroon**

Abstract

In discussing democratic governance this paper argues that, the models of governance in the traditional “states” of Babungo and Ide were imbued with stable political institutions and mechanisms of governance, such as democracy, the balance of power, checks and balances. The people governed by their chiefs were very vigilant to hold tight and preserve their material, social, and spiritual needs; as well as conditions of life that guaranteed the political stability and survival of both the traditional political system and the “state”. Basing our findings on the analysis of existing secondary information in the form of published books, articles, journals, thesis and primary sources essentially based on critical interviews conducted in the field with varied informants. Our investigations reveal that, in the traditional “states” of Babungo and Ide, the activities and actions of the Fon and his government were checked by institutions of control and mechanisms provided for by the “constitutional ordering”. The *modus operandi* of these structures varied from one traditional state to another, with some incarnated by individuals or groups of individuals while others were platforms and open assemblies. The democratic governance models in the traditional “states” of Babungo and Ide, enabled a governance system where the control of the ruling authorities is a fundamental aspect of their governance civilisation. Traditional states provide real opportunities for building democracy and sustainable peace in Cameroon on local realities. They are multi-faceted in court cultures and forms of etiquette with ethics.

Key terms: Traditional States, Governance, Peace, Babungo, Ide, Bamenda Grassfields

Résumé

Cette étude s'intéresse aux institutions, structures et mécanismes de la gouvernance dans les "États traditionnelles" de Babungo et d'Ide situés dans les Grassfields de Bamenda, au Cameroun. Ces modèles de gouvernance basés sur les valeurs démocratiques notamment le modèle consensuel, les mécanismes de prise de décision, les freins et contrepoids, les rapports de force et l'état de droit, enracinés sur les valeurs traditionnelles et civilisationnelles ont permis la gouvernance démocratique et la stabilité politique de ces royaumes. En outre, les institutions et structures de pouvoir fonctionnent selon "l'ordre consitutionnel" établi ou les chefs (fons) n'ont pas de pouvoir exclusif au vu d'une separation de pouvoir consacrée dans les domaines de la gouvernance. Cette article en conclusion demontre que la gouvernance démocratique est une civilisation ancienne qui donne une oppotunité réelle, permettant la construction et la pratique d'une gouvernance démocratique sur les réalités locales afin d'assurer une paix durable et la cohésion sociale au Cameroun.

Mots clés: États traditionnels, Gouvernance, Paix, Babungo, Ide, Grassfields de Bamenda.

Introduction

More than half a century since African countries attained independence, many if not all are still grappling with issues of governance which includes the construction of institutions, procedures and processes in the arts of state management. At the dawn of independence, African leaders adopted the colonial governance structures built on the pillars of western democracy, with the model of one man, one vote as the means of political power devolution, all of that inscribed in European-styled constitutional models. The control of government actions to achieve good governance, and check the abuse of power by the ruling authorities, has gained currency and become part of Africa's political lexicon. Yet, most African states with Cameroon inclusive are bedevilled with the crisis of governance and political instability. In the construction process of Cameroon as a state, the governance system was based simply on identity (ethnic groups) and colonial language lines (French and English), with no considerations on the values, civilisations, democratic cultures and practices within the existing traditional "states". The paradigm of governance borrowed from

the Fifth French Republic, lacked legitimacy, as leadership failed in building a state along lines of a Cameroonian identity, with local democratic realities. This form of governance has little or nothing to do with the values, civilisations and the democratic cultures of the traditional “states” that have been resilient within the modern nation-state structure.

This paper intends to show that achieving political stability for Cameroon depends largely on building viable democratic state organs, structures, institutions, procedures and processes on grassroots models of traditional “state” governance systems, drawing inspirations from its values and civilisations. In discussing the practice of traditional governance using the examples of the Bamenda Grassfields polities of Babungo and Ide, it presents the constitutional ordering of these fondoms and their socio-political institutions. It seeks to explain the dual authority system and the political power institutions and structures within the traditional authority system, as well as the control of government action within the traditional political systems.

Dual traditional authority held by two separate and autonomous power centres in Babungo, and the control of government action in Ide are used to illustrate the interaction of the structures of control and power in the practice of governance within the traditional political system. The politics of power and control within the traditional governance system highlights the competition between different elements of the political structures, which present the existence of balance of power amongst them as enshrined in the “constitutional ordering”.²⁹ In some polities, it raised strong debates on the institutional pre-eminence and competitions which demonstrate the existence of democratic vitality in the traditional political systems of the Bamenda Grassfields. These assured not only their independence, but also the interdependence of the political structures that make up for traditional authority governance in the region.

Babungo and Ide are two polities located in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, precisely in the North West Region.

²⁹This was the root bearer and the basis from which traditional institutions involved in the practice of traditional governance emanated. The legality and legitimacy for their existence were in the “constitutional order” and was also the pillar that guaranteed the sovereignty of the traditional “State”.

Located in Ngoketunjia Division, Babungo constitute one of the thirteen fondoms in the Ndop plain. Babungo is among the polities visited by the German Explorer, Eugen Zintgraff in 1889 on his way to the Adamawa region. The name Ndop is derived from Babungo, which denotes their place of origin, Ndobu. Ide is one of the polities located in the Menchum Valley, Menchum Division. Though very small in terms of population as compared to the Aghem polities in the Wum plateau, its well-structured political and governance system, is of interest to this paper.

1. Dual Traditional Authority System and Democratic Governance in Babungo Fandom

The dual traditional authority system in its widely recurrent feature, where there exists at the top of the “state” structure one or several councils which balance the power wielded by the fon. In this type of traditional political system, traditional authority is not concentrated in the hands of an individual. Such a system is designed and articulated to guarantee checks and balances between the governing institutions and the personalities that incarnate them. In the practice of traditional governance, the rule of law is enshrined in the custom and tradition of the people and those to ensure its stability are never the appointees or favourites of the leaders. In some cases, the group of religious specialists were represented either by a group of persons or individuals and hold their titles by right of inheritance.³⁰

With regards to most matters, unanimity has to be reached in the council and its decisions are consensual then binding, although the Fon can veto against them. Again the fon’s decisions have to be approved by the council and the propositions of the council have to be agreeable to the fon. Within the constituted authority themselves, there was a body of the followers of the fon and a body of people or an individual who could oppose him when they thought that his intentions were conflicting with those of the fondom, at large, or with the welfare of the people. Thus, any attempt to bring about reform or change in any direction must be consensual, if not resistances and in some cases, out blown conflicts were usually the outcome of any attempt where consensus was absent. But neither

³⁰ For more read Godwill Kungso, “Traditional Authority Governance Systems in the Bamenda Grassfields, 1888-2008”, Ph.D. Thesis in History, The University of Yaounde 1, 2019.

the fon nor the council can rule alone. The traditional authority system of the polities of Babungo and Ide are not concentrated in the hands of the Fon alone. In this traditional political systems, political and social powers were exerted through socio-political institutions.

1. 1. The Practice of Traditional Governance in the polity of Babungo

The practice of governance refers to the exercise of political power by the institutions and structures in the traditional political system in an administrative machinery or bureaucracy which indicates the existence and functioning of a government.³¹ The practice of traditional governance on African kingdoms dealt with “the maintenance and the establishment of social order, within a territorial framework, through the organised exercise of coercive authority, by the use, or the possibility of the use of physical force”.³² The interaction of the political institutions and structures of power and control within the traditional authority system in accordance with generally accepted norms and values enshrined in the customs and traditions of the people, indicated the existence of a governance system. In examining the political power configuration at the helm of the traditional “state”, procedures and proceedings, the mechanisms for the control of government actions in the polities of Babungo and Ide, provide avenues for the interaction of various political institutions and structures show different configurations of power relationships in the traditional authority governance systems.

1. 2. Political Institutions and Power Structures in Traditional Democracy

One significant way to understand the practice of democratic governance and its consensual values within the traditional political system of the Bamenda Grassfields is to study its various political institutions and socio-political power structures. They are crucial in as far as the concrete expression of democratic idea of the people is concerned. The traditional “States” of the Bamenda Grassfields had organised, well-entrenched, highly structured and sophisticated political institutions of governance through which power and

³¹Abotchie, Chris, “Has the position of the chief becomes Anachronistic in contemporary Ghanaian politics?” in *Chieftaincy in Ghana*, Sub-Sahara Publishers, Accra, Ghana, 2006, p.171.

³²Ibid, p, 171.

authority in the political system was exercised. These institutions consisted of elaborated bodies that acted in some circumstances as law enforcement agencies that guaranteed the full respect of customs and traditions habitually obeyed by all. The distinctions in the institutions of governance will be shown to be not one of size, nor even of structural form, but in principle an ideological construct that was backed by the political and ritual community subscribing to a single constitution, from which emerged particular institutional organisation with well-defined roles and limits.³³

Political institutions in the traditional “states” of the Grassfields are the real structures of democratic governance. These institutions “were a close arena for political debate operating on a strictly inward flow of information and churning out decisions with the public appearance for consensus”.³⁴ The traditional authority system was incarnated by traditional political institutions which implemented traditional governance. It was also centred on sacred kingship,³⁵ and a cult of dead kings usually to give credibility and importance to the institutions and pay homage to the ancestors, as Fon Zofoa II of Babungo wrote about the traditional bag of Tita Sorgho,

(...) as we grew up and saw it...the traditional bag is a state one belonging to the people of Babungo. It has remained there for many years of the following Fons who have reigned over Babungo village as Sake I, Nguinetas, Nyifuan, Ndofoan, Fuan Lavesse, Yavessa, Nkangfuan, Bikuefuan, Sevesse, Fuan Folung, Nka-

³³ By traditional institutions and power structures, we refer to those instruments of governance uncontaminated either by colonial or post-independent modifications or distortions. They are a configuration or combination of behavioural patterns shared by a plurality and focused upon the satisfaction of some group need. It is part of a culture, a pattern segment of the way of life of a people. In many cases, these political structures were complementary, in spite of their unavoidable variations as seen in the discussions of state formation in the region. These instruments of traditional governance (institutions and power structures) had a number of important common elements and features. Traditional institutions and power structures were in some cases closed societies of retainers with governmental functions.

³⁴ Ian Fowler, “Babungo, A Nineteenth Century Ndop Plain Chiefdom, Cameroon”, Ph. D. Thesis, London, 1990, p. 66.

³⁵ The “Tikar” chiefdoms have dialectical variations of sacred kingship. To Chilver and Kaberry, the term “Tikar” is a political term implying the legitimacy of sacred kingship.

nyasse, Nchaifuan, Zenkwini, Nyichikew, Nsaingui II, Sake II, Zofoa I, Fuanyang and the present Fon of Babungo(...).³⁶

Tifuan (Tifoa) and Traditional Governance in Babungo

*Tifuan*³⁷ had as basic political function within the traditional governance model, the distribution of certain public rights and prerogatives among the various leaders in their social, ritual and governance activities.³⁸ It was the central axis of the traditional political system and the executive arm of the traditional authority system. The regulatory society gave the political system the rationale for the mythology that helped to establish the traditional governance system and the divine right of the “state” functionaries in the fonom. It legalised political power through rituals and the basis of the traditional “state”. It is the ruling authority and without it, there will be anarchy. It was the political institution that bear most directly on the relations between the Fon and the people, which is between the ruler and the ruled.

The authority of this body was of an imposed kind and its agents could not be held to account by the populace. In other words, nobody knew who it was.³⁹ Though it was believed to be supporting the Fon, for without it there would be disorder, it could immobilise the palace and fine the Fon for flagrant disregard for the custom and tradition, for example, persistently rejecting the advice of the Bah in Babungo, It could depose the Fon, but could not depose the

³⁶ N.A.B, file No B.3128, Letter of Protest to the District Officer, 25th July 1970, p, 357.

³⁷ *Tifuan* literally means the Father of the Fon. The origin of *Tifuan* in the fonom of Babungo, dates back to the period following the establishment of Babungo, about the middle of the eighteenth century. More to this, the completing elements of *Tifuan* see Kungso in “Traditional Authority Governance Systems”.

³⁸ The constituted authority in the kingdom of Babungo. The configuration of political relations between the institutions and structures in a dual authority system had an umbilical link between the Fon as leader and the Bah as head of the constituted authority (*Tifuan*) and the legislative organ. In content and in structure, it was in Babungo a sacred society with sacra of gongs and named masks. One day in the week (*Nkumse*) was reserved for it. Members met in session and no one else in the chieftdom could fire a gun, strike a drum or go to the farm on pain of punishment. In Babungo, the constituted authority was an institution with many facets- some organs came out only at night and others during the day.

³⁹ Kungso, “Traditional Authority Governance Systems”.

Bah.⁴⁰ Examining this disposition within Babungo's political system, Ian Fowler concluded that “the Fon rules during the day and the Bah rules at night” in the Babungo Fondom.⁴¹ This institution provided democratic avenues for debates and veritable grounds for operating traditional governance.⁴²

Tifuan announces the death of the Fon and the Bah in Babungo. It supervises the mortuary and enthronement ceremonies of the Fon, communicated events and decisions to the people (*Sor'ob Tifuan*), collected tributes and organised communal work both in the palaces of the Bah and the Fon. This executive body of the traditional government kept records of all tribal events, decided the dates for the performances of royal cults, the annual dance and the planting season. The ritual powers of this body were associated with the fertility of the land and its people, the cult of the royal ancestors and a sacred kingship. In Babungo it was charged with the responsibility to oversee the proper functioning of the traditional authority governance system.

The Bah (Institution of Power and Control) and the Fon (Institution of Power and Authority)

In the dual traditional authority system, the distribution of power and authority is not decided nor is being derived from the fon. Power and authority are incarnated in the customs and tradition from which the traditional political authorities and institutions emanate. The exercise of power and authority must derived legitimacy based on one or on a number of factors such as the consent of the people, law, customs and traditions. Its effectiveness, impartiality and fairness in treatment of subjectiveness are based on the "eternal yesterday". Here the degree to which change can be handled or brought about to achieve necessary reforms in the chieftdom must be sanctified through the unimaginably ancient recognition and habitual orientation to conform and agreed upon by the different power centres that make up for such a traditional authority system.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Fowler, “Babungo a study of Iron Production”, p. 25.

⁴² Forde and Kaberry, *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, p, 287.

⁴³ In the dual authority system, the traditional political systems are made up of two or more power centres placed on an equal wave length or strength within the traditional authority system. In its constitutional dispensation the traditional

The traditional authority governance system of Babungo fits rightly, where duality in its traditional political system clearly exerts a good reference. In the traditional political system of Babungo, the Bah⁴⁴, referred to as the *Bah Tijuan* (founder of Babungo's traditional authority system and head of the constituted authority (*Tijuan*), while the fon is referred to as *Tie Vengo*, the administrative and executive head of the chiefdom. This is evidenced of the existence of a dual authority system whereby there are two "equal" power centres in the chiefdom.

The Bah founded the ruling dynasty with the laws governing both the people and the institutions. In this process, the Bah arrogated much power and authority with yet another title *Bigbai*, meaning the root bearer of the chiefdom and head of the traditional institutions of governance, while the head of the chiefdom, the Fon⁴⁵ is the executive head. In the "constitutional" arrangement of the traditional authority system, the Fon had administrative powers while the political and spiritual powers were vested in the Bah. In the polity of Babungo, the Fon was allowed to direct the activities of the chiefdom, settled disputes mainly by arbitration and punish some offences committed by members of the polity.⁴⁶

The administrative powers of the Fon were largely functional and limited to the obedience of the people. The conditions for obedience on the part of the people, marked the social power of the Fon which was guaranteed by rightful succession, coordinated by the Bah under the supervision of *Tijuan*.⁴⁷ Since the power of the Fon was generated from the rightful source, popular consent was guaranteed and good social order established. Such a social order was backed by the political and spiritual powers of the Bah. The Bah had established rights within the social order to determine policies,

political system does not give any clear edge to any one power centre over the other.

⁴⁴ The Bah is custodian of the custom and tradition and guarantor of the "constitutional ordering" in Babungo. He represents the institution of control and checks on the Fon and ensures the proper respect and application of the customs and tradition, as per the "constitutional" dispensations.

⁴⁵The Fon was one of such personalities constituted by custom and tradition. He directed the activities of the fonom and social power was vested in him. Though, he enjoyed a number of prerogatives and privileges, but has not gotten exclusive political powers in the polity.

⁴⁶ Kungso, "Traditional Authority Governance Systems".

⁴⁷ Ibid.

acted as a leader and directed from within the traditional political system of Babungo. In Babungo, any attempt to bring about change or reform in its constitutional dispensation by the Fon or Bah had met stiff resistance with the outcomes being traditional authority feud in the polity.

In its traditional authority system, the Fon in Babungo has two status, dependent ruler and sacred kingship.⁴⁸ Based on its tradition of origin and the establishment of traditional authority of the chiefdom, Babungo is described as having a contractual and secular nature of chieftaincy.⁴⁹ Here, the Fon is largely dependent on the *Bah-Tifuan*, as he was chosen and given only limited powers. The traditional authority system shows the dependency of the Fon on the Bah and the people. The sovereignty of the Babungo chiefdom does not reside with the Fon, but in the constituted authority, *Tifuan*, and *Tifuan* is not the property of the Fon.⁵⁰ The Fon belongs to *Tifuan* as *Tifuan* is the supreme authority of the land.

The dual traditional authority system gives room for checks and balances within the traditional political system. The actions of the Fon were to be in line with the customs and traditions of the chiefdom. The Fon was not there to execute just his will for his personal pleasure. In Babungo, the Bah protected both his position as the political and spiritual authority in the chiefdom and in the institutions he incarnates. The Bah (as head of *Tifuan* in Babungo) influenced the decisions of the fon, checked and call the fon to order, when found guilty of violating the laws, customs and tradition of the land. He is a major political force and structure of power and control that guaranteed checks and balances, the rule of law, which are key governance and democratic principles within the traditional governance system of the Babungo. Such moments of control were done within the traditional political institutions and mostly at night. This is confirmed in Babungo, by Ian Fowler "That the Fon rules during the day and the Bah rules at Night".⁵¹

Holding the contention on Babungo as a traditional democratic "state", the polity has two separate, autonomous and interdependent power centres; the Fon, with power and authority,

⁴⁸ Kungso, "Traditional Authority Governance Systems", p, 196.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 196.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 196.

⁵¹ Fowler, "Babungo a study of Iron production", p, 25.

the *Bah-Tifuan*, who incarnates power and control within the traditional governance system. The traditional authority system was actually constituted by the Bah at the time of migration and place of settlement. It was the Bah who unanimously chose a Fon⁵² and made him leader of the chiefdom, who did not own the tiger skin, symbol of power and authority in Babungo.⁵³ The Bah put himself at the centre of the redistributive network. Though Babungo is under the leadership of the Fon, he had a limited degree of power and authority which is exercised through the constituted authority, *Tifuan* incarnated by a single individual the Bah.

1. 3. Democratic Governance and the Conflict of Authority in the Babungo Fandom

The coming into contact with the traditional authority systems with the colonial rule produced many challenges to traditional democracy.⁵⁴ The political culture and civilisation of the traditional political and governance systems of the Bamenda Grassfields fondoms came head on with alien cultures and civilisations. The result was, initially, adhoc and sometimes contradictory policy, informed by the colonial government's dilemma: wanting on the one hand, to preserve and strengthen traditional authority, and on the other hand, striving to allow for "modernising" influences in the form of Christianity and education.⁵⁵ The re-establishment of the Catholic mission, signified by the church building, institutionalised an elaborate web of conflict in the Grassfields: conflicts between the

⁵² Who happened to be his younger brother.

⁵³ Sainggi I, the first Fon of Babungo was the youngest of *Mange's* sons, who migrated alongside Fuanje and the Bah, in the company of *Tiefe Tifuan*. Before the group left from Mbenje, *Fuanje* asked Bah to take care of Sainggi to the place of rest. *Tiefe Tifuan* had the tiger skin which was symbol of power and authority of a fon. The Bah did not accept some other person to rule them when they had numerical strength. The Bah conspired against *TiefeTifuan* and took away the tiger skin, which he gave his younger brother Sainggi. *Tiefe Tifuan* on his return saw Sainggi comfortably sited on the tiger skin and was venerated by his brother, Bah and his retainers as Fon. Bah made Sainggi Fon of Babungo. For more see Kungso "Traditional Authority Governance Systems", p, 107.

⁵⁴Godwill Kungso "Conflict within the Tradional Authority System in Babungo, 1889-1990", Masters Dissertation in History, The University of Yaounde 1, 2013, p, 81.

⁵⁵Regarding Christian missions, both Germany and Britain were guided by pragmatic motives, and both co-operated with the missions to a certain degree in order to further their own aims: economic exploitation, the supply of labour, and the "socialisation" of the natives along colonial lines.

converts and the non-Christian population, between the leaders of the young Catholic Church and the traditional authority systems, between the colonial government and traditional authorities, and between the colonial government and church authorities.

In the face of these circumstances described above, the traditional political institutions and structures adapted and re-invented themselves in many different ways to survive both the German and later the British colonisations. The challenges left with the traditional authority systems included a volatile environment of conflicts (conflict within and between traditional authority systems), and the conflict between the traditional authorities and the Western Educated political class. Because these challenges were everywhere, the case of Babungo is the focus of this paper.

1. 3. 1. Conflict within the Traditional Authority system in Babungo

The conflict within the traditional authority systems in Babungo concerned the Fon and the Bah in a dual traditional political and governance system. In Babungo, the Fon was the traditional head of government but the successes of traditional administration depend on the close collaboration that exists between the Fon and the Bah. It is true that the power and the legitimacy of the Fon and the Bah were derived primarily from tradition, with specified roles and competences, and conflict brought about by colonisation developed as one of the successive Fons tried to encroach into the domain of activity of the Bah.

The German colonial policy of divide and rule provided a fertile ground for the emergence of the conflict between Fon Sainggi II and Tita Bah in Babungo. Fon Sainggi II was a major collaborator to the German colonial administration in the Ndop area.⁵⁶ The Bah became a victim of the colonial policy of divide and rule. This policy made the Fon see the Bah as his rival and an obstacle to the implementation of his friendship pact⁵⁷ with the Germans in the village. This pact consisted of the supply of labour for their plantations and road construction, pay tributes, porters and especially to remain an ally to the German colonial authorities in the

⁵⁶Kungso “Conflict within the Tradional Authority System”, p, 81.

⁵⁷ When Zintgraff visited Babungo in 1889, a friendship pact was reached between Fon Sainggi II and Zintgraff through gifts and servants.

area.⁵⁸ In return, the Germans were to help subdue all rebellious subjects to the Fon in Babungo.⁵⁹ Fon Sainggi II saw the German colonial administration as a new-found ally to change the balance of power within the traditional authority system in Babungo to his favour. It was in this context that Fon Sainggi II complained of the dominant position of the Bah within the traditional administration of the German colonial authorities.

The fon's progressive take-over of the functions of the Bah within the traditional administration, caused conflict between Fon Sainggi II and Tita Bah in Babungo. Fon Sainggi II exploited his position within the colonial administrative system, undermined and marginalised the Bah, thereby making the latter ineffective. In an effort to redress this, an open quarrel ensued. The Bah was looked upon as the “father of the Fon” in as much as he commanded *Tifuan* (the main administrative organ). *Tifuan* was the strength and source of power to the Fon. The Fon did not take the final decision on issues in the fondom. It was *Tifuan* to do so.⁶⁰ The Bah was charged with the responsibility of pronouncing decisions within *Tifuan*.⁶¹

With the implementation of the German colonial policy in 1900, the Fons did not subscribe any longer to the ideas of “council of elders,” which hitherto ruled the community. The Fons gave less respect to the main traditional administrative organ, *Tifuan*. Fon Sainggi II openly contested the importance attached to *Tifuan* and the key position of the Bah.⁶² Since *Tifuan* was a close arena for political debate operating on a strictly-inward flow of information and churning out decisions, the Fon may reach an agreement with the people, but made them know he does not have the final say. This was however, not the case as *Fuan* Sainggi II impressed on the people, prince and princesses that in *Tifuan* he decided. This sparked off tensions “as the notables considered the Fon to rule without any institutional backing”.⁶³

⁵⁸Kungso, “Conflict within the Tradional Authority System”, p, 49.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p, 46.

⁶⁰Ibid, p, 65.

⁶¹ Ibid, p, 65.

⁶²Kungso, “Conflict within the Tradional Authority System” p, 65.

⁶³ Ibid. p, 65.

The introduction and payment of tributes by Fon Sainggi II to the German colonial authorities was vigorously opposed by the notables of Babungo headed by Tita Bah. The Fon accepted that the people of Babungo were to pay a head tax of two German marks per head to the colonial authorities. Fon Sainggi II was responsible for tax collection and his agents used the local market days to check tax defaulters.⁶⁴ The imposition and collection of taxes was not agreed upon in the traditional administration of Babungo. The notables in Babungo saw this as an exploitation of the local people. The Bah saw the German presence in Babungo and believed that Fon Sainggi II had sold the chiefdom to the “white man” for money.⁶⁵ The views and knowledge about tax collection brought tension within the traditional authority system especially as the Fon collected the money without sharing it with the Bah. Just like the tax collection, the Fon did not discuss his friendship ties with the Germans to the Bah who was the head of *Tifuan*.

In 1909, the disagreement between the Fon and the Bah reached a stalemate. Fon Sainggi II reported Tita Bah for not paying the head tax and the community refusing to take part in the road construction supervised by the German colonial authority.⁶⁶ Tita Bah was arrested and taken to the German Fort at the Bamenda Up-Station (*Tison*). Tita Bah was beaten and imprisoned before being released.⁶⁷ The arrest and detention of the Bah in 1909 did not change the Bah from being the head of the traditional institutions (*Tifuan*), with a considerable degree of popularity, prestige and prerogatives.

In the application of the 1916 ordinance, under British rule, Fon Sainggi II appointed members into the political institutions of Babungo without prior consultation with the Bah. The entire council was rejected by *Tifuan*,⁶⁸ as Tita Bah saw it as an attempt to reduce his powers by creating a parallel administrative structure in the village. The Bah's views were similar to that of J.F.A. Ajayi;

⁶⁴ Chilver and Kaberry, “From Tribute to Tax in Tikar Chiefdoms”, *Africa* 30, vol 1, 1960, p, 34.

⁶⁵ Kungso, “Conflict within the Tradional Authority System”, p, 58.

⁶⁶Ibid, p, 74.

⁶⁷Ibid, p, 78.

⁶⁸ N.A.B 1473/25, J.C. Drummond-Hay, An Assessment Report on Babungo clan, 1929.

...The ancient judicial and administrative system [...] has been superseded by the native court. It had two unfortunate results. First, the reduction of the chiefs prestige and authority and secondly by the limited sentence permitted by the "D" grade court, there has been an increase in offences like adultery, formerly held to be a most heinous offence, especially when committed with a chief's wife [...]⁶⁹

Tita Bah was attacked by agents of Fon Sainggi II in the summer of 1926. The Bahs compound was invaded and they got him beaten. The Provincial court held the Fon responsible.

(...) cause 37/26. It appears that the agents of the Chief of Babungo and either carried out his orders or acted with his knowledge. If this is the case what action has been taken against the Chief?

(...) While it is most necessary to prevent the ill- treatment of the Bah, you must also keep in mind whether the immediate abrogation of native customs will not cause greater harm...⁷⁰

The above quotation seeks to illustrate Fon Sainggi's resentment to the dominating position of the Bah within the traditional authority system in Babungo. The conflict between Fon Sainggi II and Tita Bah came to an end without any basic change within the traditional institutions of power. Before his death in 1927, Fon Sainggi II had reconciled with Tita Bah and even confided to him his successor as required by the custom and tradition of the Babungo people.⁷¹ Tita Bah moved to the fon's Palace where he occupied it for some time and finally made public Fon Sake II as the new Fon of the Babungo people.⁷²

1. 3. 2. Resolution of the Crisis

The constituted authority (*Tifuan*), the main regulatory organ of traditional authority governance systems though under colonial rule, was able to keep the political unity of the Babungo fendom and end the crisis with the traditional authority systems.⁷³ Each time there

⁶⁹ J.F.A. Ajayi, "Colonialism. An Episode in African History", L.H. Grann and Peter Duignan, *Colonialism in Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p, 504.

⁷⁰ R.A.B, File N^o 1885/1882/1926, Memorandum, Divisional Officer Bamenda to the Resident Cameroons Province, Buea, 20th October 1926.

⁷¹Kungso, "Conflict within the Tradional Authority System", p, 78.

⁷²Ibid, p, 100.

⁷³Ibid, p, 78.

was a power struggle, *Tifuan* through the custom and tradition provided opportunities for reconciliation and to restore order. One of such avenues was during the death of the Fon, in which only the *Bab Tifuan* was charged to carry out the burial and enthronement rites involved. The Bah has exclusive powers to handle the operations, processes and procedures relating to this. Conversely, only Tifuan and its agents under the supervision of the Fon did carry out that of the Bah in the eventuality of his death. During such moments, the Bah reconciled with the new Fon, and re-established his authority, power and prestige to those who accompanied the Fon in contesting his prerogatives and privileges contained in the constitutional ordering of the Babungo.

2. The Control of Government Action within the Traditional Governance Systems

In many traditional states across the Bamenda Grassfields, the activities and actions of the Fon and his government were checked by the institutions of control through different methods provided for by the “constitutional ordering”. Having been given powers and authority, through legitimised charters and accepted norms, as seen above, such powers were not without effective checks, to achieve purposeful and positive leadership. Such checks were executed without fear and compliance. The *modus operandi* of these structures varied from one polity to another, with some incarnated by individuals or groups of individuals while others were platforms and open assemblies. Before examining the *Ka* forum which is an assembly to evaluate the chief in the polity of Ide, it is worthwhile to look at a few others elsewhere in the region.

2.1. The *Ka* Forum in Ide Polity

The *Ka* Forum was a platform for the expression of public opinion, public purpose, and public control of traditional government in the Metchum valley polity of Ide. The latent function of the *Ka* forum in Ide gave the people an opportunity to criticise the government of the elders and the chief.⁷⁴ It provided an

⁷⁴Masquelier, Bertrand M. "Structure and Process of political identity: IDE, A polity of the Metchum valley (Cameroon)", Ph.D. Thesis in Anthropology, university of Pennsylvania, 1978, pp, 90-114.

opportunity to judge “proper behaviour” of the chief. The purpose of the forum was to realign not only people’s actions but especially that of the Fon and the ruling “state” functionaries with the constitutional order (customs and traditions), general values and conscious goals of the polity. This was believed to be achieved through speech; words, according to folk theory, had this power to bring misfortune or to heal. In the forum, the words were pronounced to soothe and cure the ills that the words of everyday life had brought about, and the ritual invocation capped the discussion of the meeting with pronouncements that dismissed every kind of ill. The *ka* forum was a sort of ceremony in which the focus of verbal performance was on the reiteration of established standards of thought and action. Perhaps the most important goal of the forum was to rectify the general course of events and give them the proper direction.⁷⁵ The role of speakers was essentially “constitutional”: a speaker spoke as the guardian of fundamental and visible values upon which social relations were established.

The *Ka* forum dealt with the few dominant values of Ide. It was also convened in times of serious crisis, such as a Paramount Chief abusing his power, by ordering the war drum-beat played for another purpose, such as was the case in 1970,⁷⁶ or a ward chief who failed to bring game to the hunters and children to their wives. Such crises transcended the particular problems of the Fondom. In a joint forum, the issue was generalised by the speakers who dwelt on themes that pointed to the most general fallibilities of the Fon and of the traditional governance system.

Participants in the *ka* forum included every person who was able to attend. These people were grouped into quarters and wards. The forum allowed women, who, in principle, took no part in everyday male politick-ing-to move from the periphery of the political scene to the centre of the global political stage. In their discourse, women raised the picture of an alternative form of social relations, a form where the essential goals of the polity, life, food, descendants, and harmony prevailed. These goals were vested in the symbolism and ritual of the rule by the male elders and chiefs. By dwelling on these principles and values, the women played fully their constitutional role in male corridors of power. Moreover, women dialectically

⁷⁵Masquelier, "Structure and Process of political identity: IDE", pp, 90-114.

⁷⁶Ibid, pp, 90-114. This was the primary cause of the *Ka* forum.

posited themselves as other than a vehicle for the transmission over the generations of the forces of disorder (*ku-fufu*). Being relatively uninvolved in the politics of everyday living, they were better placed to express the hopes of the community as a whole.⁷⁷

The *Ka* forum of 1970 was brought about because of the changing role of the chief of Ide who had become responsible before the Cameroon State administration in the organisation of communal labour, including the maintenance of a school building located near *Bwofobon* ward.⁷⁸ But had lost his “traditional” authority, with no modern means, to mobilise communal labour at the level of the polity. After he had consulted with some of the elders, the chief ordered the war beat to be played on the drum, demanding the mobilisation of the people. The mobilisation that ensued was described in the following eyewitness accounts;

As soon as the drum was played, everyone in Ide stopped working in the palm groves and farms. The rumour that neighbouring Aku people had challenged Ide to a fight quickly spread; men armed with sticks and cutlasses and women armed with sticks converged on the school compound, from where the path to Aku began. A sizable group of men and women was thus assembled and the Paramount Chief began to lead them towards Aku. Excitement rose when the chief announced that he would consult with a few elders to try to parlay with Aku people, none of the latter were, however, in sight. The chief and the elders walked away while the crowd waited. The chief did not meet any Aku, but only walked until he was out of sight, waited awhile, and then came back to announce that he had agreed with Aku not to fight; the disappointment that followed was great. But it soon changed to anger when the chief asked the men to fell branches to make beams for the school and the people quickly realised that they had been tricked. Most of the men and women thereupon walked away, leaving only a dozen docile men to fell the trees.⁷⁹

Within a few days after this incident, a polity-wide forum was organised at the request of both the male chief of *Bwofobon* and the polity’s female chief; they conveyed to the Paramount Chief the general discontent with him of the people of Ide.⁸⁰ The women voiced their concern about a misdemeanour of the chief in the following words:

⁷⁷Kungso, “Traditional Authority Governance Systems”, pp, 230-263.

⁷⁸Ibid, pp, 90-114.

⁷⁹Kungso, “Traditional Authority Governance Systems”, p, 234.

⁸⁰Ibid, pp, 230-263.

We want to know whether or not the chief obeys us?” And they might elaborate by pointing out that “whether the chief is a big or small man, what matters is that he was given birth by a woman”. Hence, women would refer to the chief as child and the female chief of the village would pose as a mother. She would say, for example: “if a woman gives birth to a child, and the child does not obey her, doesn’t she punish him?” and the answer from the crowd would be: “you beat him.”⁸¹

The people, then, saw themselves as the censors watching over how a chief conducted himself. Comparisons with former chiefs were made. Good and appropriate conduct was linked to a state of plenty in food and game. Describing the Fon prior to the forum:

Today, the Fon quivers with fear, for he cannot rule. I witnessed the rule of the previous Fons and then food crops were plentiful and men killed many animals. Since they installed this chief, I can attest to little improvement in the village. No game was recently killed. Women need good crops, and men also need something.⁸²

During the meeting, elders who had not been involved in the decision to play the war beat argued against it having been done. They contended that this had never been done before and that such beat should only be used to summon people to war or to the polity’s collective hunt. The Paramount Chief defended his decision and accused the men and women of Ide of being unruly. In the end, he and the elders who had helped him with the deception were fined by the assembly one goat. Thus, the pragmatism of the chief was re-joined as both an abuse of power and a breach of fundamental rules. The *Ka* forum ended with a ritual invocation called *shia ka*.⁸³ An elder from every part of the chiefdom representing every village in a polity-wide forum (*Ka*) made these invocations. Each elder pronounced the invocation in turn. In a polity-wide forum, the order in which representatives of villages spoke was defined (whether the speaker was male or female); Umekwo, Bwofobon, Bwozeu, Bwondong, and, finally, Ipfaka.

The invocations were in the form of simple or complex statements, and sometimes in the form of questions. The assembly approved or denied the statements, or answered the questions briefly in a merger of all the voices.⁸⁴ Statements and questions dealt

⁸¹Ibid, pp, 230-263.

⁸²Ibid, pp, 230-263.

⁸³Kungso, “Traditional Authority Governance Systems”, pp, 230-263.

⁸⁴Masquelier, “Structure and Process of Political Identity”, pp, 90-114.

with death and sickness, games and descendants, it dismissed the bad and begged for the good. The following exemplifies the pattern.

Elder: "The chief who holds you has called you."
Assembly: "He has called us."
Elder: "He called you so you would come to pray"
Assembly: "To pray."
Elder: "He called you to give you some bad news."
Assembly: "No."
Elder: "A man is lying sick on his bed."
Assembly: "No."
Elder: "That someone should stay on his bed, we have denied."
Assembly: "We have denied."
Elder: "We have lied."
Assembly: "No."
Elder: "I see a man lying on his bed."
Assembly: "No."
Elder: "I am sending you out."
Assembly: "Yes."
Elder: "You will work."
Assembly: "Yes."
Elder: "If you go out, you will stand and look?"
Assembly: "We will be looking."
Elder: "Will the God not give us children?"
Assembly: "It will give."
Elder: "Where have the animals gone?"
Assembly: "Where?"
Elder: "Since they beg the animals to come, won't the animals stay?"
Assembly: "They will stay."⁸⁵

The ritual invocation demonstrated the assembly's consensus in reaching out to their Fon; the words which were pronounced were believed to be powerful and to restore peace in the community.⁸⁶ Each speech pronounced by the speaker recreated harmony in the world of everyday life; it quelled chaos. Once the invocation ended the forum was closed and the participants departed.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Ibid, pp, 90-114.

⁸⁶Kungso, "Traditional Authority Governance Systems", pp, 90-114.

⁸⁷Ibid, pp, 230-263.

The *Ka* forum, could be held at two levels of organisations of the political community.⁸⁸ At the polity level, it took three forms: one which assembled all men, one restricted to women, and, finally, a joint forum that gathered both men and women; at the polity level, there were only two forms: the forum of men and the joint forum of both men and women.⁸⁹ The village forum and the polity-wide forum were respectively known as the “small” *ka* (*ka vupfuene*) and the “big” *ka* (*ka wutsenken*).⁹⁰ The *ka* forum, at either level, provided the only context in which public purpose and opinion were expressed; a ritual invocation closed the forum, giving sanction to the consensus that had been reached by the assembly. The village forum, more narrowly, could also be called to discuss its economic problems. Decisions taken in the *ka* forum were meant to control the Fon and the course of events within the polity.

2.2. What Lessons for Democratic Governance, Peace and Political Stability for Cameroon?

Achieving political stability and democratic governance for Cameroon depends largely on building viable democratic state organs, structures, institutions, procedures and processes on grassroots models of traditional “state” governance systems, drawing inspirations from the values and civilisations of the “traditional states”. Starting with the construction of a functional democracy, in which legal, judicial, administrative and electoral procedures and processes operate in strict respect of the laws, without prior approval from some high quarters. The construction of democratic organs, institutions and their procedures and processes require consensus from the political actors and senior state functionaries. Consensus being one of the major assets of the traditional polities, and that which is absent in the modern state of Cameroon, is indispensable to guarantee political stability and peace in Cameroon. What exists as political institutions are simply tribal bureaucratic structures void of decision making powers, with prior approval by the President. This is the case with Parliament, the civil service, election management body and the judicial organs.

The return of peace requires the emergence of two or more power centres, with equal status emanating from the constitution.

⁸⁸Ibid, pp, 230-263.

⁸⁹Ibid, pp, 230-263.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pp, 230-263.

That does not mean that there two Presidents. It is noted that in the traditional state of Babungo, an institution like that of the *Bab*, clearly stands out as an unavoidable power centre with equal status to the Fon. The Fon cannot dismiss him and he is not subject to the Fon. In Cameroon as it is now, there is no such institution with a mission to check on the activities of the governing aristocracy. The laws however voted, is subject to discretionary application, after all, the 1996 constitution allows for a progressive application and implementation of the laws. Checks and balances, balance of power and the rule of law ought to be cardinal in the political system.

Finally, in any functional democracy, the constitution remains the central axis of its political system. Like in the traditional political systems of the polities of Babungo and Ide, the “constitutional ordering” established many centuries ago, not written anywhere, have been able to guarantee peace, unity and political stability of the fondoms till this moment. The peace and stability of Cameroon is threatened by the existence of a constitution which is not built on local realities, values and civilisation of the polities that gave up their sovereignty for the creation of the state of Cameroon. The present constitution operating in a contradictory legal environment, is weak with the President apparently above the constitution. It is subject to constant change, usually to do away with obnoxious articles not in the interest of the governing class.

Conclusion

The modern state of Cameroon was born out of an environment where there existed democratic civilisations and values in the kingdoms that gave up their sovereignty for the creation of the nation Cameroon. These values did not only exist in the polities of the Grassfields but throughout the four cultural zones of the country. The source of political power for the organs of government involved in the practice of traditional governance, their roles and functions are well defined in a “constitutional ordering”. The sovereign polities of Babungo and Ide in the Bamenda Grassfields had functioning traditional political and governance systems with institutions and structures that accommodated it to produce exceptional democratic cultures such as the balance of power, checks and balances, and the rule of law. The traditional governance system has its ideology of Fonship, of authority and responsibility, and a set of “constitutional principles” which were applied and even

reinterpreted to meet the new political demands and challenges at the dawn of the post-independent state of Cameroon.

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