

**Chieftaincy, Development and Democratization:
A Case Study of the Bayang and Ejagham Ethnicities of
Southwest Cameroon**

By

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the conflicting claims over chieftaincy titles among the segmentary Bayang and Ejagham polities of Cameroon. Drawing largely on Don Kalb's 'critical junctions' perspective with its implications of history and locality as a way of understanding power. The study shows that these conflicts are intertwined with deeply rooted historical distinctions between 'natives' and slave families, despite inter-marriages and the subsequent expansion of lineages. These distinctions have been exacerbated by the larger socio-political context of Cameroon which is based on patronage. Within this context and in the face of the democratic transition of the 1990s, elites as self-serving political entrepreneurs are increasingly using ethnic associations and chieftaincy titles to strategically position themselves for appointment within the centralized bureaucracy as representatives of their areas of origin. Both elites and the state, tend to appropriate the discourse of bringing development for regional and national dominance in politics.

Theoretically, this study articulates the need to understand local political strategizing as manifested through conflicting claims over chieftaincy and other neo-traditional titles in terms of the macro-sociopolitical context of ethnic society, nepotism and neopatrimonialism

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List of Abbreviations and Figures

AAC-All Anglophone Congress

BLCC- Bakweri Land Claims Committee

CAMTEL-National Telecommunications and Internet Services provider in Cameroon

GCE-General Certificate of Education

CDC-Cameroon Development Cooperation

CPDM- Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement

CNU- Cameroon National Union

DO-Divisional Officer

ENS-Ecole normale Supérieur

ESAP-Enhanced Structural Adjustment programme

GDP-Gross Domestic Product

IMF-International Monetary Fund

KNC- Kamerun National Congress

KPP-Kamerun Peoples' Party

KNDP-Kamerun National Democratic Party

LDC-Liberal Democratic Party

MTN-Multinational mobile Telecommunication

NAAS-Native Authority Areas

NA- Native Authorities

NCAS-Native Court Areas

NGO- Non Governmental Organization

PAP-Peoples Action Party

SDO-Senior Divisional Officer

SDF- Social Democratic Front

SWELA-South West Elite Association

SCHC-Southern Cameroon House of Chiefs

SCNC-Southern Cameroon National Congress

UN-United Nations

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Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

Although modernisation theorists have long sang the requiem of the institution of chieftaincy, the institution has remained resilient (Nyamnjoh, 2005) and the bone of contention between competing parties thereby leading to conflicting claims over the throne. In the immediate post-independent Cameroonian political context, chiefs were considered as ‘vote banks’ (Nkwi, 1976, 1979, Warnier, 1993, Fisiy, 1995, 1998, Mope, 1997, Bayart, 1985) and accession to the throne was strictly ascriptive. The pro-democracy turmoil of the 1990s however came to exacerbate conflicts in the institution of chieftaincy as manifested by claims and counter-claims among lineages in both majority and minority Bayang and Ejagham clans of Manyu Division in Southwest Cameroon. Laymen, civil servants, academics and politicians alike are increasingly taking neotraditional titles including chiefship for symbolic cultural capital thereby marrying modernity and tradition, combining achievement and ascription and promising their kith and kins, ‘development’. This has prompted me to ask the question, why this rush for neotraditional titles as reflected in titles such as Chief/Chief.Dr, Chief, Prof, Chief, Senator among others?

1.1 Statement of the problem

While the accentuated conflicts and competition over chieftaincy stools might be associated to changes within and among lineages such as expansion and intermarriages, there is the need for an in-depth historical cum anthropological study of the dynamics of this conflict so as to capture both the micro- and macro-level mechanisms responsible for this jockeying for symbolic social capital and to demonstrate how the institution of chieftaincy is being

renegotiated in the present politically polarized context. The central research question informing this thesis is: Why are elites and lay men alike making claims to the throne and to neotraditional titles and promising their ethnic groups ‘development’?

Specifically, this research will:

- Explore the reasons for this rush for neo-traditional titles when ‘status among the Bayang and the Ejaghams no longer depends on membership of secret societies’ (Pemunta, 2011) ?
- Find out how this acquisition of titles by elites leads to “development”?
- Explore how democratization has transformed the institution of chieftaincy in the segmentary societies of Southwest Cameroon.
- Find out how chiefs and elites are maneuvering the postcolonial bureaucratic state in their quest for access to symbolic and material resources in their home villages and region.
- Find out if these chiefs have any agency in their dealings with the state or they are just puppets.

The choice of Manyu Division in the Southwest Region for this research is informed by two main reasons. First and foremost, unlike other regions of Cameroon there are few indigenous political parties and even the existing parties (Liberal Democratic Party, LDC, and the newly formed Peoples Action Party (PAP) neither have a regional nor national following. The two main political parties with national following are the ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) and the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF) party. Secondly, chieftaincy conflicts are more accentuated in the segmentary societies of the Southwest Region unlike in the centralised societies of Cameroon. Lastly, studies of the institution of chieftaincy in Cameroon have mostly focused on centralised societies (Fokwang, 2008, Nyamnjoh, 2004, 2005, Geschiere, 2004, Eyoh 1999; Kuba and Lentz 2006, Nkwi and Socpa

1997; Nkwi, 2006; Nyamnjoh 1999; Yenshu 2006, Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997) within the context of democratisation and the politics of ethnicity. This ethnographic study therefore brings useful insights by attempting to establish a relationship between neotraditional titles and political strategising among the Bayang and Ejagham segmentary polities of Southwest Cameroon. This will be achieved through local level ethnography that captures the intersection between local political and historical processes and their intersection with regional and macro-sociopolitical events within the centralised state architecture in Cameroon.

1.2 Theoretical framework

Theoretically and methodologically, I will frame my research largely around Kalb's 'critical junctions' perspective with its implications of history and locality as a way of understanding power. In line with this theoretical perspective, I argue that an analysis of local political and historical processes within the Southwest region and within the larger Anglophone regions of the Northwest and Southwest must be understood within the larger extra-local context of ethnicity and politics in the macro-sociopolitical context of Cameroon which is based on neopatrimonialism. This calls for the necessity to see local politics as intertwined in regional and national politics: the connections in space (and in and out of a place/in and out of a group), the relations through time, the internal and external relations of power and dependency, and what Wolf has called “the interstitial relations” between apparently separate institutional domains” (Kalb and Tak, 2005: preface). This implies that this quest for chieftaincy and other neotraditional titles can be understood in the light of neopatrimonialism at the national level and as a strategy among local political entrepreneurs to strategically position themselves for appointment as an exchange for 'development' from the state.

This larger framework will be complemented by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of power and Foucault's (1979) notion of power and governmentality as well as Wolf's broader notion of power (Wolf, 1990, 1999). Steven Lukes (2005) defines power as "the capacity to secure compliance to domination through the shaping of beliefs and desires, by imposing internal constraints under historically changing circumstances". Bourdieu analyzes power in three analytical, but distinctive ways: 1) power in valued resources (capitals). Valued resources function as social relations of power by becoming objects of struggle 2) power in specific spheres of struggle (fields), and power in legitimation (symbolic violence). Wolf (1990, 1999) describes power as (1) personal potency (2) interactional, or the power to shape social action, (3) tactical or organizational power, or the ability to shape instrumentally the environment or settings where others act, and, finally (4) structural power, a mode of power that shapes the social field of action, making some behaviours possible while others are impossible or even unthinkable (1990: 586-7, Wolf, 1999: 5). Also important are François Bayart's concept of "politics of the belly", Mamdani's (1996) "institutionalized despotism" as well as insights from the broader literature dealing with the reconceptualisation of ethnicity in the wake of the democratic transition of the 1990s in Africa (Shack, 1979, Englund and Nyamnjoh 2004; Eyoh 1999; Kuba and Lentz 2006; Nyamnjoh, 2005, Geschiere, 2004).

1.3 Significance

Theoretically, by presenting chiefs and the institution of chieftaincy as active agents even in the face of the most overwhelming structures of repression, this project seeks to challenge modernization theorists and their critics who have for long sang requiems for chiefdoms. While demonstrating that this institution has displayed remarkable dynamism, adaptiveness and adaptability to new socio-economic and political developments, I argue that chiefdoms

and chiefs have become active agents in the quest by the new elites for ethnic cultural symbols as a way of maximizing opportunities at the centre of bureaucratic and state power, and also at home villages where control over land and labour often require both financial and symbolic capital.

This research therefore seeks to demonstrate the entanglement of local political struggles in larger political struggles and strategies within Cameroon's centralized state bureaucracy. Spatial dichotomies such as rural-urban, local/national/regional as distinctive analytical and methodological categories have been deplored. For instance, Pemunta and Bosire (2012:1) argue that such distinctions mask and "suggest a contingency in the pattern and character of social phenomenon". Specifically, they demonstrate "that ...geographic, spatio-temporal conceptualization[s]...are problematic because all spaces have become hybrid: "rootedness in either rural or urban [local or regional/national] is no longer the vogue" because of the subversion of spaces by global ethnoscares. Social actors including politicians are therefore entangled in multiple spaces simultaneously-local, regional and national and these locations shape their ideas and reactions to social situations and to the game of politics. Relying on Don Kalb and Herman Tak (2005), Pemunta and Bosire (2012:1) maintain that this calls for "a critical junctions" perspective-one that explores the connections in space (and in and out of a place/in and out of a group), the relations through time, the internal and external relations of power and dependency, and what Wolf has called "the interstitial relations" between apparently separate institutional domains". The entanglement of local political struggles in larger forces beyond the local calls for an analytical perspective that offers a broad conceptualisation of power as well as agency.

1.4 Methodological approach

The overall methodological approach is interpretive. Emphasis was placed on the collection and eventual analysis of qualitative data so as to help reveal the motivations of individuals who are competing for chieftaincy titles thereby marrying both modernity and tradition and how this quest is perceived to attract ‘development’ from the bureaucratic postcolonial Cameroonian state. Data was generated through a combination of secondary literature (documentary sources), in-depth individual interviews, and informal discussion sessions. Knowledgeable individuals helped in identifying other potential respondents.

The adoption of a multi-locale ethnographic approach (see among others, Clifford (1997, Marcus and Fischer 1986) enabled me to examine the relationship of chiefs to elites both within the Mamfe region in particular and in the Southwest region as a whole (local) as well as within the larger national political context of Cameroon (macro). To understand the local context of chieftaincy, I had to take into account the national political context in which chiefs find themselves today as well as larger political struggles among Anglophone elites that has historical roots. The sample for this study included a wide range of stakeholders: quarter heads, administrative officials, chiefs, in both rural and urban areas. Altogether, I conducted individual in-depth interviews with 25 individuals between April 20th and May 5th 2013. I also had informal discussion sessions with whoever was interested in the study.

1.5 Data analysis

Data analysis will involve the identification of themes, patterns and processes, commonalities and differences (see Edwards and Talbot, 1994:45) and the generation of possible explanations. This is the general framework for analysis although data from specific information sources such as observations, interviews, informal discussion sessions,

documents, etc) will be analyzed qualitatively. I now consider it appropriate to set the context of study.

1.6 Context of study

Manyu Division of present-day Southwest Region where the study took place is one of the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon. Manyu is one of the six administrative Divisions that make up the Southwest Region. The Manyu Basin that is framed by the higher ‘‘Grassfields’’ is bounded to the East by the Northwest Region-the other Anglophone Region. Covered by rainforest, it is increasingly being converted to agriculture. It is made up of four administrative subdivisions with Mamfe Central-including Mamfe town and its surrounding villages, as the most densely populated. In the east of the Division is Upper Bayang. Eyumojock, located south and west of Mamfe Central is largely made up of lowland and borders Nigeria. Akwaya, which also borders Nigeria, is the northern part of the Division. It is hilly and one of the most enclaved and underdeveloped regions in Cameroon.

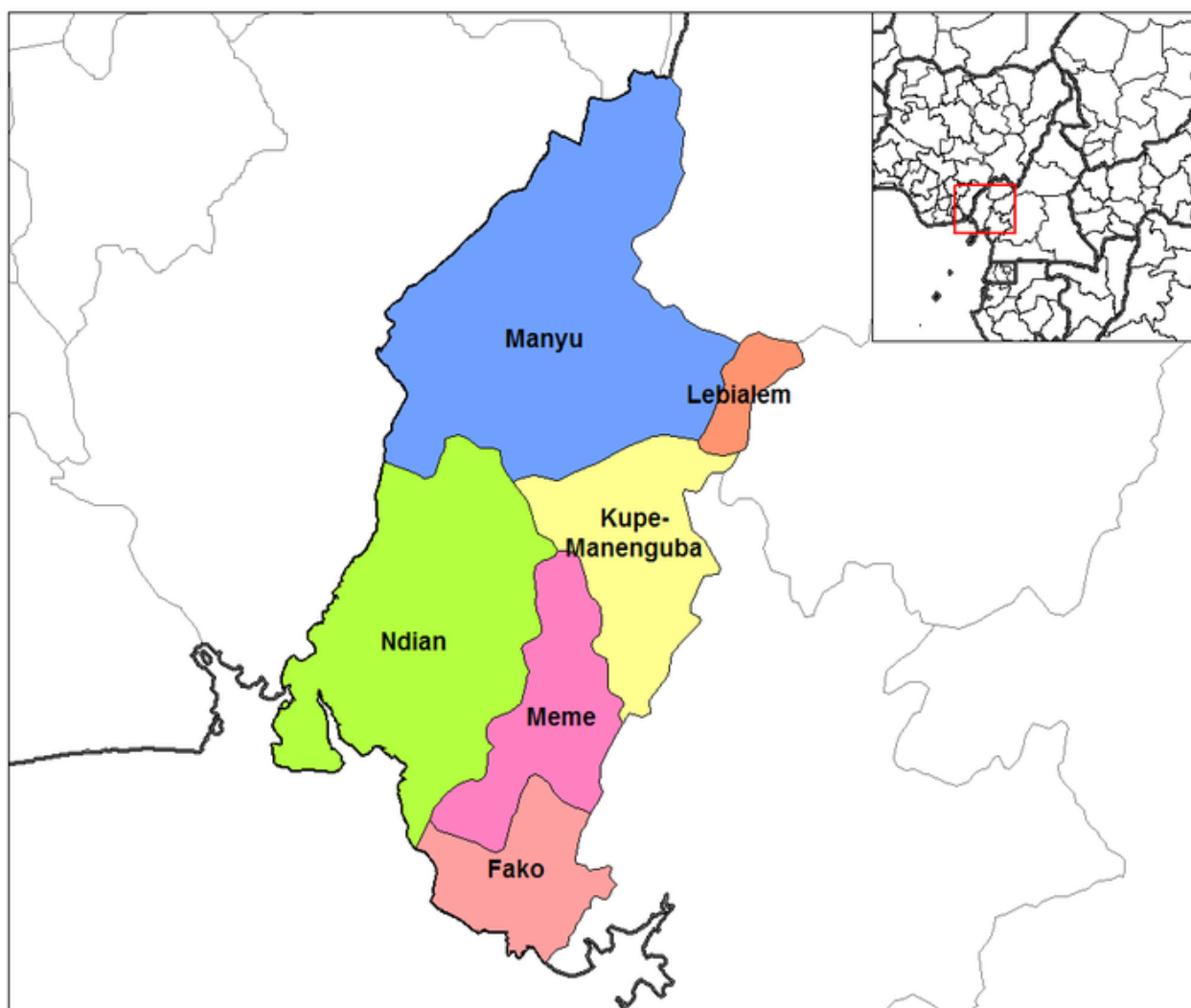
Fig 1: MAP OF CAMEROON SHOWING TEN REGIONS



Manyu is home to myriad ethnicities who overlap in their territories and “are products of the colonial reification of more fluid identities” (Evans,nd). They also share common “socio-economic and political institutions and have historic connections to the outside world by virtue of their trans-border location on the Cameroon-Nigeria frontiers”(Pemunta, 2011c:171). The dominant ethnic group in Mamfe Central and Upper Bayang Subdivisions are the Bayangs. The Ejaghams are the majority in the Eyumojock Subdivision. Like other coastal groups in the Southwest Region and on Cameroon’s coastline, they are acephalous communities. Chieftaincy has colonial roots and chiefs are relatively weak in authority when

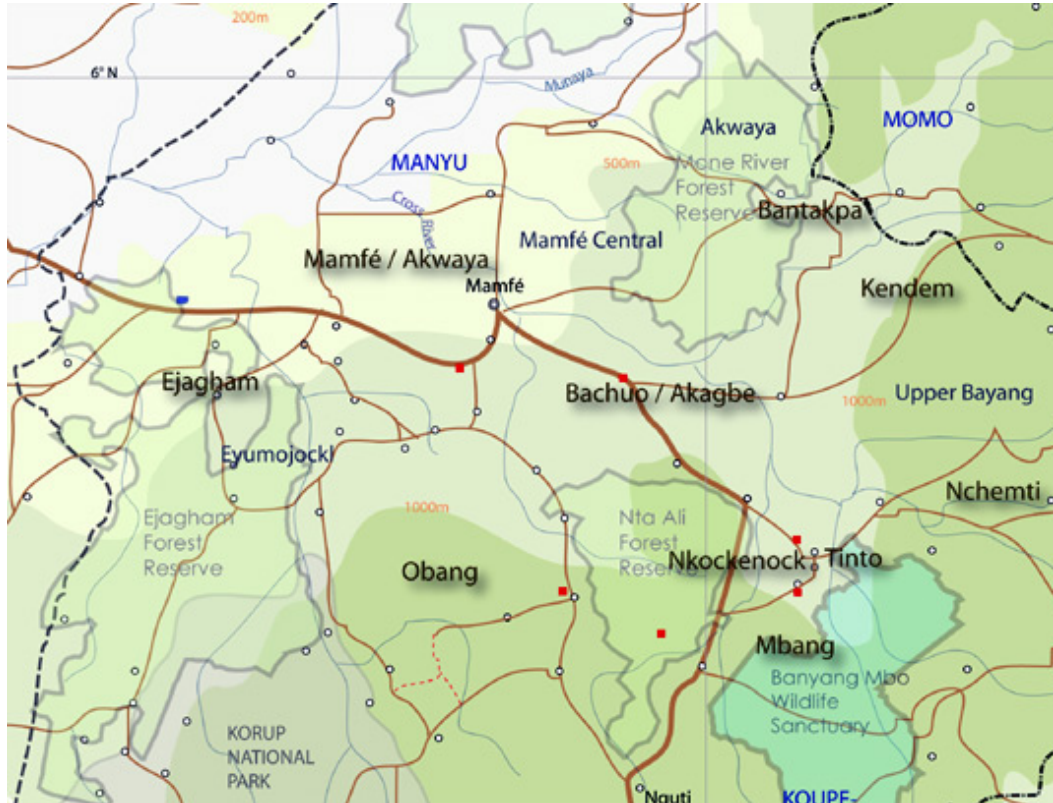
compared to the centralized political entities of the Western Grassfields region. This led Pemunta (2011a, 2011b) in reference to the fight against female circumcision to note that ‘they are unable to structure the social field of action of others’. As Evans (nd: 4-5) points out, ‘the village is the basic and most important unit of neotraditional government. Ties may exist at higher levels, usually through clans-village groups defined by perceived common descent-but these are more fluid and have no fixed political authority’’ (cf Ruel, 1969 in Evans, n.d).

FIG 2: MAP OF SOUTHWEST REGION WITH ITS SIX ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS



Source: Pemunta(2011a).

FIG 3: MAP OF MANYU DIVISION



Source: Pemunta (2011a)

The area has unceasingly been characterized by mobile actors including itinerant traders since colonial times. The Bayangs and the Ejaghams were middlemen during the transatlantic slave trade. Nigerian refugees also came into the area during the Biafran War of 1967-70. Since colonial times, especially with the establishment of plantation agriculture on the fertile slopes of Mount Fako by the German colonial administration, the Southwest Region has witnessed unprecedented influx of migrants from the Western Grassfields region (Pemunta 2008, 2011a, 2011b, Pemunta and Njiki, 2010). Today, most of the migrant population especially from the Grassfields region has populated the area and this has been socio-politically

contentious. Ethnic elites often point out that these migrants who are dominating them in their own home are members of the opposition SDF party- the main opposition party in Cameroon whose founder is from the Northwest Region. They are treated with suspicion and seen as a threat to the ‘development’ of the area from the lens of ethnoterritorilisation which is at the heart of state neopatrimonialism in Cameroon. From this perspective, Southwest elites under the banner of the Southwest Elites Association often decry the perceived domination of the ‘entrepreneurial’ North Westerners of the region’s economy in trade, housing and transport. According to Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997:212-213), SWELA is angry over the perceived transfer of development resources and ‘the associated retarded development ‘of the South West to the advantage of the North West region by politicians including John Ngu Foncha and his KNDP party in the 1960s and by various North West politicians such as former PM, Simon Achidi Achu (1992-1996) who allegedly gave all top and juicy posts within his ministry to his co-ethnics whereas, he had risen to the top thanks to the Anglophone lobby. In the same light, North Westerners who took the region by storm as workers in the colonial plantations are scapegoated and accused of being responsible for all political disturbances including the activities of the Southern Cameroon National Congress (SCNC), a local Anglophone pressure group that wants secession and independence from the Francophone region of the country because of the perceived marginalization of Anglophones since reunification in 1961.

1.7 Lay out

This exploratory study seeks to investigate the accentuated conflicts of claims and counter-claims over chieftaincy titles among Bayang and Ejagham lineages in Southwest Cameroon. These conflicts usually pit lineage members or brothers at each other’s throat. Although a

mechanism of political positioning and strategy, they are usually framed in terms of bringing development. A qualitative research methodology has been adopted to achieve the aims of this study.

Chapter two presents the institution of chieftaincy and the co-optation of chiefs as political actors by the colonial and postcolonial administration in Cameroon as well as how, through this mechanism, the party-state has whittled the powers of chiefs. On its part, chapter three examines the sociopolitical organization of chieftaincy in Cameroon with a particular emphasis on Southwest Cameroon. I argue that the administrative regulation of chieftaincy is a mechanism of governmentality put in place by the state for the appropriation of chiefs and the institution in electioneering campaigns and vote rigging. Chapter four examines the chiefs of the Bayang and Ejagham regions in the democratisation process while chapter five which is the conclusion attempts answers to the main research questions.

Chapter 2

Chiefs in the colonial and postcolonial context in Cameroon

2.0 Introduction

This chapter demonstrates that the chiefs have been coopted by the state: colonial and post-colonial Cameroonian state and elites for their various purposes. The chiefs were first coopted by the German, British and French colonial administrations- and are being appropriated by the postcolonial Cameroonian state in the realisation of the state's political agenda. They played a preponderant role in the countdown to independence in Southern Cameroon (today's Northwest and Southwest Regions). Today, chiefs are carving out new political niches for themselves by hanging on to the ruling CPDM party and elites for their own personal interests usually framed as bringing 'development' to their people whom they claim to represent. This quest for dominance in local and regional politics has partly led to conflicting claims over chieftaincy thrones as individuals strategise to outdo each other and to stand a better chance on the political stage and to gain access to resources such as land.

2.1 Chiefs and the colonial encounter

Despite numerous treaties reached with Douala chiefs, Queen Victoria hesitated in declaring Cameroon a British protectorate and was swept off guard by the Germans. It was against this backdrop that in 1884, the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck through his representative Dr. Gustav Nachtigal negotiated and signed treaties with the Kings of Douala, Bimbia and Batanga culminating into Kamerun becoming a German protectorate with an administrative headquarters first in Douala and later, Buea. In 1916, Cameroon became a Franco-British colony when Anglo-French allied forces pushed out the Germans at the battle of Mora. In line with the recommendations of the League of Nations for all “enemy property”, Britain and France partitioned Cameroon into two- British and French Cameroon then called West and East Cameroon. The French took 80 percent of the territory while the British, contended themselves with 20 percent of it in a 4 March 1916 agreement but both territories became two League of Nations mandates in 1922. The British later portioned out their mandate into Northern Cameroons and Southern Cameroons- initially administered separately but later attached to Nigeria. The two adjacent territories of British and French Cameroon therefore began their political evolution under different political traditions. Southern Cameroons is today the Northwest and Southwest Regions of the Republic of Cameroon.

Fig 3: MAP OF BRITISH SOUTHERN CAMEROON



Source:<http://ntemfacofege.wordpress.com/2011/09/20/southern-cameroons-palaver-drama-in-bamenda-begins/>.

Like their German predecessors, both colonial masters relied on the existing administrative cartography under the tutelage of district heads who at times happened to be the recognised traditional ruler of a tribal group within the district^{1, 2} (Chem-Langhée, 1983:656). Similarly, in Southeast Cameroon, chiefs were a creation of the French for the implementation of a wide range of perceived “coercive measures” explaining why they lacked leverage in the local political organisation and “do not constitute an independent core of authority” (Geschiere, 2003). Like the German predecessors, the French used metropolitan legislation,

¹ In what follows and except otherwise stated, I draw heavily from Chem-Langhée’s (1983) incisive account on the origins of the Southern Cameroon House of Chiefs and political developments in the region.

² Traditional and religious leaders alike in the north actually negotiated with the German administration to maintain their authority in return for tribute payments and the formal acknowledgement of the latter’s sovereignty (International Crisis Group, 2010).

superimposed “neo-traditional” chiefs and rules based on their perceived interpretation of native laws and customs (Noorduyn, 2005:69-70). Many new chiefs lacked legitimate authority because they had no blood bonds with any formally established royal lines or “because they were installed in communities in which no chieftainship ever existed” (Mback 2000, Geschiere 1982 in Noorduyn, 2005:Ibid). The system of non-interference in native affairs tended to strengthen indigenous authority systems in the colony and resistance to modern leaders replacing traditional authorities. It eventually laid the foundation of the emergence of the Southern Cameroons House of Chiefs (SCHC)-a political outfit meant to represent and to give the chiefs voice in politics- prior to the British takeover of West Cameroon after World War I. Apart from the precolonial political administration of Southern Cameroons, other factors that underpinned the establishment of the SCHC included the German administrative paradigm of their territory, the British policy of indirect rule, political events in Nigeria, the desire and determination of western-educated elites to harness the support of traditional rulers in their struggle with the British over larger political concerns as well as the determination of traditional authorities to have the final say in indigenous decisions in Southern Cameroon (Chem-Langhée, 1983).

The lack of logistics-particularly European staff- led to the abandonment of direct rule in favour of indirect rule. In early 1917, British Southern Cameroon became an administrative appendix to the Northern Province of Nigeria leading to the establishment of indirect rule through the Chiefs under the banner of Native Administration. To facilitate this process, the four Divisions of Victoria, Kumba, Ossidenge (Mamfe) and Bamenda inherited from the Germans were split into several administrative sub-units generally called Native Court Areas (NCAs) under the auspices of Native Authorities- but for the Kaka-Ntem area of Bamenda Division which was to be administered directly because “the people were too primitive to

govern themselves”(Gardenier, 1969:546). Chiefs or Fons usually aided by an advisory council and smaller chiefs (a-fon) within their jurisdictions were coopted as Native Authorities (NAs) and they administered justice in particular Native Authority Areas (NAAs). The Courts comprised of village heads in the four administrative Divisions “performed the executive and judicial functions of Native Administration”(Chem-Langhée,1983:658). In the precolonial fondoms of Nso, Kom, Bali Nyonga and Bum the four a-Fons were the only Native Authorities of their individual NCAs. One Chief was usually recognized as the President of the Court, 2 others as Co-Presidents, and the rest were simply members”(Chem-Langhée,Ibid).

In 1949, a major re-organisation took place due to the British desire to coopt and harness the social capital of the Western educated crop of elites which they had produced. This enthusiasm alongside constitutional changes in Nigeria coalesced to produce the Southern Cameroon House of Chiefs. The proposed Richard’s Constitution of March 1949, became a reality and took effect on January 1947. Among others, it proposed for the representation of Chiefs in the Central Legislature. Only Chiefs of the Eastern Region of which Southern Cameroon was an integral part were to be represented in the Central legislature. This was plausibly the case because Igbo Chiefs were warrant Chiefs-individuals appointed and recognised as chiefs by the colonial administration with little or no traditional authority. Despite the controversy sparked by this Constitution because as an act of imposition, it authorized the government to appoint and dismiss chiefs, the existence of the Northern House of Chiefs, was salutary to Southern Cameroon’s traditional leaders as they later demanded a Southern Cameroon House of Chiefs.

In early 1949, the western-educated elites waded into the constitutional debates in Southern Cameroon when Sir John Macpherson, the new Governor of Nigeria asked for a new

Constitution thereby setting aside the Richard's Constitution. In this regard, all regions and Provinces of Nigeria met to brainstorm and put forward proposals for the envisaged constitution. In reaction to this development, Chief Manga Williams-a semi Western-educated Chief chaired a meeting of the new Cameroon's Provincial Council in Victoria in early 1949 where a resolution was adopted in favour of a separate Southern Cameroon's Region made up of 27 Chiefs, 6 administrative officers and 37 observers. However, the traditional rulers were made to understand their subordinate status vis-à-vis the British colonial administration. This irked the educated elites who charged that the British were using "unprogressive and illiterate Chiefs [to stymie] the progress of the country". This led to the challenge of the traditional leaders and the entire system of Native Administration. They called on the United Nations (UN) to institute administrative reforms and to oversee the economic, social and educational development of Southern Cameroon. Among their series of contradictory demands, they also called for the separation or autonomy of Southern Cameroon from the Eastern Region of Nigeria and for it to become an autonomous region with Nigeria, Secession-meaning that the "Southern Cameroons" or "all of "British Cameroons" separate from Nigeria and develop into an independent state in its own right, Unification, the idea that Northern and Southern Cameroons be unified to form a single administrative and political entity whether or not within the Nigerian framework, and Reunification, the idea that all sections of the former German Kamerun protectorate be reunified to form a separate distinct and independent political entity (Chem-Langhée, 1976:41-45). This demonstrates the deep divisions within their ranks and the clash between modernity represented by elites and the British administration and tradition represented by Native Authorities as well as the repudiation of the Native Authority administrative system. Despite subsequent reforms culminating into a federation, the Village Courts and Councils were retained to handle local issues and to implement the policies of the local administration.

This development transformed most traditional leaders into mere executors of general policy since those who were still engaged in legislating had to share their power and authority with elected commoners in the central administrative apparatus, but for their comfortable majority in those organs. With the involvement of local elites and the weakening of the native administrative set up, the former remained focused on larger political concerns- Autonomy or Separation, Secession, Unification, and Reunification. In the 1951 general elections to the Eastern House of Assembly, both cooperated in electing the Southern Cameroons representatives, despite low voter turnout. Coincidentally, elected candidates were nominees of the traditional council dominated Federal Councils. Out of 13 elected officials, only 6 came from chiefly families.

Chiefs were co-opted by the western-educated elites into the nationalist movement. The two political shades of opinion merged to form the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) under Dr. EML Endeley. Thereafter, Paul M. Kale formed the Kamerun People's Party (KPP). The British Secretary of State for Colonies pegged Southern Cameroon's status of a separate region on the KNC's victory in the 1953 general elections. It came to pass that thanks to the support of the traditional leaders, they won all but one seat. Thereafter, Southern Cameroon became a Quasi-Federal Territory –an outcome that eventuated into separation from Nigeria. Thanks to the support of the traditional authorities, one crop of western-educated leaders had scored a point against the British. The same scenerio was replicated during the Federal and Native Council elections of 1954 as all KNC candidates were voted at the detriment of the KPP. Thereafter, both parties fiercely competed in wooing traditional authorities-at times even using mudslinging tactics. October 26, 1954 marked the inaugural meeting of the Southern Cameroon House of Assembly and advocates made the case for the establishment of the House of Chiefs and a motion was unilaterally adopted to that effect.

As traditional rulers, Fons enjoyed the obedience of the masses and were jealous of mere elected representatives in the Assembly who were mostly commoners. The 1957 Constitutional proposals for Nigeria created space for a House of Chiefs of the Southern Cameroons. However, the House of Chiefs was limited to legislative proposals and policies- an advisory role- since the House of Assembly under the tutelage of the new, western-educated leaders was to have final say in Southern Cameroon politics. The House of Chiefs finally emerged in 1960 with rather limited and largely symbolic powers. It was placed under the patronage of the Commissioner of the Southern Cameroons Executive Council, J.O Field who was concomitantly Speaker of the House of Assembly and not a traditional leader. Bongfen Chem-Langhée (1983:673) suggests that the aim of placing the House of Chiefs under an educated commoner was because “powerful traditional chiefs- the Fon of Nso, Kom and Bafut respectively- and in order of importance were illiterates and yet, would not yield to the authority of any other traditional leader, whether he was western-educated or not”. To exacerbate matters, the 1 October 1961 Federal Constitution gave birth to the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Although retained, the House of Chiefs was renamed as the West Cameroon House of Chiefs as a reflection of the change in the name from Southern to Western Cameroon. In May 1972, Ahmadou Ahidjo unilaterally disbanded the House of Chiefs and the Chiefs were now in search of a political identity.

2.2 Chiefs and the postcolonial state

Jude Fokwang intimates that the consolidation of the postcolonial state apparatus under Ahmadou Ahidjo’s authoritarian regime led to the sidelining of chiefs as the emerging new bureaucratic elites sought to dominate local and regional affairs. At the nascent stage of Biya’s accession to the mantle of power, he made alliances with old traditional elites to safeguard stability and national unity just as his predecessor Ahidjo and the colonial powers,

particularly in the north of the country had done. Nevertheless, events such as a botched coup d'état in 1984 made him to recruit new partners within the ranks of the newly educated elites from the North. In this regard, the government gradually began diminishing the powers of traditional authorities-particularly Fulbe leaders from the North by appointing members of Kirdi groups and simultaneously appointing Southerners to top positions in the North (Noorduyn, 2005:71). The democratic influenza and the pro-democracy movement of the 1990s was caused by a concatenation of factors. These included the chronic economic crisis and the international situation following the end of the Cold War. A comparative analysis undertaken by Bratton and Van der Walle (1998:131-146 cf Noorduyn 2005) supports the view that although the economic downturn that plagued Africa from the mid-1980s was partly responsible for the widespread political protest, "it cannot explain the [whole] extent, timing and outcome" of the ensuing protests. Cameroon was also able to maintain a positive economic growth rate during that time window (3.2 percent). Additionally, 'international factors played a supportive, but essentially secondary roles'. According to Noorduyn's (2005:71) reading, it was rather the growing frustration about regular participation possibilities...without any real choice, the subsequent denial of former political rights together with political diffusion from other countries that led to protests". He goes on to concede that like other Africans, Cameroonian voters exercised the 'familiar urge to participate[...] this time through non-electoral outlets such as strikes, riots, and demonstrations''. With the government sweating under donor pressure to either institute economic and political reforms or see aid rescinded, 'and not finding solutions to existing problems, made protesters challenge the legitimacy of the State leaders'(Noorduyn, 2005:72). This push towards democratisation and good governance reforms culminated in and saw the chiefs reclaiming decades of long lost political space by aligning with significant sources of power. Despite their eroded popularity, they have however "succeeded in

maintaining regional political dominance” (Fokwang, 2003:88-89) since the political system is largely based on patronage and favouritism.

In a bid to consolidate power, in 1966, Ahidjo dissolved all political parties to form a single national party, the Cameroon National Union (CNU) in the name of ensuring national unity and integration. Then came the abolition of the federal structure in May 1972 and the birth of a unitary state-the United Republic of Cameroon. One unfettered effect, apart from the centralization of power was the abolition of the House of Chiefs in West Cameroon, thereby sending the Chiefs into political wilderness. From there on, state-party dichotomy became blurred and political entrepreneurs-politicians, businessmen and civil servants increasingly relied on the state and party to further both their individualistic ambitions and their hegemonic project (see also Eyoh 1997:5-10, Fokwang 2003:96) often couched in the discourse of bringing about “development”.

A July 1977 Presidential decree No.77/245 that replicated the colonial typology of chiefs and their role as labour organisers and tax collectors (Geschiere, 1993) classified chieftancy institutions into first to third degree chiefs and spelt out their role as auxiliaries of the administration: “intermediaries between the administration and the people, helping the [administration] in the execution of government directives and recovering state taxes within their domains” (Jua, 1995:43). Article 29 of the decree prescribes sanctions for “acts that threaten public peace and order” in the eyes of the administration (non-cooperation). Chiefs are often caught in a dilemma whether to support their subjects or the administration. In their ethnographic analysis of the conflict pitting the state of Cameroon and the Bakweri ethnic group Pemunta and Njiki (2010:48) characterise the chiefs and to a large extent elites-as being caught up in a “double jeopardy situation” whenever they have to mediate between their ethnic group and the state. In their dilemma of shifting allegiances: “they[chiefs and elites] simultaneously engage in both resistance and consent”. In like manner, Fokwang

(2003:97) cites two examples in which chiefs have been caught in this dilemma. A Prefectoral Order literally put the Fon of Nso under house arrest as he was banned from leaving his palace as punishment for allegedly supporting his subjects when they refused to pay water bills to a parastatal that had taken over and was appropriating their pipe borne water system (Jua 1995:43 in Fokwang, 2003). Another case involved the Fon of Fungom who was arbitrarily jailed in 1997 for siding with his subjects “in their confrontation with Fulani grazers who had destroyed their farming fields”. This resonates with Ahidjo’s deposition of the traditional leaders of Maroua and Ngaoundere in 1959 and 1963 respectively because they opposed his rule despite having been offered a continuation of the colonial deal which made them administrative auxiliaries (International Crisis Group, 2010:7). The cooptation of the chiefs as administrative auxiliaries through the 1977 Chieftancy law whittled their powers and their role in national and regional politics calling for new strategies to make their impact felt. Most of them throwed their weight behind the ruling CPDM and even made its Chairman- Paul Biya- “Fon of Fons”.

The International Crisis Group (2010) points out that both the colonial and postcolonial Cameroonian state have controversially abused and manipulated traditional rulers, leading to the eventual politicisation and contention of the institution of chieftancy in the 1990s. Hitherto perceived as an arm of the administrative machinery, they have now become a bone of contention in politics-most often, on the side of the CPDM-at times in disputes between factions and at other times, against opposition parties. This has demeaned them as well as the institution of chieftancy in the eyes of the public. While some traditional leaders have been instrumental in the resolution of local conflicts-especially land disputes, their credibility is witnessing a free fall due to political manipulation from the centre leading to their diminishing role in conflict resolution. However, as Pemunta (2010) argues with reference to chiefs in Southwest Cameroon, the conflicting landscape of modern and traditional authority

systems has led to the diminishing of the powers of the chiefs as some individuals now prefer to take matters to the modern court for arbitration.

The appropriation of traditional chiefs through their employment as “auxilliaris” into the party-state apparatus “is at the heart of how the ruling [CPDM] party functions”. Their employment as “auxilliaris” apart, the party-state “creates, re-moulds or co-opts (pseudo-) traditional leadership, depending on local context. As under colonialism, the chiefs have proven adept at turning this arrangement into their advantage”(International Crisis Group, 2010:17). This has been exacerbated in a context where poverty makes allegiance to the party-state a necessity for survival especially as the chiefs are keen on cashing in on the advantages of incumbency within ethno-regional enclaves: “A goat eats where it is tethered”, “Politics is give and take and you can only give where you stand”³. This is more the case in a context where the conflation of the ruling party-state makes dissension to be equated with subversion: you are either with us, or with the opposition-there is no third space. As the International Crisis Group (2010:3) rightly notes, the rearrangement of local politics and the new symbolic and material capital and resources at the disposal of those who [could lay] claim to traditional authority, reminiscent to the colonial era when “chiefs kept a portion of taxes raised, and often used forced labour for their private profit sparked off disputes over chief’s legitimacy, many of which rumble on today”.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall collapsed and the shortfall in international backing for authoritarian regimes encouraged civil society and opposition political actors across Africa to demand democratic reforms. Although the Yaounde regime grudgingly accepted democratisation, it backtracked on reforms and restored authoritarian rule behind a facade of democratic practice” (International Crisis Group, 2010:12). Among other effects was the re-emergence of chiefs as

³ Anonymous Chief x interview of 20th April, 2013.

old political entrepreneurs to the “national political scene” despite popular demands for political actors of a new kind (cf Geshiere 1993:151). Fierce debates erupted with several intermediate positions and are still continuing regarding the role of chiefs in the new political dispensation in Cameroon. Specifically, the debate revolved around whether or not, chiefs should be partisan or play a neutral role. Some chiefs such as Fon Angwafor III of Mankon and Fon Gayonga of Bali appropriating the discourse of human rights mounted the rostrum to state that they were human beings and are thus entitled to political participation and political office. Chiefs further claimed legitimacy as “natural rulers” and the notion that they sought the well-being of their subjects- to attract development from the state. On the other hand, while the public and the opposition expected chiefs to mediate the incessant struggle “between civil society actors and the state”, this was however, not to be the case. There was a general outcry towards the overt participation of chiefs in multiparty politics particularly as they were known to side with the state. Ardent traditionalists maintained that chiefs would be disgraced and would lose the esteem and respect of their subjects should they compete with commoners for elected offices and fail to win⁴. As Jude Fokwang maintains, those who opposed the participation of chiefs pointed out that it was “uncommon for fons to compete for political positions with commoners because the ‘fon’ was above party politics-he was father of all subjects, regardless of which political party the subjects supported” (Fokwang 2003:113-114).

⁴ A case in point is Fon Ganyonga who, out of personal interests framed as community interest (bringing development) ran for the 1996 Municipal elections but lost and was humiliated by his subjects. He is Board Chairman of MIDENO-an agro-industrial outfit and a University Lecturer. He was however co-opted into the Central Committee of the ruling CPDM party as compensation for his partisanship. The chiefs variously justified their siding with the ruling party-state on grounds that “one could not bit the finger that feeds him” and that one must “sow where one is sure to reap”-meaning they are unsure of when the opposition will takeover the reigns of power.

The ruling party has apart from co-opting prominent chiefs into its ranks⁵, also appointed some as senators. In the composition of Cameroon's first ever senate in which 70 percent were "voted" by municipal councillors and 30 percent elected directly by the president of the Republic, 15 traditional chiefs were nominated by the President on the basis of their supposed or real affiliation to the ruling CPDM party⁶.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has captured the role of chiefs in the political evolution of the Southern Cameroon and demonstrated that they have always been political actors in their own right. It has also examined the double appropriation of the institution of chieftancy by both the colonial and the postcolonial state and elites. Both parties, alongside elites have relied on the chiefs for the achievement of their political agenda of self-interest in the name of bringing development to the local population. The chiefs have been forced by prevailing circumstances and poverty to join the state-party bureaucratic administration as auxiliaries. Since the state is the main employer (Pemunta and Fonmboh, 2010), and they are poor, their power has been whittled. Their subaltern positions make them unable to act as independent arbiters in the democratisation process since they are subjects of the state and are subordinated to its dictates through regulation which I argue- is a vehicle of governmentality and control, but they are also not void of agency when their collective interests is threatened. I take this issue up in the next chapters.

⁵ These include Fon Ganyonga, Angwafor III of Mankon who is first vice national President, Nfon V.E Mukete, Paramount chief of the Bafaws, who are all co-opted members of the political bureau of the ruling party.

⁶ Prominent among these senators is the all powerful Sultan Mbombo Njoya of Fouban.

Chapter 3

Socio-political organisation of chieftaincy

3.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the social and political organisation of chieftancy in Cameroon with particular emphasises on the Southwest Region. It argues that as administrative auxilliaries, while chiefs have differential powers depending on whether the society is centralised such as in the Fondoms of the Western Highland of Cameroon and in the North of the country or in the acephalous societies of the forest zone including Southwest Cameroon, they are subordinated and appropriated by the state which has made it impossible for them to act as independent arbiters between civil society and the state in the wake of the stalled and moribund democratisation process in Cameroon⁷.

Political anthropologists such as Meyer Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) distinguished between centralised and acephalous societies (so called ‘non-headed communities’) on the basis of authority systems. However, Joseph Nzalie Ebi (2008) argues that Cameroonian communities do not neatly fit into this standard dichotomy of centralised and acephalous communities in terms of political organisation. He intimates that they could either be classified under the former or latter because they take myriad forms. Highly centralised societies are headed by a centralised authority, usually called a Fon with an administrative

⁷ As auxilliaries of the administration, several sanctions await perceived recalcitrant chiefs (a) Call to order (b) Warning (c) Ordinary reprimand (d) Reprimand with suspension of allowances for not more than three months; and (e) Deposition (see Metiege, 2012).

machinery as well as judicial institutions. “They are organised into Sultanates, Lamidates and Fondoms or Paramount chiefdoms”. These are characterised by hierarchical systems of social organisation. The leader wields executive, legislative and judicial powers. He designates the officials of these organs and his subordinates (Fisiy 1992:212-213, Weeramanting, 1997:14, Max, 19964:46 in Ebi, 2008:17-18). He is both a temporal and spiritual ruler, chief priest, intermediary between the worlds of the ancestors and those of the living. He has overall authority over persons, goods and land-which is sacred and serves as a medium of communication with the dead (Gluckman, 1964:46, Fisiy, 1992:221 in Ebi, 2008). He holds the land in custody for his subjects and whoever needs land turns to him, but he has no right of ownership. In the postcolonial state context, they are custodians of the land on behalf of the state which claims monopoly over all parcels of land (see Pemunta and Njiki, 2010, Pemunta, 2013a, 2013b, Pemunta and Mbu-Arrey, 2013).

The segmentary societies of Cameroon’s coastline are characterised by lack of “leaders with all-embracing authority over persons and property. Nor do they they have strong centralised authorities, administrative machineries, and constituted judicial institutions. What obtains is a segmentary pattern of traditional political organisation based upon a loose-knit and non-hierarchical clan structure . The exercise of political power is bestowed upon a local chief priest or council of elders,” with specific roles assigned to each member of the council. Authority is in the person of a ritual functionary and not in the chief who is a political leader (see Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1955:5, Neville, 1971:18, Elias, 1956:14 in Ebi, 2008:17-18).

3.1 Chieftancy among the Ejaghams and Bayangs of Southwest Cameroon.

During the pre-colonial and colonial period, Ejagham society was a centralized kingdom but today various Ejagham communities are decentralized, segmentary polities (Bonchuck, 1997 in Pemunta, 2011, Pemunta, 2008) under the leadership of a Chief. Following Pemunta

(2011), chieftaincy among the Ejaghams and the Bayangs is hereditary and accession to the throne is restricted to sons of the soil, not *nsung*, members of slave families, whenever the stool becomes vacant. Upon the death of an chief, members of the founding clans decide to choose someone among themselves to succeed him and to become the next *Ntuifam*⁸. That individual, Pemunta (2011:76-82) intimates, must be of good moral standing, show respect for everyone, especially the elders of the community, must be intelligent and demonstrate both tact and wisdom in solving problems in the community. He must also be literate as today's modern administration demands penmanship skills, specifically the ability to read speeches in public. It is these characteristics of changing times, particularly literacy, that led to a six year long succession conflict between various lineages in Otu village when the throne became vacant.

It might be suggested here that changing times has led the people into believing that to grab development resources from the state, one must have social capital-particularly the ability to read and write. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'capital', which he extends beyond the notion of material assets to capital that may be social, cultural or symbolic (Bourdieu 1986: cited in Navarro 2006: 16) is instructive here. These forms of capital may be equally important, and can be accumulated and transferred from one arena to another (Navarro 2006: 17). Cultural capital – and the means by which it is created or transferred from other forms of capital – plays a central role in societal power relations, as this 'provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy, as classes distinguish themselves through taste' (Gaventa 2003: 6). The shift from material to cultural and symbolic forms of capital is to a

⁸ In most lineages, it is supposed to be rotatory so that members of each of the founding lineages could become chief in turn.

large extent what hides the causes of inequality thereby giving advantage to the educated to lay claims to the crown whenever it is vacant.

Following the death of the pioneer Chief of Otu village, His Royal Highness Chief Emmanuel Nyok in September 1992, two factions cropped up in the village and competed for the throne. Traditionalists wanted rotation of the throne in keeping with tradition. Modernists on the other hand, wanted that the new leadership should be educated. This is a clear instance of contestation, conflict between modernity and tradition. They invoked the qualities mentioned above. Unlike in the past, elections were conducted and Mr. Ayamba Ojong Ita was declared successful. The external elites did not however deem him fit for the task since he is not literate. On the basis of this, they protested that the elections be repeated, not with the entire population as the electorate but rather among the ten elders and kingmakers of the village secret society, Mgbe. The Senior Divisional and Divisional Officer oversaw the conduct of the elections and Chief Ojong Moses Ntui emerged victorious with six votes in May 2006. The loser camp boycotted various village functions such as participation in secret societies and cleansing rites and threats multiplied to outdo enemies using poison and or witchcraft. Ekpe was turned apart, the administration failed to reconcile both factions. Of late however, the Chief of Chiefs, Ntuifam Arrey of Ossing was able to broker an uneasy truce through a public reconciliation conference in May 2006 during which both camps pledged to collaborate with each other. The administration subsequently installed Ntuifam Ojong Moses Ntui, a retired civil servant as Chief of Otu bringing the conflict to “an end.”

Before his initiation and subsequent enthronement, the prospective Chief is presented to the modern administration. The Divisional Officer or his representative usually installs him and he works in close collaboration with the modern administration as an auxiliary. The co-optation of the chiefs into the postcolonial administrative set up, Pemunta notes has tremendously diminished their prestige and status. Chiefs often find themselves in landscapes

of conflicting institutions as some individuals tend to invoke modern law in the resolution of conflicts of interest and no longer tradition, as was the case in the past. The prospective Chief is subsequently initiated into all the secret societies in the village since he holds the highest office in the traditional governing system (Pemunta 2008, 2011:80).



Fig. 3 Ejagham Chiefs with the Seniou Divisional and Divisional Officer (copy right, Pemunta, 2011)

The Chief rules in collaboration with the village council (nju-Essere), the quarter heads (Abhonatui), the various family/lineage heads (Nne Nkwi Ndephenju) in the village and with the Ajom Etek (divinities). He is an intermediary between the living and the dead. He administers law and order through social institutions such as Ekpeh, Obhassi-Njom, and Njumepah and is directly answerable to the national modern administration. In the colonial and early pre-colonial days, they served as tax collectors for the administration. At times, he is assisted by the Regent Chief, especially when he is a civil servant. These Regent Chiefs are usually referred to as “administrative Chiefs”, “Government Chiefs” and the Chief himself as the traditional Chief partly showing the erasure of their powers as well as the conflict

between modern and traditional authority systems. The Chief, unlike in the Western Grassfield region of Cameroon where Chiefs still have exclusive right to marriage by capture as a mark of their distinctive status within society, is an equal among equals. In other words, he neither commands any special respect nor authority despite his high office. He can hardly “structure the possible field of action of others”(Foucault, 1984:428 in Pemunta, 2011). He is however the custodian of the lores and customs of his people through the intermediary of a dense network of institutions including Ekpe and Obhassi-njom.

3.2 Postcolonial regulation of chieftancy as a vehicle of governmentality

In Cameroon, the institution of chieftancy despite its highly hybrid character is regulated by statute, particularly decree No 77/245 of July 15, 1977 which lays down the duties and responsibilities as well as the benefits and categories of chiefs. The decree classifies chiefdoms into three categories: First, Second and Third class chiefdoms. The area of jurisdiction of a first class chiefdom encompasses at least two second class chiefdoms within a Division and is set up by a Prime Ministerial Order. A second class chiefdom is comprised of at least two third class chiefdoms within a Sub Division and is set up by a decision from the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation. A Third class chiefdom is analogous to a village or quarter in a rural or urban area. It lies under the jurisdiction of the Senior Divisional Officer (DECREE No 77/245 of July 15, 1977).

As leaders in their communities, Metiege (2012) concedes that they play political roles, but are subordinate in their Electoral Districts “and their means of appointment, responsibilities, financial status and disciplinary approach makes them agents of the state⁹”. Similarly and in line with Peter Geschiere (1996), I argue that the classification of chiefs shows differential

⁹ Available <http://nanjcreativethinking.blogspot.hu/2012/08/chieftancy-law-organizing-chiefdoms-in.html>

power among chiefs. Geschiere notes that in the densely populated areas of the Northwest and West Regions, chiefs have retained most of their powers. To successful migrants or elites from these regions, the chief's moral authority "is vital for legitimising their success and their new forms of wealth". These chiefs have thus created all sorts of titles, "pseudo-traditional titles" which can be bought by the *nouveau riches*. This is a mechanism of incorporating successful 'sons' into the structures of chieftancy as a mechanism of gaining access to their wealth. While the chiefs are co-opting the new elites, the latter are "manipulating their rights in land". In the new constellation ushered in by multipartism, "the chiefs appointed and paid by the government, had suddenly once more a political role: they could serve as an alternative channel, by-passing the turmoil of party politics, for the encadrement of the population and the fixing of votes...of course, all chiefs appointed were staunch followers of Biya's party" (Geschiere, 1996:322). It is clear that state imperatives led to the renaissance of chieftancy in the segmentary societies of Southern Cameroon including the Maka. In the Southwest region and other parts of Cameroon, corrupt administrators often interfere in designating ineligible candidates-usually those who find favour with the ruling party for the chieftancy stool thereby orchestrating conflict. Several examples abound. For more than four decades, a protracted chieftaincy conflict pitted late Chief Dr. Enonchong and Chief Tanyi Tambe as to who was supposed to be the rightful heir of the Besongabang stool. According to various respondents, the former unlike the latter came from a slave family whereas according to the customs of the Besongabang people, the future heir's family should be potentate with no peons lineage. Traditionalists trace the Besongabang lineage to Tanyi Mbi and point out that Enonchong had a questionable background with no link to the royal family. Furthermore, geriatric eyewitnesses from Ntenako, Nchang, Ossing and Mamfe (close neighbors) all testified that Tanyi Tambe's family was the rightful heir to the Besongabang throne (see also Prince and PA Hamilton Ayuk, 2007). The several internecine court battles fought between

the two contesting parties with decisions of lower courts being constantly overturned by the Supreme Court in favour of Enonchong shows the meddling of the administration and corruption in chieftaincy institutions in Cameroon. Chief Dr. Enonchong was a legal luminary, financial magnate and well connected in the upper echelon of Cameroonian society and therefore used his social and symbolic capital to his advantage. Despite the contestation of his chieftancy title, he declared himself chief and his children are passing around as princes and princesses. Some people suggested the need to change tradition because Enonchong was a developmentalist and a philanthropist.

A further case of conflict over the chieftaincy throne is that of Nchang village in the outskirts of Mamfe. The protracted decades long Nchang chieftaincy crisis pits former Minister of Environment and Forestry, Clarkson Tanyi Mbianyor and an educationist, Tarkang Eyong. In December 2006, the then Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) of Manyu Venant Oloume chaired a fact-finding mission to seek a lasting solution to the dispute, but participants left the meeting disappointed because “an apparently tailor-made administrative decision [was being imposed] on the factions”. Both factions were unanimous that Nchang had its first chief in 1875 and that it was a rotatory system between upper and lower Nchang. The ten quarters that compose the village “had to be given an opportunity to produce a chief if one of them had not produced a chief before. Both factions agreed that individuals became chiefs because they were assisting the people positively”. Disagreement erupted when it was claimed that Mbianyor’s grandfather hailed from a neighbouring village, Ntenako. However, those who testified were of the opinion that, it was rather Mbianyor’s genealogy from Nchang village, that got married to a family in Ntenako and not the contrary. When the SDO sought to know, if there was anyone in Ntenako that was related to the Mbianyors, no direct answer was forthcoming. The Eyong faction made the point that it was because of the failure of the Quarter head/Kingmaker of the Mbianyor faction to designate an appropriate candidate from

his Quarter to run for the chieftaincy stool. They accused the said Quarter head to have been cajoled with money and other material inducements. According to informants, the college responsible for designating a chief is comprised of Quarter Heads and two elders from upper and lower Nchang respectively (see also Nana 2006)¹⁰.

While it is surprising that Mbianyor started making his claims to the throne only when he lost his ministerial portfolio, it might be suggested that he wanted the crown as a political tool with which to stage his comeback to the political scene one day.

In 2004, the then Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation, Marafa Hamidou Yaya had to intervene in a chieftancy dispute by instructing the then Senior Divisional Officer for Fako, Bernard Okalia Bilai, to repeal prefectoral order No 185/2003 of June 15, appointing Mr. Molive Otto Molungu as Third Class Chief of Batoke. The reason offered was that the consultation talks which culminated in his designation was contrary “to the provision of decree no 77/245 of July 15, 1977, to recognise chieftaincy.”

In 1998, David Longonje II, had been made Chief of Batoke by a prefectoral order signed by Jean-Robert Mengue Meka then SDO for Fako. He was later on destituted by former Fako SDO, Robert Ngambi Dikoumbe. Respondents were unanimous that Longonje was designated following the hereditary rule to take over the crown following the death of his father in 1995. His father had ruled Batoke, a village inhabited by about 6000 inhabitants on the West Coast of Limbe, for 36 years.

Although the former DO for Limbe Central, Simon Achuo Atem, designated Otto Molive, a contender, Chief, the administration is yet to install him. Longonje was jailed for seven days and was only released following a protest march by women for his release. While he was in

¹⁰ http://www.postnewsline.com/2006/12/nchang_chieftai.html(accessed May, 20,2013).

detention, Otto Moliwe was made “Chief in the maternity, not even in the Community Field without any consultation.”

The argument of Moliwe’s supporters is that Longonje is a stranger and not a native because his grand father came from Barombi in Meme Division as a paddle carver and Otto’s father bought him as a slave. His father Lucas Longonje is alleged to have been a regent Chief. According to Chief Otto, when Malomba Mokoto, his grand father passed away, the throne was reverted to his uncle, Mbua Ngoto, but Mbua died when his own father was barely 20 years old and because at the time, it was believed that only old people could become chief, Longonje who was then the oldest man in the village took hold of the throne. Otto alleges that his grand father was the founder of Batoke and named it Mokoto (meaning talking) after meeting with some of the hunters and fishermen along the coast, but the Germans later changed the name to Batoke (Manga et al. 2004)¹¹.

It can however be stated that the institution of chieftaincy in the Southwest region is undergoing social changes. One example is the enthronement of Chief Norbert Nangiya Mbile, former Member of Parliament for Ndian Division (2002-2007), an educator and the Vice President of the Southwest Chiefs Conference as chief of his village Lipenja I, but also Paramount Ruler of the Batanga people-his clan. He had no hereditary claims to the throne, but was nevertheless installed because of his personal commitment to the development of his area of origin-especially through the provision of human and material resources for the benefit of his people. He was unilaterally “designated by the chief "catchers" and custodians

¹¹Administration Drags Batoke Chieftaincy Dispute. Available

<http://www.postnewsline.com/2004/08/strongadministr.html>(accessed 22 May, 2013).

of the Batanga tradition to take over from Chief Sampson Mekongo, whose abdication from the throne created a vacuum” (Tah, 2009)¹².

The dependence of the chiefs on the state makes it impossible for them to act as independent intermediaries between state and civil society. Similarly, in a Correspondance sent to Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada and the Research Directorate of Canada, it is intimated that “ in terms of politics, the current regime in Cameroon needs traditional chiefs who are subject to its authority”. Once appointed, traditional chiefs “automatically become members of the party in power-the ruling CPDM,”in keeping with that party's charter^{13, 14}. Charles Nach Mbach (2000:98) is more forthcoming about the subordination of the chiefs and their subsequent manipulation as political football when he intimates that “the political commitments of the candidates are influential in ascending to or occupying the throne”’.

Governance by chiefs brings together the spiritual leaders and heads of various groups from different strata of the population, but none of them has overall power over the population. Their distinct, but complementary functions is socially sanctioned by the community. At the same time, political power is not an entitlement to rights over a given territory and its inhabitants. Community membership as well as the rights and duties associated with it are generally acquired through genealogical ties “as against political allegiance to the sovereign” (Ebi 2008:).The chief only controls unappropriated land which he manages in council whereas, each family holds and enjoys land in their own name. Ebi (2008) cites chief Endeley from the southwest Region as an expert witness in *Wokoko v Molyko* who stated “that

¹² Available <http://www.postnewsline.com/2009/02/mbile-crowned-paramount-ruler-of-batanga.html>

¹³ <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=country&category=&publisher=IRBC&type=&coi=CMR&id=&docid=440ed6e619&skip=0> (accessed 5th May, 2013).

¹⁴ See also [http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/.\(accessed](http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/.(accessed) 5th May, 2013).

members of the tribe even without any prior authorisation appropriate parcels of communal lands''. In their ethnographic study of the conflicting claims between the government of Cameroon and the Bakweri Land Claims Committee over lands ceded to the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), Pemunta and Fonmboh (2010) point out that the roots of the conflict lies in, and should be understood against the backdrop of "the conflicting landscape and power fields of traditional, colonial and modern authority systems: a hallmark of the land tenure system" in which most local communities including the Bakweri find themselves today and which has pitted most local communities against the state (Pemunta and Fonmboh 2010:38, see also Pemunta, 2013a, 2013b, Pemunta and Mbu-Arrey, 2013). The postcolonial state, Pemunta and Fonmboh (2010) maintain has whittled the power of chiefs over land as the state has created categories such as state and national lands thereby taking over the common property of the community (see also Ebi, 2008). Most parcels of land in the urban sphere are now placed under administrative officials rather than under the authority of the chiefs, although chiefs still maintain control over rural lands as the eyes of the administration.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that independent of the authority system (centralised or "non-headed") chiefs are subordinated by the administration and can therefore not serve as impartial arbitrators between civil society actors and the state in Cameroon. The institution of chieftancy is also undergoing fundamental internal changes as evidenced by the preference for educated individuals to accede to the throne so that they can use their social capital to bring about development from the postcolonial state.

The existence of hierarchies, a legacy of the slave trade affects social interaction between perceived sons of the soil and those that have been assimilated into various ethnic groups through intermarriages and generates conflicting claims over the institution of chieftaincy. Despite the rotatory nature of the institution of chieftaincy among founding lineages, some individuals are excluded on the grounds that their parents are not original inhabitants of the villages in which they find themselves today and therefore they have no claim to the crown. This is happening against a backdrop when some groups like the people of Lipenja I, have adopted social change and have allowed Chief Norbert Nangiya Mbile not only to lead them, but to become Paramount Chief of the Batanga because of his personal commitment to the development of the area. The next chapter examines the role of chiefs and elites in the development of their villages.

Chapter 4

Chiefs, Development and Politics

4.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the role of chiefs and elites-some of whom hold neopatrimonial titles-as political agents in development within the context of multiparty politics and the democratisation process in Cameroon. The chapter argues that while chiefs and elites present themselves as representatives of their people in a bid to attract development projects for their areas of origin, they are actually involved in a self-serving process of positioning themselves for appointments and therefore access to both economic and symbolic capital within the centralised state apparatus in Cameroon. The quest for neopatrimonial titles such as chiefship has actually orchestrated conflicts as every individual attempts to better position himself in front of the state for appointment in the name of bringing about development by taking a neopatrimonial title and by using home area associations.

4.1 Chiefs and the discourse of development

The postcolonial Cameroonian state has traditionally used development resources as a political tool of governmentality which has orchestrated under- and unbalanced development. While regions that find favour with the regime get more development resources, those that do not get little or nothing. This is independent of the contribution of various regions to the national budget and Gross Domestic Product(GDP). The promise of development or the discourse of development is and has been used as a mechanism for divide and rule tactics by the state. Oftentimes, respondents argued that the government creates structures such as schools mostly on paper while elites and villagers are usually the

ones saddled with the responsibility of transforming these structures into reality. This should be understood against the backdrop of the fact that the party-state is not only the largest employer (Pemunta and Fonmboh, 2010), but also jealously controls all resources and attributes them on the basis of patronage. In his analysis of the entanglement between underdevelopment and resistance to change in the ritual practice of female circumcision, Pemunta (2012:235) observes that “the NGO social exchange for change” paradigm-referring to the doling out of money and other material inducements to practitioners for an end to the ritual practice should be understood within “the macro political context of Cameroonian society which is characterised by patronage and political clientelism, bribery and corruption which discourage economic development by government”. Extrapolating from Stokes (2007:1), he maintains that “By creating an interest in the continuous poverty and dependency of its constituents, the government allows some voters to communicate policy preferences while others use their votes as a medium of exchange”. He further concedes that material inducements are offered in return for electoral votes, “where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (Will You) support me?”. A combination of threats, cajolery and persuasion are sometimes used instead of material inducements. According to Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007: 10) in a clientelist political system in most African countries including Cameroon, “citizen-politician relationships are based on direct material inducements targeted to individuals and small groups of citizens whom politicians know to be highly responsive to such side-payments and willing to surrender their votes for the right price”. They refer to this arrangement as patronage-based, or voter-party linkage. This is what Jean-François Bayart (2006) describes as “la politique du ventre”-“a neopatrimonial system in which those in positions of power in postcolonial Africa do not only exercise power, but are also out for their personal gains”(cf Pemunta, 2012:Ibid). The chief’s involvement in partisan politics in the name of bringing development should be seen against this backdrop. This tendency of exchanging appointments

(politely called development projects) for votes and political support is often reflected in political statements such as: “Biya has scratched our back and we shall certainly scratch the Head of State’s back thoroughly when the time comes”(Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003) quoting former prime minister and presently one of the appointed senators from the Southwest Region, Peter Mafany Musonge. Similarly, when chief Dr Gahyongha was appointed senator, he declared to his people that “Biya has signed a contract with Bali people¹⁵”. Another former prime minister, and presently senator of the ruling CPDM party, Simon Achidi Achu from the Northwest Region has oftentimes stated that: “Politik na njangu” (in pidgin english meaning “politics is like a thrift and loan society”. It is give and take, a two way street in which people vote and support the ruling party in exchange for development projects- usually the appointment and subsequent maintenance of their sons and daughters in government. Press reports maintain that the Fons of the Northwest were reportedly congratulated by former Prime Minister, Simon Achidi Achu for allegedly “working hard to bring victory” to the ruling party in the 2013 senatorial elections. The Fons obliged Councillors to take an oath that they will vote only the CPDM. Accordingly, some Fons, according to these media reports, “exposed their navels to be touched by not only men, but women, swearing that if they voted otherwise, something awful or a spell will attack them”¹⁶.

¹⁵ Chris Mbunwe. ”Biya has signed a contract with Bali people-senator Gahyongha” available <http://www.cameroonpostline.com/Content.aspx?ModuleID=1&ItemID=9988>(accessed May 30th, 2013).

¹⁶Chris Mbunwe.(2013).“Yang fires back at Fru Ndi”. available <http://www.cameroonpostline.com/Content.aspx?ModuleID=1&ItemID=9985>

This chapter argues that although subservient to the dictates of the state and therefore open to political manipulation by the state in the name of development, power, following Foucault is always fragmentary. In other words, the chiefs are also able to turn the state's discourse of bringing development to their own advantage. At the same time, they are also able to resist the state's dominance by taking certain positions on regional and national issues showing that since power is fragmentary, they are also capable of resistance and agency.

4.2 Elite associations

In their comparative analysis of the role of elite associations in the Grassfields 'Chiefdoms' of the Northwest Region and the more diffuse, segmentary polities of the Southwest Region, Nyamnjoh and Rowlands (1998:320) argue that "the influence elites exert in their home regions depends on the respect they acquire in local politics for their knowledge of and influence over external affairs...the extent to which [they] will play a significant role in defining a regional identity for their home area depends on the resources they bring with them and the incentives that encourage them to mobilise local political support". They further concede that "[t]o some extent, this depends on the number of educated, literate adults that exist to represent a particular rural population as well as their willingness to remain identified with local interests". In Cameroon where the party-state is the source of patronage and personal accumulation as well as upward social mobility, elites depend on the central government and like the chiefs characterise their allegiance as meant for the well-being of their region despite inter-elite feuds. To maintain their positions of economic and political dominance, the state appropriates the support of elite associations and their representatives, while these elites present ethnic and regional associations as their electoral constituents to the state. As a matter of fact, political parties have been virtually replaced by "ethnicised elite associations as the prime movers in local political 'party' status and access

to state resources”(Nyamnjoh and Rowlands, 1998:321). Ethnic associations of elites are a reflection of “the virtues of vertical integration, providing the contacts and self-help necessary to gain access to resources for local development, and describes the special characteristics of ethnic/regional politics in the articulation of state power”. Most Grassfields associations, Nyamnjoh and Rowlands maintain, often espouse Anglophone politics and identity due to discrimination in a predominantly french speaking Cameroon and use this association as a useful medium as well as a space to decry marginalisation.

In the wake of the democratic tornado of the 1990s, local associations initially framed as a political self-help groups took political connotations as mechanisms of representing local interest “due to the unpopularity of a single-party state that has lost considerable direct local influence”(Ibid). This led to the manipulation of local tribal networks as a form of political football and political capital. The government reacted like against opposition political parties, by creating/sponsoring parallel associations. According to Geschiere (2004), the creation of regional power bases as a strategy of undermining political rivals was to pre-empt the emergence of any ideologically coherent opposition movement. It might be stated that the rise of ethnic belonging was an antidote to multiparty politics aimed at taking the democratisation process hostage and conserving power and the privileges associated with it. Chiefs and ethnic elites were instrumental in this process as they fanned the flames of ethnicity and perceived “strangers” were and are oftentimes chased away from voting stations or outrightly disenfranchised well in advance of any electoral contest¹⁷. Various home associations sprouted up or took political connotations despite claiming to be apolitical. They included

¹⁷ Governor Peter Oben Ashu went as far as establishing and implementing residence permits for settlers as a mechanism of barring them from political participation because of their perceived support for the opposition SDF party

LAAKAM (Bamileke), Essingam bringing together the Betis and the Bulus-the ruling ethnicity in Cameroon as well as the SouthWest Elites Association (SWELA).

4.3 SWELA, development and the state

In the decades of the 1990s, rural home areas associations became a source of “political legitimacy for urban-based elites thereby focusing attention on autochthon –a ‘son or daughter of the soil’ – capable of acting [and voting] in the perceived interests of their place of origin” (Page et al. 2010:345). ‘[I]ncreasing obsession with “autochthony” throughout the continent . . . trigger[ed] a politics of belonging’ (Geschiere and Gugler, 1998:309).

One of such associations was SWELA created and registered on 7th August 1991 in line with Law No.90-153 as an apolitical, cultural association. It was an umbrella association bringing together myriad ethnic elites associations of the coast as a bulwark against perceived ‘external hegemony’ from the Northwest Region and from Anglo-Bami settlers. One motivating factor for its creation was the underrepresentation of Southwest elites in government despite the region being the source of much of Cameroon’s resources-oil, timber, bananas, palms and tea, but facing serious problems of underdevelopment and enclavement. Its regional, rather than ethnic definition was meant “to distance itself from the views of the Anglophones as a homogeneous community where all suffered the same level of marginalisation” (Nyamnjoh and Rowlands, 1998:327, see also Nkwi, 2006). Often believed to have been slighted by the Northwest Region in the distribution of state power and by implication development resources, Southwest elites perceived more access to political power and leverage through a regional outfit than in promoting a real or imagined collective Anglophone identity politics. It was therefore expressly formed to counter the national opposition status of the Grassfield-based SDF party.

Nyamnjoh and Rowlands (1998:328) maintain that at its birth, SWELA had an “explicitly regionalist, federalist, anglophone:anticentrist and anti-francophone but not anti-government” aim. It was viciously opposed to the the two state federation on which Anglophone nationalists and the SDF stood and opted rather for a federation within a ten state [federal framework] so as to extricate the Southwest [Region] from the perceived ‘exploitative’, ‘unscrupulous’, ‘ungrateful’, ‘domineering’ settler/Grassfielders”.

In September 1993 Southwest chiefs visited Paul Biya in Yaounde and expressed unalloyed support for the unitary state while simultaneously calling for the appointment of their sons and daughters into top administrative positions. Thereafter, chief Endeley was subsequently appointed Paramount Chief of Buea with responsibility to appoint new sub chiefs in districts that had become detribalised. Projects including the creation of the Cameroon Rural Construct in Kumba, the Fish Co-operative in Limbe and the Obang Farms in Manyu were brandished as exemplars of “the energising force of SWELA in extracting government funds for local development” (Nyamnjoh and Rowlands, 1998:329). In fact, “regionalism linked with ethnicisation” is central to the control of resources (Ibid). Similarly, Nkwi (2006) maintains that in their effort to access state resources, ethnic elites constructed and appropriated ethnicity. While the government used SWELA, the latter also used the government to achieve its own aims- particularly as elites like in the colonial days, manipulate ethnic diversity for their own self-interests by fanning the flames of ethnicity and considering settlers as enemies of the party-state and therefore as working against the interests of the Southwest Region. However, the Biya’s government’s over-emphasis on ethnicity as enshrined in the 1996 Constitution with the aim of fostering minority rights was actually a smokescreen that instead led to the use of political and traditional elites. Through this policy of ethnicity, the state sucessfully pitted the elite class against themselves for

monopoly and hegemony over the state and state resources. This is explainable, Nkwi (2006:121) points out because of “...[the] neopatrimonialistic and clientelistic system in which appointments were made based on one’s relation to the government rather than on merit and ability. In this way, it became fashionable to use ethnic associations to retain the government in power”.

Some accounts maintain that the government was behind the creation of SWELA (see Nyamnjoh and Rowlands, 1998, Nkwi, 2006). It subsequently backed the appointment of proxies, surrogates and lackeys to significant positions “and funnelled money to them, while the masses were struggling with poverty to a large extent” (Bayart, 1973, Korvenonja, 1993, cf Nkwi, 2006:121). As is often the case, with vertical competition between elites, government infiltration led to squabbles and eventually rupture between the Yaounde-based Southwest and provincial elites. The former were not seen as representing the province but rather as fighting for themselves since they often claimed to be the real representatives of SWELA at the detriment of their provincial counterparts. For instance, contrary to the SWELA position to attribute 10 seats to each of the Divisions in the Southwest Region at the *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS) (Higher Advanced Teacher’s Training College) Yaounde, Chief Prof./Dr. Peter Agbor Tabi, then Higher Education Minister instead attributed 68 mostly to his Bayang brothers and sisters from Manyu Division. None of the names on the consensual list submitted to him through the then Assistant Secretary General at the Presidency of the Republic, Chief Ephraim Inoni appeared on his final list¹⁸ (see Nyamnjoh and Rowlands,

¹⁸ They were not admitted on the basis of the outcome of the competitive examination into the institution but as an act of favouritism. The same scenario was observable when Chief Dion Ngute was Director of the National School of Administration and Magistracy (ENAM). His Oroko tribesmen had privileged entry independent of whether they

1998). He later boasted to his Manyu people that unilaterally attributing most places to them was geared towards developing the area by getting Manyu sons and daughters into the public service so that they could eventually help their parents and other relatives.

The chief's attempt to hijack SWELA because most of them belonged to the CPDM further led to its destabilisation. They were included in SWELA as "custodians of the culture and the people" (Nkwi, 2006:133) and were given the positions of national executives and advisers of chapters and branches. This act instead transformed them into political elites and marked the beginning of the end for SWELA. In fact, SWELA became the site of "inter-elite competition stemming from political elites' desire to identify with the state and control political and economic resources" (Chazan et al.1992, cf Nkwi, 2006:135). According to Barango (1983), "such situations are more acute in impoverished regions because poverty often drives the ambition and activities of elites"(cf Nkwi, 2006:Ibid).

Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-legitimised through an interplay of agency and structure is important here. The 'habitus' or socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking. Habitus is 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them' (Wacquant 2005: 316, cited in Navarro 2006: 16). In the bureaucratic state structure of Cameroon, it might be said that the habitus of individuals and groups have been shaped by the state into thinking that to have access to state resources, their kinsmen and women must be part of the ruling class. In this light, the state frames the appointment of an

passed the entrance and oral exams or not. Most of them are today Tax Inspectors, Divisional Officers and Magistrates thanks to this act of tribalism, nepotism and corruption.

individual from a particular group/region as ‘development’. Local political actors in turn frame their presence in government as meant to bring about ‘development’ to their region(s) whereas in reality, they are actually serving their own personal and family interests. Two examples are in order here. Nfon Victor E. Mukete, Paramount Chief of the Bafaw is an appointed senator, Board Chairman of the Board of Directors of the CDC, Chairman of CAMTEL (the national telecommunications and Internet service provider in Cameroon) and Mukete Estate. One of his sons Prince Ekalle Mukete is section President of the CPDM and Mayor of one of the Districts of Kumba. The family owns a huge share in the MTN¹⁹ telephony company. Chief Mukete is simultaneously the largest smallholder producer of palm oil and rubber. Although he employs several casual and part time workers, he has used his traditional leadership position to appropriate land without any intervention from the state. A further example is Senator Chief Tabetando, traditional ruler of Bachuo-Ntai, a trained and seasoned lawyer, he is President and CEO of EurOil in Cameroon, and Director of Fakoship Company Limited. This Bayang chief is also former president of the Southwest Chiefs Conference. Like Chief Mukete, he is diehard member as well as a Central Committee Member of the CPDM party. As Bourdieu rightly points out, the habitus is created through a social, rather than individual process leading to patterns that are enduring and transferrable from one context to another, but that also shift in relation to specific contexts and over time. Habitus ‘is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period’ (Navarro 2006: 16). In their interaction with the state, local political entrepreneurs claim to have been vested with rights of authority by the local masses that they

¹⁹ MTN Group is a South Africa-based multinational mobile telecommunications company, operating in many African, European and Middle Eastern countries. See http://mixidj.delta-search.com/?q=MTN+&s=web&as=0&rlz=0&babsrc=NT_ss (accessed June 1, 2013).

claim to represent. These local masses, in Coleman's (1990:145) words, have made themselves subordinates to local politicians as intermediaries with the state in the hope that the latter will bring about development as "intrinsic benefit".

This is the basis of neopatrimonialism. Local political actors use their regions of origin as well as home area associations alongside their money and other achievements such as educational standing or prominence in the business world to achieve their goals of upward social mobility "in return for remuneration" (Coleman,1990:146) ("the promise of bringing about development") . They pass for 'vote banks' to the state and achieve political prominence for themselves since individuals often vote on the basis of tribal affiliations, like when deciding on a presidential candidate to vote for (see Coleman, 1990:237-238). As is often the case with class relations, exploitation and domination are not reducible to each other. While elites as politicians are actually exploiting their ethnic origins, they are also being exploited by the state for the realisation of its projects-including the conservation of political power (see Burawoy and Wright,2002:472) and projects that are likely to face opposition such as the privatisation of the Cameroon Development Corporation process discussed below(see also Fonmboh, 2008, Pemunta and Fonmboh, 2010).

The habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these (Bourdieu 1984: 170). In this sense habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, 'without any deliberate pursuit of coherence... without any conscious concentration' (ibid: 170). In line with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, it might be suggested that through the repeated and constant appointment of individuals from prominent groups, the local masses and politicians have acquired a set of schemes of dispositions, perceptions, and appreciations, ...which tends to orient their practice of politics as based on

ethnicity and give them meaning. The habitus is simultaneously the effect of the actions of, and [their] interaction with, others [politicians]. It is both a “structured structure” and a “structuring structure”- simultaneously suggesting and constraining their future actions (Bourdieu,1992). Critically, the habitus is embodied, that is, “located within the body and affects every aspect of human embodiment.” (Shilling 1993:129). This presents local elites and politicians as fanning the flames of ethnicity in their quest for positions within bureaucratic state institutions. Their positions, as the case studies of the traditional rulers and politicians Paramount Chief Victor E. Mukete(Bafaw) and the Bayang Chief Tabetando will be seen as inaccessible to anybody apart from those ritually sanctioned through the acquisition of chieftaincy titles or belonging to a significant ethnic entity. As Bourdieu maintains, the power of an agent to accumulate various forms of capital, and to define those forms as legitimate, is proportionate to their position in the social structure (Bourdieu, 1992).

A second important concept introduced by Bourdieu is that of ‘capital’, including material as well as social, cultural or symbolic assets (Bourdieu 1986: cited in Navarro 2006: 16). The acquisition of the neo-traditional title of chief is a mechanism of creating cultural capital which is then invested in the game of politics as a way of accessing social and economic advantages. Although unlike in the colonial and immediate post-independent days, chiefs are no longer ‘vote banks’, the postcolonial state however continues to use them to mobilise the population despite the erosion of their powers over time. In this regard, the state is most likely to co-opt individuals who are representatives of significant social groups into bureaucratic state structures and in turn use them to garner electoral votes or push through unpalatable reforms such as privatisation. These elites are a distinct class of actors with access to state resources and a particular taste.

A third concept that is important in Bourdieu's theory is the idea of 'fields', which are the various social and institutional arenas in which people express and reproduce their dispositions, and where they compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital (Gaventa 2003: 6). As a concept, 'field' is important to my research because although elites all belong to a class and therefore as maintaining a particular position and subjectivity within the social structure, as individuals, they often have differential access to resources or to positions of responsibility. They are therefore constantly jockeying for higher positions so as to stand a better chance vis-à-vis other elites from the same region/group and from the whole Anglophone region. This definitely leads to tension and contradictions as they individually tend to use strategies such as mudslinging against their political rivals in their efforts to capture the most strategic position within the postcolonial state apparatus.

This claim of bringing "development" can also be understood through the appropriation of François Bayart's concept of "politics of the belly". Relying on Foucault's notion of governmentality or the perceptions and methods of a government concerning how it organises itself, society and specifically its dealings in power politics with the latter, he demonstrates that unlike culture which is ideologic, legitimate, problematic and hegemonic, governmentality is more likely to avoid the trappings "of unwarranted totalisation". His imagery of the tethered goat which states that "I graze therefore I am" eloquently captures the goal of politics as geared towards personal self-aggrandizement. In other words, though framed in terms of bringing about development as recompense, it is meant for the satisfaction of immediate and personal interests through the apparatus of the state system- which is a defining feature of power politics in Africa. This has resonances with the role of colonial intermediaries and indigenous bureaucrats in the colonial system. As gratification for their services, they were allowed to gain concessions from their positions and power for

their specific regions or ethnic linguistic groups. Mamdani(1996) uses the metaphor of “decentralized despotism” to capture this relationship and the system of rule that colonialism put in place in colonial Africa. According to him, the institutional framework of rule in apartheid and in all late colonialism was based on the use of “indirect” rule over natives by customary chiefs using the mechanism of “customary law”. This in turn led to the bifurcation of African societies into “citizens” and “subjects”. The former-mostly white were above customary law and enjoyed some civil liberties whereas the latter were largely peasants living in the countryside who were subjugated to the whims and caprices of native authorities, chiefs and their retinues. Mamdani’s concept of “institutionalized despotism” reflects the relationship between the ruling classes who are appropriating neo-traditional titles as part of armoury in the game of power politics and control over their regions or ethnic groups for their own self-interests. It might be stated that the postcolonial elites and chiefs have transplanted indirect rule into their villages by sustaining the fiction of “tribal solidarity” in their encounter with the state. They claim to control the rural masses and when they fail to get their votes, they rig elections using even “symbolic violence²⁰” to maintain the status and their interests by holding back the democratic transition process in Cameroon. In other words, democratic transition has not led to the deracialisation of politics. Politics has remained trapped in ethnicity as captured by the concepts of autothone and allogene. As an arm of “decentralised despotism”, Mamdani (1996:45) another vocal opponent of chiefs as political actors maintains that owing to the withering away of institutionalised mechanisms that checked the power of chiefs against excesses, the institution should be disbanded. Before

²⁰ Worthy of note here is the violence and bloodshed wrecked on settlers, predominantly Anglo-Bami(northerners and Bamileke settlers) in the 1990s by Nfon Victor E. Mukete’s tugs because of their perceived support for the opposition in the Southwest Region.

colonialism, Mamdani maintains, the chief was the custodian of land, not its proprietor and ‘the ultimate sanction against a despotic chief was desertion’. Colonialism and apartheid systematically strengthened the powers of the chief and the state became the ‘determiner of the consensus’ (Mamdani, 1996:145). Furthermore, chieftaincy has also been affected by the wave of democratisation and multiparty politics that began in the 1990s. This led to ambivalence as the chiefs were co-opted by both the state and local elites in their quest for regional political dominance (Geschiere, 2004). During this time, the concepts of home, belonging and politics were used as a political strategy to exclude non-natives from local political participation. The ambivalence of chieftaincy in the colonial and postcolonial era has been variously explored (Quinn, 1980, Fonmboh, 2008, Pemunta and Fonmboh, 2010, Binsbergen, 2003, Geschiere, 1993).

In his more than three decades of preoccupation with the interaction between local communities and the postcolonial state in various regions of Cameroon Geschiere (1993:151) argues that since the advent of democracy in 1990, there is the dire need for political actors of a new kind in Cameroon.

4.4 Resistance and agency

Despite the co-optation of Southwest chiefs and elites by the postcolonial party-state, they are able to stand firm on certain regional and national issues that clash with their interests or those of their subjects including the privatisation of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC)- the largest and oldest agro-industrial complex and second employer after the government of Cameroon. The ensuing conflict of claims and counter-claims has been well documented by Konings(), Fonmboh (2008), Pemunta and Fonmboh (2010). I do no more than highlight the most salient aspects to highlight elements of resistance and the prebantal political strategy of the postcolonial Cameroonian state. The Bakweri chiefs and elites

greeted the government's announcement of the privatisation of the CDC in July 1994 with virulent opposition. Both the chiefs and Bakweri 'modern' elites were unanimous on their claims over the CDC land as native land that was expropriated by the German colonial administration and later turned over as 'Enemy property' to the British colonial administration. They had tried to retrieve for centuries without success. They accordingly organised protest marches and letters to the government of Cameroon, the World Bank and potential international investors warning them against the privatisation process. Bakweri modern elites like the Cameroon Anglophone Movements pointed out that the privatisation process was an affront to Anglophone identity and colonial heritage by the Francophone-dominated post-colonial state.

As part of its strategy of divide and rule, the state instead fragmented the unity of the Bakweri by co-opting their 'traditional' and 'modern' elites into the Board of Directors and Management of the CDC. Despite this, the Bakweri Land Claims Committee (BLCC) under the leadership of Paramount Chief S.M.L Endeley (Buea) and Paramount Chief F. Bille Manga Williams of Victoria (Limbe) continued their campaign of outright resistance against the privatisation of the corporation insisting that they should have been consulted and should have a say in the negotiations. Alongside the Cameroon Anglophone Movements, they co-signed a memorandum stating that they never gave up the ownership of their land and that the CDC could not be sold without their consent. They requested for the restitution of unpaid royalties since 1946 when the lands were leased.

The state which claims to own all pieces of land, further used other Southwest elites such as Chief Ephraim Inoni, then Assistant Secretary General at the presidency and Chief of Bakingili, a Bakweri village, Chief Dr Dion Ngute, a Southwesterner and Minister in charge of Commonwealth affairs and Chief, Professor Peter Agbor Tabi, then higher education minister in its negotiation with the Bakweri. At the same time, The World Bank and the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) continued to mount pressure on the government for privatisation and economic reforms within the framework of the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). Concomitantly, the Southwest Elites Association (SWELA), the Southwest Chiefs Conference and the Bakweri Land Claims Committee, USA mobilised and raised both national and international awareness through letters, memoranda and the internet thereby causing an international scare campaign against investors.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that in their interaction with the state as intermediaries between their various ethnicities and the Southwest Region, chiefs and elites are actually out on a self-serving mission framed as 'bringing about development'. In the process of trying to attract state resources for 'development' through ethnic associations such as SWELA, the state uses them to achieve and retain dominance in regional and national politics. However, since power is always fragmentary, they in turn use home area associations such as SWELA to achieve their political ambitions of upward social mobility within bureaucratic state structures by presenting these outfits and writing motions of support as their political constituencies. Since political prominence requires competition, they take on chieftaincy and other neopatrimonial titles so as to stand a better position as representatives and spokesmen for their various ethnicities and the Southwest Region in terms of appointments. This positioning for political prominence has orchestrated conflicts between competing parties all laying claims to the throne.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusion

This study sets out to explore the reasons for the escalation of conflicts over chieftaincy stools and other neotraditional titles among Bayang and Ejaghams lineages in Southwest Cameroon within the context of multipartism and democratisation. Where the concepts of home, belonging and politics are being increasingly used as a political strategy to exclude non-natives from local political participation. This ethnic consciousness syndrome led to the hardening of political identities as a way of excluding outsiders/others from political participation (Shack, 1979, Englund and Nyamnjoh 2004; Eyoh 1999; Kuba and Lentz 2006; Nyamnjoh, 2005) on the fallacious basis that only natives-a son or daughter of the soil can protect the interest of his or her ethnic group/region and bring about development projects from the neopatrimonial Cameroonian state. As eloquently captured by Peter Geschiere and Josef Gugler (1998a: 309) in their influential edited issue on Africa ‘increasing obsession with “autochthony” throughout the continent . . . triggers a politics of belonging’. In reality, the discourse of autochthony and its equation with development is doubly appropriated. On the one hand, it is used to preserve and promote the individual interests of elites some of whom are chiefs within the bureaucratic state apparatus, while on the other, the state uses it in its divide tactics.

Appropriating Don Kalb’s ‘critical junctions’ perspective with its implications of history and locality as a way of understanding power as well as theories of power (Bourdieu, Foucault, (1979) Wolf, 1990, 1999) the study shows that the conflicting claims over chieftaincy status although partly rooted in long term distinctions between real natives and slave families,

despite inter-tribal marriages and therefore the expansion of lineages should be foregrounded in the larger sociopolitical context of Cameroon which is based on neopatrimonialism. In other words, Manyu elites and chiefs as a class use neo-patrimonial titles and ethnic area associations such as SWELA to position themselves for appointment within bureaucratic state structures. To achieve this aim, they position themselves and become dominant in local and regional politics by appropriating neo-traditional titles in the name of bringing development to their constituents. While they often frame their participation in politics as meant to bring development for their ethnic groups and regions, the state simultaneously uses them for the achievement of its hegemonic agenda and to push through unpopular projects such as privatisation by using cooptation of significant elites to fragment group unity as the case study of the Bakweri tends to suggest.

The study further shows that the conflict over chieftaincy thrones between the Bayang and Ejagham lineages should be understood through the prism of the interplay between modernity represented by the colonial and postcolonial state and tradition represented by traditional authorities in politics as well as the simultaneous entanglement between modernity and tradition as reflected in neo-traditional titles such as Chief/Senator/Chief.Doctor/Chief Professor. The combination between modernity and tradition underpins the co-optation of individuals, particularly chiefs into the postcolonial administrative apparatus as ‘vote banks’. Like the colonial masters, the postcolonial state and elites have also appropriated the institution of chieftancy to maintain ‘national unity’ and as political ammunitions in their quest for ethnic and regional dominance in the game of politics within the centralised state system in Cameroon. Although this has led to the withering of the institution of chieftancy, the institution has remained resilient and has survived the presently stalled democratic transition process in Cameroon. Chiefs and elites are increasingly being used as election

rigging agents as they struggle to conserve their positions through maintenance or re-appointment.

Theoretically, this study articulates the need to understand local political strategising as manifested through conflicting claims over chieftaincy and other neo-traditional titles in terms of the macro-sociopolitical context of ethnic society, nepotism and neo-patrimonialism. Against this backdrop, the state as the main source of development resources and the path towards upward social mobility tends to use its economic resources to retain power at the center by using divide and rule tactics at the local and regional levels. Ethnicity, despite the fluidity of the concept of identity becomes a useful lense for analysing social changes orchestrated by the democratisation process in Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular through the prism of the conflicting claims over the chieftaincy institution.

While this study has called the attention to the need to see local political strategising as imbricated in an overarching regional and national architecture-positioning, by elites and chiefs within the neo-patrimonial state system. This has also demonstrated that chiefs are not puppets as they have agency and are willing to stand up as one man like they did during the privitisation of the CDC agro-industrial complex despite the state's strategy of divide and rule. A further, but unexplored area of research could be an assessment of the real role of the chiefs and elites in the promotion of self-reliant development in the Manyu region.

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