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The Role of Traditional Authorities in Conflict Management: Cameroon

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the
Doctor of Philosophy

AUGUST 2018

School of Social and Political Sciences (SSPS)

The University of Melbourne

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents Awoh Vincent and Kengha Celestina who worked all their lives relentlessly and spent their entire savings to ensure that I acquired the best education which they often referred as the “white man’s book”.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

- 1) The thesis comprised only my original work except where indicated
- 2) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
- 3) The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps bibliographies and appendices

Name: Emmanuel Lohkoko Awoh

Date: August 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

According to Achebe (1987 p. 122 cited in Nkwi 2015 p.xi), 'the cock that crows in the morning belongs to one household, but his voice is the property of the neighbourhood'. The implication is that, although I wrote this thesis, many people contributed directly or indirectly to its realisation. To complete this thesis, I was mentored and supervised by three persons who I shall forever remain indebted to: I thank my primary supervisor, Dr Rachael Diprose and my two co-supervisors, Dr Bina Fernandez and Dr Bart Klem for their invaluable contribution in the realisation of this thesis. They helped to clarify the fuzzy research ideas which I had at the beginning of my candidature and directed my attention to the relevant literature that I needed to engage with. This literature revolutionised my thoughts and contributed to some of the conclusions of this thesis. In addition, my supervisors took time to read and provide comments that challenged my own academic presumptions and finetuned my amateur research skills as an early researcher. Even at times when I doubted myself and felt very vulnerable due to poor health, their constant encouragement and support helped me to stay motivated. I must admit that the relaxed and non-intimating supervisory meetings created a conducive environment throughout my candidature. This kind of environment and interaction was very instrumental because I was able to clarify with them my conceptual language and to situate it within the different bodies of literature that this thesis contributed to. It was a rare opportunity to have such a wonderful team to guide me and I feel lucky and proud to have had you all.

I am also grateful to my panel chair, Dr Julie Evans who offered invaluable insights into my research and took a keen interest in my progress until her retirement early 2018. I am equally grateful to Associate Professor Tamara Kohn, my new panel chair. Before now, you opened your doors to me, and each time we met, you offered invaluable tips on how to stay focussed and to prepare for life after PhD. My gratitude also goes to Dr Nkwi Gam Walters, who granted me access to his private library in Cameroon and was also instrumental in the development of my ideas and framing of my thesis. I also like to thank Associate Professor Monica Minnegal who made the SSPS space truly a home and also provided invaluable advice and encouragement on how to survive the isolating nature of doing a PhD.

Although undertaking a PhD can be truly be isolating, this was, however, not my experience. I received enormous support and encouragement from my colleagues. I am particularly grateful to Matthew Mabefam, Bibiana, Tom, Charmaine, Angelique, Amy and Nathan Shea. It is hard to

imagine what this journey would have been without your support. I also want to give a big thank you to Kirsty, Hamza, Mbeva and Sam Wilkins for accepting to read through the final draft chapters at a very short notice. A big thank you also goes to the members of the African Studies Group at the University of Melbourne where I shared my research ideas and received very great feedback.

My gratitude also goes to my friends like Ndungana Divine, Tabe Eric, Florence Tong, Ako Rajour, Epie Chu, Randi Noegroho and the limitless number of friends whose names have not been mentioned here. I appreciate in diverse ways all your contributions to my education in general and PhD, in particular. Without your immense support, I would not have gotten this far. Special thanks also goes to my family, my father Awoh Vincent, mother Celestina, my brothers, and sisters, who have continually and patiently endured my PhD journey with love and support. I equally thank my God parents, Mr and Mrs Otto Langa in Austria, for their financial and spiritual support throughout this study period.

Most importantly, I am forever grateful to the people of Kom, Bali and Bawock who kindly agreed to participate in this project. In particular, I thank the people of these communities who welcomed me into their homes to have interactions with them.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine the role of traditional authorities in conflict management and peace-building in the North-West of Cameroon. I compare two sites within the region (Kom and Bali administrative areas), which have had different experiences regarding ethnically-coloured conflicts and attempts to diffuse it. Attempts to co-opt formal and informal state actors in Cameroon have led to the creation of hybrid political systems where the state is confronted by multiple political orders. These political orders are captured in terms of neo- patrimonial rule and customary governance where the 'modern', legal-bureaucratic state is interfused by intertwined rationalities, values, norms and practices both at the local and national *levels*. This creates the potential for uneasy coexistence with the different normative systems of governance. Where the fields of jurisdiction between the different political orders overlap, it produces tensions and conflicts within local communities with regards to issues such as land governance. I argue that the legitimacy of the state in mediating such conflicts becomes critical when analysing the formal state authority in certain policy fields, while informal state actors like traditional authorities appear to be relevant in processes of local conflict management within local communities only if they remain legitimate. Informed by over eight months of ethnographic research conducted in Cameroon in 2015, I explore the everyday encounters between traditional authorities, local communities and state bureaucrats to explain the ways that legitimacy is built and recognised by different audiences. In the process of establishing control and ownership of land, traditional authorities, the state and the local population become engaged in processes whereby specific aspects of the different sources of legitimacy are borrowed, reproduced, altered and/or co-opted. It is through examining these local interactions in relation to the control and ownership of land, I argue, that it is easier to understand how legitimacy is gained and sustained because one gets to learn what traditional authorities do as custodians of land and what their actions mean to their communities. Set out to understand how traditional authorities gain and sustain legitimacy and the role that they play in conflict prevention/ management at the local level, the findings of this thesis show that different sources of legitimacy will matter in conflict management depending on the policy field in question. However, once a traditional leader loses his moral legitimacy with the grassroots, he does not only undermine his power to mediate community conflicts, he also creates a situation of conflict.

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ACRONYMS

CPDM	Cameroon People Democratic Movement
DO	Divisional Officers
JPS	Justice and Peace Service, a Human Right Organisation run by the Arch Diocese of Bamenda-Cameroon
KNC	Kamerun National Congress
KNDP	Kamerun National Democratic Party
KPP	Kamerun People's Party
NRM	National Resistance Army.
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SDO	Senior Divisional Officer

GLOSSARY

Abasakom and Nggvin-Kijem	The two sectors that make up what is referred as Kom proper
A-langha-Kwifoyn	A traditional injunction used by the Kwifoyn in Kom
Ba’ni	They constitute the mainstream Bali and are those who are believed to have migrated from Nigeria. Other groups were only incorporated as they migrated to their present location
Ba’Nten or Lolo	This are sub groups who joined the Bali alliance in fleeing hostility and harassment from stronger groups
Bali Nyonga	Is a first-class fondom founded before colonial rule. The Bali Nyonga subdivision constitutes a wide range of ethnic communities with Bali as the dominant centralised ethnic unit
Bawock	They are a second-class chiefdom in Bali Nyonga subdivision and are predominantly a Francophone community, believed to have migrated from Bangante in the Western-Region of Cameroon in the late 19 th century
Bonte	The political head of a village in Kom who is answerable to the paramount Fon
Chum	A Bali thatch house where several sacred and secular treasures were kept
Chutete	This is a High court which holds at the gate of the palace in Bali, constituted by elders
Etwi	Etwi is a court in the Kom palace which try cases that have no witchcraft implications
Fon	Fons (chiefs) are the head of traditional governments and are considered to be the secular and spiritual leader of their fondom in the North-West Region of Cameroon
Fo-Nte	These are the village heads in Bali
Fouwah-ah	This is a particular leaf that is used in Bali for banishment. It also used as a form of traditional injunction in land related disputes in Bali
Fulani	Major group of West African pastoralists who are believed to have migrated from Nigeria and settled in North-West Cameroon in the late 19 th century

Grassfield	This is a colonial appellation of North-West Cameroon, which is characterised by high relief, cool temperatures, heavy rainfall and savanna vegetation
Juju	Pidgin term for ‘medicines’ covering all kinds of transformative agencies including both herbal medicines and masquerades
Kom	Kom is often used to refer to Kom proper- Abasakom and Nggvin-Kijem made of 43 villages - and to the ten sub fons who constitute the tributary fondoms of Kom and enjoy considerable autonomy
Kwifoyn	It is a traditional, all-male governing body in Kom
Laikom	The traditional capital of Kom, the place where the Kom people first settled on their arrival in the land
Ma yo mi mfon	Translated to mean ‘to drink from the Fon’s cup’. It is the process where disputants can take forward the case to the Supreme Court where the Fon of Bali is the judge
Manjong	Social dance group in Kom and Bali which in pre-colonial times served as military clubs. In Bali today, they constitute the military clubs charged with law enforcement at the village which are placed directly under the leadership of the sub-fon with the paramount Fon himself as the supreme commander
Mansenteh	The High Court of appeal in Bali, which is a dispute commission that is directly linked with the Fon, but that can make independent decisions
Mantum village	This is a village in the Bali subdivision and shares borders with Pinyin and Mbu villages in the Santa subdivisions. They have farmlands which both groups claim ownership
Mbu-Pin-Wock alliance	This was the working alliance three villages: Bawock (in the Bali sub division) and Mbu and Pinyin (in the Santa sub division) which was meant to map out the borders between the Bali and Santa subdivisions within Mezam division
Mfe-Ngamfais	The term the Bawock people commonly use to refer to themselves which connects them with their roots in Bangante
Mukum-	The mukum are juju groups that represent the Kwifoyn at the village level
Nchindo	People the Fon of Kom sends on missions
Nchintoh	The Fon’s Kinsman to take good care of the Fon and give advice

Nda-akum	This are social clubs in Bali also charged with the responsibility of reinforcing the laws of the land and ensuring that defaulters are punished
Nggvin	A village parallel of ntul which reconciles disputant parties and punish people who maliciously uproot crops and trees that may lead to famine
Ngoh-Ntuin	The stone of denial in Kom Palace used to determine evildoers
Ngumba	It is a cult that is primarily responsible for reinforcing the laws of the land and ensuring that defaulters are punished
Nikangsu-	the traditional police force at Laikom
Nkom Ba, ni	They are the hereditary nkoms in Bali
Nkomfon	This is a Privy Council in Bali which advises the Fon and assist in the administration of Bali
Nkoms	non-territorial authorities who deal with the maintenance of social order within a territorial framework
Ntsi Su'Fu	The Bali shrine at a stream where Bali perform annual Lela festival
Ntul	Ntul-shrine/court acts like a centre for reconciliation in Kom
Ran-ngon	These are elders who are considered owners of the kingdom when they sit in the traditional Council (Chutete)
Su gvuf ntul'	This is the act of initiation into ntul in Kom
Voma	A religious body in Bali whose functions are three-fold; protection, productivity and initiation rite
Wayndatoh	Errand boys in the palace

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Map of Africa showing the location of Cameroon



Source: <http://billbaroni.com/cameroon-africa-map/>

Map of Cameroon showing the ten regional boundaries



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cameroon>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Growing up as a teenage boy in the 1990s in Cameroon, I witnessed the attention and respect that our parents gave to traditional authorities both in towns and rural communities. Although my parents, like many others, had migrated from a rural area in the North-West of Cameroon to a rural area in the South-West of the country for better economic opportunities, they still invariably attached much interest to the rural area from which they came. Together with others, they collectively acted in the perceived interest of their places of origin. For example, they identified development priorities and raised funds to develop such projects back in their villages. Fundraising projects were often scheduled for the month of December at the end of every harvest season (cocoa and coffee). This was in the anticipation that at the end of the harvest season, members could contribute funds more generously to support home-based projects of collective interest in their home region, like building town halls, bridges or community schools.

These funds were often handed to village Development Associations back in the villages which executed these projects. December was also the month in which fons (a fon is a chieftain or king in the North-West, Western and part of the South-West Region of Cameroon) would program national tours to visit their 'subjects' residing outside their fondoms ¹. Such visits were partly intended to mobilise support for such local initiatives. The reception accorded to visiting fons was always colourful and they were treated with respect and majesty. Their visits were usually the talk of the town or village for several weeks after they were gone. Different ethnic communities from different fondoms were always in competition between themselves with regards to the lavish treatment they could reserve for their visiting fons.

My memory of that time was that in contrast to the treatment of fons, the treatment given to state officials like Divisional Officers (D.O.s)² was less supportive. It was challenging for any village head to mobilise the community to attend scheduled public visits by state officials. Some community members would deliberately travel out of the village so as to avoid

¹ A fondom is a territory ruled by a fon.

² Cameroon has ten regions and each region is divided into administrative units referred as divisions. These divisions are headed by presidentially appointed officers (DOs) who perform the duties of the governor on a smaller scale.

attending such visits; while others would prefer to go to their farms during such visits despite threats of punishment or sanctions. We, as college students, in many instances became the unintended audience who sat in meetings on behalf of our parents who saw no reason to attend such meetings. With all the administrative and judicial power on the side of the state against informal state actors like fons, I began to ask what could account for such a disparity in terms of loyalty. The question, in a clearer form today, would have been who is perceived to have authority and influence with regard to these communities?

Just when it was becoming apparent to me that the fons were the natural rulers of the people; based on how their authority was highly revered and supported by the communities during their visit, other things were taking place that challenged this conclusion. The rebirth of multiparty politics in Cameroon in the early 1990s saw fons gain new responsibilities within national party politics. Most of the fons whose receptions I had watched as I grew up in the coastal cities, and who used to enjoy enviable respect and prestige, increasingly met resistance from their communities. This was partly because some fons had decided to align with political parties against the will of their 'subjects' who wanted their fons to remain politically neutral.

Some of these fons were rejected by their own communities in the North-West. This was not only peculiar to the cases I observed, many in the North-West Region had risen against traditional leaders who opted for active political roles. In some of the communities that were more radical, fons were burnt alive by the villagers while others were dethroned. Some fons managed to retain their positions but did so through being heavily guarded by palace guards and in some cases by the police within their palaces. This was strange because within the Grassfield (this is a colonial appellation of North-West Cameroon, which is characterised by high relief, cool temperatures, heavy rainfall and savanna vegetation), fons were said to mediate between the living and the supernatural world, and in my observation, gained legitimacy in the eyes of the communities largely because of this intermediary role. In this sense, they were the sacred repository of the peoples' culture and incarnate the collective being of their communities. Those fons who engaged in politics during the multiparty period had to rely on the state for protection. This posed a challenge to their authority and legitimacy that is customarily derived from their office as custodians of culture, rather than as an extension of authority of the larger state.

The burning and dethronement of fons was indicative that the people were questioning the authority and legitimacy of the fons, challenging their moral and religious grounds for representing the collective interest of their communities given their co-opted role in partisan politics. Such fons seemed to have lost their relevance as the sacred container of the people's cultural norms. Most of the fons who suffered this fate had either sold community land entrusted under their leadership to private investors or were supporting political views that were unpopular within these communities. While few communities in the North-West embraced those political leaders involved in party politics in the early 1990s in Cameroon, not all involved in party politics suffered the same fate. Some communities were more tolerant than others. The degree to which fons were accepted or criticised had implications for the extent to which such fons could speak for their people. In those communities where fons were no longer trusted they were less able to mediate disputes in communities, in which they had long played a key role.

These sorts of dynamics gave rise to the broader question in Cameroon in the 1990s as to whether fons should participate in party politics and, if so, what role could they play? How was such participation in national politics going to affect their role in conflict management? The bigger question was whether traditional authorities would survive the new shift? These questions arose because traditional authorities had historically been, and continue to be, responsible and involved in conflict management within their communities. These questions were also provoked by the high frequency of violent communal conflicts in the North-West Region, which usually involved different ethnic communities and has since then steadily increased over the years. Illegal land grabbing and the co-option of fons into party politics only intensified the ethnic conflicts that were ongoing in the North-West at the time (Nkwi 2011). These doubts rose because the authority and legitimacy of traditional leaders was now being questioned by their own communities. The constitutional provision on the role of fons within the decentralised structures in Cameroon was also not clear on what their new roles could be.

My observation on the dilemma of traditional authorities in Cameroon led to the realisation that the issue of defining a role for traditional authorities and their institutions was, in the Cameroonian context, highly controversial. This was because of the way traditional authorities are defined within the state constitution; as auxiliaries of the state within the

decentralisation framework in Cameroon. Given these dynamic experiences with traditional authorities in Cameroon, it would appear that in as much as traditional authorities can mediate local conflicts, their success is largely determined by the people's imagination of them and perception of the authority they hold.

In Cameroon, like elsewhere in Africa, the debate on the role and legitimacy of traditional authorities rose sharply around the early 1990s (Cheka 2008). The introduction of multiparty politics and forms of decentralisation in the 1990s clearly brought the issue of traditional authorities, their history and role within the modern state to the fore (Jua 1995; Fisiy 1995). Despite efforts to marginalise them in Cameroon, or to abolish them as was the case in other parts of Africa like Mozambique and Ghana in the early days after independence, traditional authorities within the continent have remained a force that could not be overruled when multiparty politics and decentralisation were introduced in the 1990s (Kyed 2006). This prompted scholars like Ismail (1999 p.1) to comment that 'the institution [of traditional authorities] has shown an amazing degree of resilience'. At the same time, the continued survival of traditional authorities in Africa has raised the question of their role in contemporary African politics. Are they of any relevance? With specific focus on conflicts, the question remains whether traditional authorities play or could play any meaningful role in contributing to ethnic /community conflict management?

1.1 The key debate on the resilience of traditional authorities in post-colonial Africa

Scholars have viewed the survival of traditional authorities in Africa through different lenses, highlighting three main elements which they contend accounts for their continued existence and influence from colonial regimes to post-colonial states. Some scholars like Maloka (1995), Mamdani (2001; 1996), Ribot (2002) and Ntsebeza (2005) contend that the survival of traditional authorities is directly associated with the colonial policies of indirect and direct rule which was largely practiced by Britain and France and have been continued by post-colonial African states. These authors observed that colonial policies were created to manage Africans under direct and indirect rule rather than to enfranchise them. Through indirect rule for example, colonial powers could control their colonies through pre-colonial power structures that they found in place, which aimed at minimising administrative cost without any consideration of emancipating the Africans. Ribot (2002) for example, notes the daily

activities of the administration were left in the hands of the traditional leaders who facilitated the extraction of raw materials for European factories. In return, chiefs were empowered, and they regarded themselves as superior to the other members of their communities. Ntsebeza (2005) and Mamdani (1996) have tied the desire to use chiefs in the administration to 'the native question'.³ The native question had to do with how best to administer the African people in such a way that maximised colonial interest. Upholding traditional institutions was therefore a strategy to maximise colonial interest. This school of thought championed by Mamdani (1996) suggests that at independence, post-colonial African states have continued with these colonial legacies without modifications.

Other scholars like Jua (1995) and Ismail (1999) contend that traditional authorities survived and continue to survive on the basis of the traditional role they play as custodians of customs which keep local communities submissive to their authorities. This is so, despite efforts by colonial and post-colonial states to marginalise or abolish them. Other scholars like Bank and Southall (1996), Alexander (1995) and Bourdillon (1987) argue that traditional institutions continue to prevail today, because not all of them collaborated with the imperial colonial regimes. Bank and Southall (1996), for example, argue that some chiefs maintained their legitimacy largely because they were excluded from the colonial administration.

Alongside the above perspectives, the way traditional authorities have negotiated their spaces within post-colonial African states nonetheless remains a subject of debate among researchers seeking to understand these old forms of political order and how they integrate with new forms. By trying to negotiate a space for themselves, most traditional authorities have reasserted their authority over their 'subjects'. This they did against predictions from scholars like Warnier (1982) who suggested that structures of traditional leadership that were designed to serve colonial interest would collapse soon after independence. With the resurgence of multiparty politics under democratic governments in Africa in the 1990s, traditional authorities resurfaced as major stake-holders in national politics and made themselves a force that could not be sidelined in local governance.

³ The native question, according to Mamdani (1996), was the basic problem that existed in every colony where minority. European colonial power was to rule over the majority indigenous population.

Traditional leaders appear to be ready to accommodate and to be accommodated by the post-colonial state to remain relevant and, in the process, they shuttle between tradition and national politics.

This practice of shuttling between tradition and national politics further raises the question of where traditional leaders get their legitimacy and authority, a subject which this thesis seeks to explore. There is debate in the literature that seeks to provide answers to these questions. Ribot (2001) for example argues that traditional authorities rely on international donors as well as local/state governments for their authority. His argument is based on grounds that traditional authorities in most African countries are auxiliaries of the government. For this reason, Ribot (2001) casts doubt on the legitimacy of traditional authorities that is based on culture and disagrees with the view that traditional authorities gain their legitimacy because they are indigenous, traditional, local and accountable as Ismail (1999) suggests. Ribot (2001p.77) states: 'chiefs are not necessarily representative, legitimate or even liked by the local population, neither are they necessarily accountable to the local population'. This is also the opinion of Spierenburg (2002) who observed with his research in Zimbabwe that although traditional authorities appeared to have regained grounds in terms of moral/political authority and influence in the country, their communities do not necessarily see that chiefs have the legitimacy to represent their interests in national politics. This has resulted in unintended consequences of violence where communities have risen against leaders who purportedly act on behalf of the same people who revolt against them. Such violence directed at some of the traditional leaders brings to the fore the question of how conflicts relate with claims of legitimacy.

1.2 The nexus between legitimacy and conflict in this study

The African continent has been faced with a wide variety of violent conflict with destructive consequences. Local, national and international actors alike have struggled to manage, let alone resolve violent conflicts (Jackson 2002). One way to understand these multiple conflicts in Africa is to capture the extent to which such conflicts are usually a challenge to the legitimacy and authority of the ruling class.

This challenge to legitimacy and authority stems from the fact that there is a continuous struggle between traditional leaders and the state as they compete at the local level (Boege

et al. 2009). Under such circumstances, the two forms of authority—that is, the state and traditional authority—tend to exist as protagonists at the local arena which often results in violent clashes between them (Jackson 2002). Such complex power dynamics that characterise traditional authority at the grassroots often result in clashes with the state on the one hand and the local communities on the other. This thesis will explore, in part, how competition between traditional leaders and the state at the local level affects the extent to which traditional leaders can act independently from the state on issues such as land and even succession disputes without ending in a confrontation with the state bureaucrats.

Placed in a vulnerable position to take decisions independent of the state, some traditional leaders try to instead gravitate towards the state by relying on the state to legitimise or consolidate their authority. Ntsebeza (2005) argues that some traditional leaders see their engagement with national politics as a way to safeguard their authority which is usurped by politicians. But this has implications too, given that when traditional leaders get involved in politics it does not appeal to all within their communities (Fisiy 1995; Nyamnjoh 2002). This is because, to some, a political role for leaders erodes their traditional basis of legitimacy, a subject which this thesis explores in detail. This is especially so where traditional leaders are not perceived to represent the collective interest of their communities given that their authority risks rejection as illegitimate and possibly erodes their capacity to intervene in conflicts when tensions arise. Particularly when coupled with ethnic tensions, the inability or unwillingness to act for the collective good of the community (because of political affiliations) could be a key factor that can trigger violence or escalate tensions.

There are thus important connections between the legitimacy of traditional authority, conflict escalation and conflict management at the local levels. According to Sawyer (2003), institutional failure and loss of legitimacy by leaders is often a contributing factor to the outbreak of such conflicts which are common among African societies. Any loss of legitimacy, be it the state or traditional authority, affects the ability of the leaders to exert influence over their 'subjects' or the wider citizenry. It also affects their ability to mitigate conflicts when they occur since their decisions under such circumstances cease to have any relevance to the community which they are supposed to govern.

The lack of legitimacy as a driver/consequence of conflict highlights the importance of inclusive governance in averting conflict outcomes. It also highlights the need to understand local interpretations of legitimacy and how this could fuel local tensions to escalate into violent conflicts. As Sawyer (2003) asserts, when such institutions fail or are considered untrustworthy, insecurity, including fears of violence could be heightened and individuals or groups tend to rely on their own capabilities resulting in even more outcomes of conflict. The emphasis, drawing from Sawyer (2003), is that the legitimacy of conflict management institutions/mechanisms is critical in diverse contexts, such as in multi-ethnic societies. Understanding some of the conflicts in Africa will require investigating how local interpretations of legitimacy affect such conflict outcomes. This especially the case given that legitimacy requires communities to recognise governing regimes/institutions as appropriate and right. Without legitimacy, institutions (either traditional authorities or the institutions of the state) find it difficult to function, which may contribute to some of the violent ethnic conflicts witnessed across the African continent.

1.3 Aims and objectives

This thesis studies traditional authority, its relationship with multiparty politics, and the role traditional authorities play in local conflict management in two localities in the North-West of Cameroon: the Kom in Boyo Division and the Bali in Mezam Division. I chose to research the Kom because though there exists the potential for violent conflict based on limited resources and infighting between farmers and grazers, Kom has not experienced large scale violent conflict. The choice of Bali on the other hand, is because despite sharing a similar political system to Kom (a centralised fondom), Bali has experienced many large-scale ethnic conflicts between groups within its boundaries and also with neighbouring groups. As recently as 2007, people from Bali and Bawock were involved in a violent ethnic conflict. I briefly introduce these dynamics and the site selection further below. This thesis offers an explanation as to why there are differential conflict outcomes in Kom and Bali and how this is in part explained by the changing role of traditional authorities in both the wider political order in Cameroon (national and subnational levels) and how this shape and is shaped by their perceived legitimacy. It also looks at how these local perceptions about the legitimacy of traditional authorities in turn have implications for their effectiveness in managing conflict and in part helps to explain differential conflict outcomes in Kom and Bali.

This thesis thus aims to describe and analyse the role that traditional authorities play, or could play, in relation to local conflicts. This entails an understanding of the complex and diverse conflict management strategies used by traditional authorities in Cameroon, including, their mechanisms of accountability and the transformation they have undergone over time. Through the case studies of Kom and Bali, this study seeks to understand the role of traditional authorities in local governance and conflict mediation. Ultimately, this research considers how, and under what conditions, traditional authorities do or do not gain and sustain legitimacy.

1.4 Research questions

The idea of resilience and the issues of authority and legitimacy of traditional leaders are central to this thesis. The question of how traditional authorities derive their legitimacy and how that affects their popularity and impact on local conflicts constitute the core of this thesis. In brief, the questions this thesis seeks to answer specifically are:

1. What is the basis of power that is exercised by traditional authorities in Cameroon?
2. How do traditional authorities gain and sustain legitimacy?
3. What is the relationship between traditional authorities and the modern state, and how does this affect conflict management at the grassroots in Cameroon?
4. What role do traditional authorities play in conflict prevention and management at the local level?

1.5 The context, the nature of the conflict and the core argument in this study

This thesis is focussed on inter-ethnic tensions in Kom more generally, and the Bali-Bawock conflict explicitly, which has experienced tensions and bouts of violence over the past few decades. The Bali-Bawock conflict, which became violent in 2006, is typical of the kind of ethnic conflicts that have become very common in the North-West of Cameroon where this research was conducted. In the early hours of Wednesday 7th of March 2007, the entire Bawock community was attacked and transformed into a waste land of ashes. Compounds were destroyed; food crops such as bananas, cocoyam, cassavas and maize farms were set ablaze. This attack also led to the killing of livestock while electricity and water infrastructures were rendered useless. In a broader context, the Bali-Bawock conflict reflects the politics of

belonging in Cameroon. It is a conflict about claims over who belongs where, who has the right to call a place their homeland, and who gets to write the most widely accepted story of particular events. It welds together questions about land ownership, home, ethnicity and history. This is exacerbated in the North-West because factors such as soil infertility and rapid population growth have increased local demand for land for agricultural purposes provoking many land related conflicts (Kah 2009, 2013; Nkwi 2011; Angwafor 2014).

Rival claims over scarce (land) resources are articulated in discourses that link these claims to ideas of ethnic rights over territories. Competition over the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies also provide a background to these disputes, in which the Bali feel marginalised in the region. For the Bali, the outcome of these political manoeuvrings is the conclusion that one can only trust one's own people. In this instance, the reification of social and political boundaries in contemporary Cameroon is materialised through battles over real territorial boundaries. While this is the case in Bali, similar land conflicts have not had the same dangerous consequences in Kom.

Despite having similar tensions, Kom has not experienced collective violence outright, and has remained relatively peaceful. I examine the preceding dynamics and the eventual escalation of the Bali-Bawock conflict from 2006-2007 and compare this with how conflict has been avoided in Kom. Variation in the conflict outcomes between Kom and Bali, I argue has to do with the ways that fons in Kom and Bali relate with state institutions and state politics. The central argument of this thesis is that fons that have been incorporated into some state institutions eventually get involved in party politics. This then has implications for the extent to which they can respond to local conflicts as traditional authorities because their legitimacy and authority is in question. Interrelation between state politics and state governance with fons limits the extent to which fons like that of Bali (who are close to national politics) can intervene and manage complex conflicts like the Bali-Bawock conflict. It also affects the extent to which they can intervene and manage small-scale conflicts over issues such as land and boundary issues. While such discrete conflicts are not at the same scale as the Bali-Bawock conflict, the involvement of fons in national politics as has been the case with the Fon of Bali, nonetheless affects his ability to manage small and large-scale conflicts because his moral legitimacy has been compromised by his involvement in national politics.

This thesis problematises the active participation of Bali traditional leaders in national politics and the competition between fons in the fondom for political offices at the national level

(which is less so for the Kom). The thesis argues that political participation by traditional leaders has significantly eroded the authority of the Bali fons to be able to effectively manage local tensions, which partly accounts for the recurrence of violent conflicts in Bali and less in Kom. Although traditional leaders could play an active role in national politics and still retain their local prowess to adjudicate on local issues, in this thesis I argue that this is only possible if traditional leaders enter the political scene as neutral mediators. Where this is not the case, the legitimacy of traditional authorities becomes fluid and implicated by their role as development providers (in liaison with the state) and less on the 'traditional' which they represent.

Although this thesis focusses mainly on the post-colonial dynamics to explain the variation in conflict escalation between Bali and Kom, this thesis also discusses how contemporary conflict dynamics are embedded in the differential historical developments in each region. While this thesis does not claim that these historical contexts explain all differentiation in contemporary outcomes, it does show the continuity between past and present in the demands for self-autonomy of sub-groups in Bali and the different ways in which sub-groups were treated and accommodated in social and political life in Kom. Whereas ethnic identities are not static as they are constantly re-negotiated, in Bali, historical legacies helped to shape the contemporary dynamics. Political organisation of Bali in comparison with Kom has allowed for a greater crystallisation of ethnic identities that are more politically salient than Kom. This pattern continued in the colonial period and is ongoing in the post-colonial era as different groups in Bali today attempt to consolidate their unique identities within the Bali polity. Bali is thus, a heterogeneous society and comprises several groups with different histories and identities who have coalesced over the years. This kind of group crystallisation is not evident in Kom. Understanding the historical narratives of different groups in these regions helps shed light on the origins and continuing appeal of ethnic identities in North-West Cameroon.

The analysis of the historical narratives of different groups in this thesis also sheds light on the importance of personal connections and networks between groups – aspects which have been explored in the literature on neopatrimonialism (Chabal & Daloz 1999; Bayart 1993; Richards 1996; 2005; 2008; Losch 2000), some of which focusses on how patrons use state resources in order to secure the loyalty of clients and the relationship this has with conflict. These personal connections and networks, in a way, constitute inherent aspects of social relation, which this thesis argues have differential importance for diverse policy fields – from land

management to broader state administrative functions – particularly when actors in these networks perform social and political roles. This thesis contends that influential actors in these networks have different sources of authority and legitimacy depending on the policy field in question. When actors such as traditional authorities lose their perceived legitimacy, there are implications for wider social relations, the way public institutions function, how conflicts occur and are framed and even how such groups manage local conflicts. Conflicts in Africa are therefore not just underpinned by what the literature describes as political ‘instrumentalisation of disorder’ and do not just occur largely as a result of the struggle to serve the patrimonial purposes of the patron –client relationship (see, for example, Chabal and Daloz 1999). To assume that neopatrimonialism is the sole essence of African politics which invariably leads to conflicts is essentialist and erroneous. The processes of conflict escalation and management are far more complex, as explained in this thesis. But of course, violence can be the means by which social and political negotiations are made, especially by those who exploit such conflicts to pursue their individual objectives, with the inevitable consequence of greater violence.

The overarching point I make here is that while the description of the neopatrimonial system in Africa in the literature is complex and generally not disputable, the way the literature explains the existence of the system (limited mostly to Africa), how neopatrimonialism relates to conflict, and the way that the literature sees neopatrimonialism as necessarily being a corrupt and illegitimate practice, is too simplistic and problematic because such an understanding is not grounded in a careful analysis of the underlying drivers of conflicts, the multiplicity and hybridity of political orders that vary across the continent, and how the legitimacy of key actors in political and social spheres can vary across time and space.

The thesis explores the current relations between Bali and its neighbours and how the escalation of violent conflicts is rooted in the events of the early colonial encounters. Under the colonial regimes, Bali became a sub-imperial power in the then termed Grassfield Region under the German and later the British administration. This was because of an alliance which the Bali signed with the Germans which attempted to unify the whole region under the Fon of Bali. The Fon of Bali through the alliance was answerable only to the German administrators. Because of the alliance, the Germans trained the Bali troops and armed them

with rifles, enabling them to achieve dominance over their neighbours, imposing the Fon of Bali as the overriding paramount Fon of the region. The repercussion of this alliance, I argue, is the protracted history of animosity between Bali and their neighbours. Not only are the Bali Nyonga accused of using their power to acquire more land, but they are also accused of having benefitted enormously from the supply of forced labour of their neighbours like the Moghamo and the Widikum ethnic groups (a small fraction of the Widikum and Moghamo people still constitute ethnic minority groups within the Bali polity today) for work on the German plantations on the coast of Cameroon.

I use the case of Kom in this thesis to challenge the view that traditional authorities get their legitimacy solely in collaboration with the state, as argued for example by Maloka (1995) and Mamdani (1996). I use the case of Kom to argue that the construction of legitimacy for traditional authorities is very contextual in nature. With their different historical legacies, the active participation by the Bali Fon in national politics, against the less active participation of Kom Fon, shape the degree to which they are perceived to act neutrally, differences in their perceived legitimacy in the eyes of local communities, their authority in the fondoms, and the extent to which they can exert any positive influence on local conflicts when they occur. These factors, this thesis argues have contributed to the differences in the manifestation of violent conflicts in the research regions, which are more prevalent in Bali than in Kom.

1.6 Significance

This thesis offers a critique of the views within the literature that explore the legitimacy of traditional authorities strictly within the context of the nation state (see Maloka 1995; Mamdani 1996). Using the cases of Bali and Kom, this thesis will go beyond the limits of the current argument in the literature to show the degree to which they collaborate with the state. Rather it argues that how legitimacy is constructed (Williams 2010; Black 2008) and perceived by the different audiences vary in context and scope and therefore is only partly contingent the state. This thesis emphasizes that the extent to which traditional authorities can intervene and manage local conflict is based on the different types of legitimacy that they hold. This study will show that legitimacy is to a degree historically contingent, as well as being based in the perceptions of different audiences and what they expect from leadership within contemporary discourse and political order.

Failure to understand how traditional authorities in different contexts construct their legitimacy, and how they are conceived by the local communities, would make understanding people's primary motivations for following (or not) the directives of traditional authorities a difficult task. These new insights contribute to the literature that examines the legitimacy of traditional authorities in relation to their efficacy in managing or mitigating local conflicts. In doing so, this study contributes to the understanding of the escalation of small incidents of violence or disputes into larger ethnic conflicts and approaches to larger ethnic conflicts.

This study will further show that preferential treatment for some groups and not others in public policies, explains also how an institution may lose legitimacy in the eyes of the population and the resulting consequences which could be violent conflict. This is because subjects/citizens tend to withdraw their support from institutions or state leadership that cannot represent the collective interest of the localised population. The inability to integrate regions or minority groups into the larger communal polities negatively affects the authority and legitimacy of traditional leaders. It can exacerbate socio-political tensions leading to violent conflicts. This research will shed some light in understanding the prevalence of disorder across some African states that can be seen through demonstrations that question the legitimacy of leaders and their ability to mediate or mitigate local conflicts. Such feelings of exclusion, under-representation and marginalisation within certain communities are attributed to the ineffectiveness of leadership and hence erodes the legitimacy and authority that both political and traditional leaders could exert on the population.

With specific reference to Cameroon, this study contributes new knowledge to research on the role that traditional authorities play in contemporary conflict management and peacebuilding in Cameroon. This is crucial, particularly given the current rise of secessionist groups in the Anglophone Cameroon⁴ (comprised of North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon) which has led to mass demonstrations. Some other groups are calling for a return to a federal system of government as it was in 1961 to preserve the bilingual, bi-jural and bi-cultural nature of the country (French and English cultures). In this ongoing struggle, the state has intensified its relationship with traditional leaders, requesting them to denounce the calls for federation or secession in support of a one and indivisible Cameroon. Traditional

⁴ The former British Mandate territory under the League of Nations and Trust territory under the United Nations.

leaders are, as a result, caught betwixt and between the choice to stand with their subjects who have risen beyond political affiliations to denounce corruption by, and marginalisation from, the state, or to support the government in their effort to suppress the ongoing people's revolution. While there is no unanimous reaction from these Anglophone chiefs in Cameroon, their choice to support or denounce the uprising speaks volumes about their source of legitimacy and authority. Do these chiefs have authority and legitimacy by aligning with the state or through the popular support of the people?

The fact that the country is beset by a crisis of governance and has been classified as a fragile/failing state (International Crisis Group 2010) makes my study highly pertinent. Ethnic conflicts in the North-West Region are on the rise, which has given rise to economic, social and humanitarian problems (Nkwi 2011). The leadership of President Paul Biya (thirty-six years in power) and his perceived manipulation of ethnic identities have generated an immense sense of frustration among Cameroonians (Nyamnjoh 2002). Other scholars of Cameroon politics such as Fisiy (1995) and Jua (1995) have already argued that the state of Cameroon's reform road map should include devolving greater administrative power to regions (figuring out a role for chiefs), protecting minority rights and enhancing citizens' participation. Though the role of traditional authorities is not without problems, this research will provide the state of Cameroon with reflections that can contribute in promoting peace and stability in the North-West Region that has experienced so much ethnic conflict. The findings will also help policy formulators, politicians and some scholars who, while focussing on policy issues, have tended to ignore historical origins and the complex and fluid nature of traditional leadership when defining a role for traditional authorities.

1.7 Overview of the chapters

This section provides a brief overview of the next nine chapters of the thesis which are divided into four parts. Part one highlights the methodology and the main theories that have informed this study. Part two demonstrates how historical legacies of ethnic formation and colonial experiences affected the authority of fons in Kom and Bali. Part three looks at the different claims that account for ethnic conflicts in Kom and Bali. These include the issues of identity, boundary claims, and scarce resources. It also discusses the activities of political elites within Kom and Bali, and how such activities contribute to violent outcomes. Part four

shows how the legitimacy of traditional authorities is in turn affected by their political choices, that is, their decision of whether or not to play an active role in party politics.

1.8.1 Part one: Methodology and literature review

Chapter Two discusses the background to the North-West Region of Cameroon, and the methodology and the methods that were used in this research. Chapter Three examines the theoretical literature, how concepts such as ethnicity, traditional authority and legitimacy are understood in the thesis. The comparison between Bali and Kom hinges on the perceived legitimacy of traditional authority, which then connects to a range of contextual variations between the two communities. This includes the broader colonial legacies, interactions between the fons and party politics and the state, as well as the demarcation of ethnic communities. This implies that to grasp the role of traditional authorities in dealing with conflict situations, one needs to understand ethnicity, conflict, traditional authority and the state.

1.8.2 Part two: The history of traditional institutions (Kom and Bali)

This part consists of Chapter Four which looks at the evolution of traditional authorities in Cameroon and Chapter Five that outlines traditional Governance institutions in Kom and Bali and details how the pre-colonial historical legacies has shaped the extent to which fons are able to wield power and authority over their subjects. It also shows how traditional authorities in Kom and Bali were affected by colonial regimes in Cameroon. By so doing, part two demonstrates the extent to which such historical realities and colonial interventions were able to strengthen or weaken the authority of fons.

Chapter Four examines the evolution of traditional authorities under colonial administration (colonial policies) in Cameroon and argues that the relation between indigenous leaders and the colonialists was determined by the extent to which any given community collaborated with or resisted colonial authority. This chapter therefore explores the ways in which traditional institutions in Kom and Bali had been weakened or strengthened by colonial exigencies. Chapter Five provides a basis for my comparative analysis by looking at traditional governance institutions in Kom and Bali. This chapter argues that the patterns of spatial village settlement and the ways in which minority groups integrate within the predominant groups

affect the extent to which larger communities can establish their authority over the smaller groups and influences the methods through which local conflicts are managed.

1.8.3 Part three: catalyst of ethnic conflicts

Part three consists of two chapters (Chapter Six and Seven) and explores the different claims that account for ethnic conflicts in Kom and Bali. It discusses issues of identity, boundary, and claims to scarce resources and patron-client networks, factors which are often conceptualised within the literature as the principal causes of ethnic conflict in Africa. It also intimates the desire by political elites to achieve power within the modern state, which obliges them to maintain close ties with their places of origin. Against this background, I compare the activities of political elites within their home villages in Kom and Bali.

Chapter Six looks at identity, power dynamics and boundary claims in understanding ethnic conflicts by looking more closely at the case that is central to my thesis: the Bali-Bawock conflict that unfolded in 2006 and 2007. This chapter presents a narrative of the Bali-Bawock conflict and demonstrates through the conflict how identity, power and borders as markers are reproduced over time. Chapter Seven focusses on the instrumentalisation of ethnic sentiments in Kom and Bali. This chapter explores the linkages between elites and their home villages in Kom and Bali (Bawock). It highlights the different strategies that political elites, traditional leaders and state bureaucrats use in deepening identity crises and how this engenders local conflicts. By comparing the nature of elite politics in Kom and Bali, this chapter demonstrates the different ways and techniques through which politicians manipulate ethnic identities for political gains. 1.8.4 Part four: Claims to legitimacy in Kom and Bali and the relationship between the state and traditional authorities in local governance.

This part consists of two chapters (Chapters Eight and Nine). It focusses on how the legitimacy of traditional authorities is in turn affected by their political choices, that is, their decision of whether to play an active role in national politics. This is done by examining the relationship between traditional leaders and their subjects in Kom and Bali and the different ways in which traditional leaders have come to gain legitimacy within these communities. This is based on the kind of relations that Kom and Bali have maintained with the post-colonial state and how their communities react to these claims. It shows that the political choices of traditional leaders are critical in understanding the extent to which they can legitimately act (the role that fons could play in managing local conflicts) on the collective interest of their

communities. When fons play active roles in national politics as the Fon of Bali does, it affects his ability to manage local conflicts because his moral legitimacy becomes compromised by his political affiliation.

Chapter Eight problematises the active participation of fons in party politics. This chapter puts in context the different ways in which legitimacy is acquired in Kom and Bali which has significantly been informed by their pre-colonial histories, but also their relationship with the colonial and the post-colonial states. It argues that the construction and interpretation of legitimacy in Kom and Bali is different. Although both communities draw on tradition for their authority, the Kom people mainly turn to cultural attributes for their legitimacy, which they see as incompatible with modern state politics. Chapter Nine looks at the contesting forms of authorities in grassroots governance and the resulting impact on conflicts. It examines the relationship between traditional leaders and the state at the local level. This includes the ways in which these local stakeholders collaborate in the execution of their roles as enshrined by the law, but also how they negotiate their spaces outside the limits of the law. This chapter demonstrates that both the state bureaucrats and traditional authorities exploit the constitutional lapses that define their functions within the framework of decentralisation in Cameroon. This is often done in ways that perpetuate local conflicts in the North-West.

The final chapter sums up the findings of the thesis. It shows how divergent inter-connections between traditional authorities and delineations of community and state institutions, democratic forces, and neo-patrimonial politics are negotiated differently. It also shows how this produces paradoxes about the nature of authority and legality and tensions (between different groups and offices) which can then trigger different kinds of local conflicts like the Bali-Bawock conflict. It summarises how the previous chapters have answered the research questions. The chapter will highlight how underlying aspects, such as community grievances and local perceptions of difference between groups, should be duly considered alongside elite mobilisation and the socio-economic context. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with the crux of this thesis, which is the finding that different sources of legitimacy will matter depending on the policy field in question. It demonstrates that moral legitimacy is always an absolute necessity for fons when it comes to grassroots governance. It further demonstrates the fact that when a fon loses moral legitimacy, he loses his ability to control local dynamics which not only compromises his powers but might even create a situation of conflict.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

2.0 Introduction

This chapter does two things. Firstly, it discusses my methodology. According to Thomas (2002 p. 272) 'the importance and significance of methodology lies in the fact that the issue of what is studied is intimately connected with the question of how it is studied'. The chapter discusses methodology and the methods that were used in this research. This includes the site selection, participant selection, data collection methods and instruments, data management and analysis, and ethical considerations, my positionality and some limitations. The research was based on an interpretative approach using a range of different techniques. This study is based on fieldwork that was carried out in Cameroon, which lasted for eight months, from February to September 2015. I used a set of closely related data gathering methods that complement each other. The authority of the data and knowledge produced by the adopted methodology rests on triangulation of data sources and methods of data collection (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005). This thesis sought to use several methods of data collection to triangulate sources and provide a stronger empirical base for the arguments presented.

A central part of my methodology concerns the comparison between two ethnic communities, respectively in Bali and Kom. This then connects to the second component of this chapter: contextual background. I will provide a historical overview of the modern day North-West Region where this research was conducted, often referred to in colonial literature as the Bamenda Grassfield. This chapter in fact begins with an overview of the North-West Region and the research design including my comparative bases of the two-main research sites: Kom and Bali. The second part looks at the methodology and the different methods through which data was collected, managed and analysed.

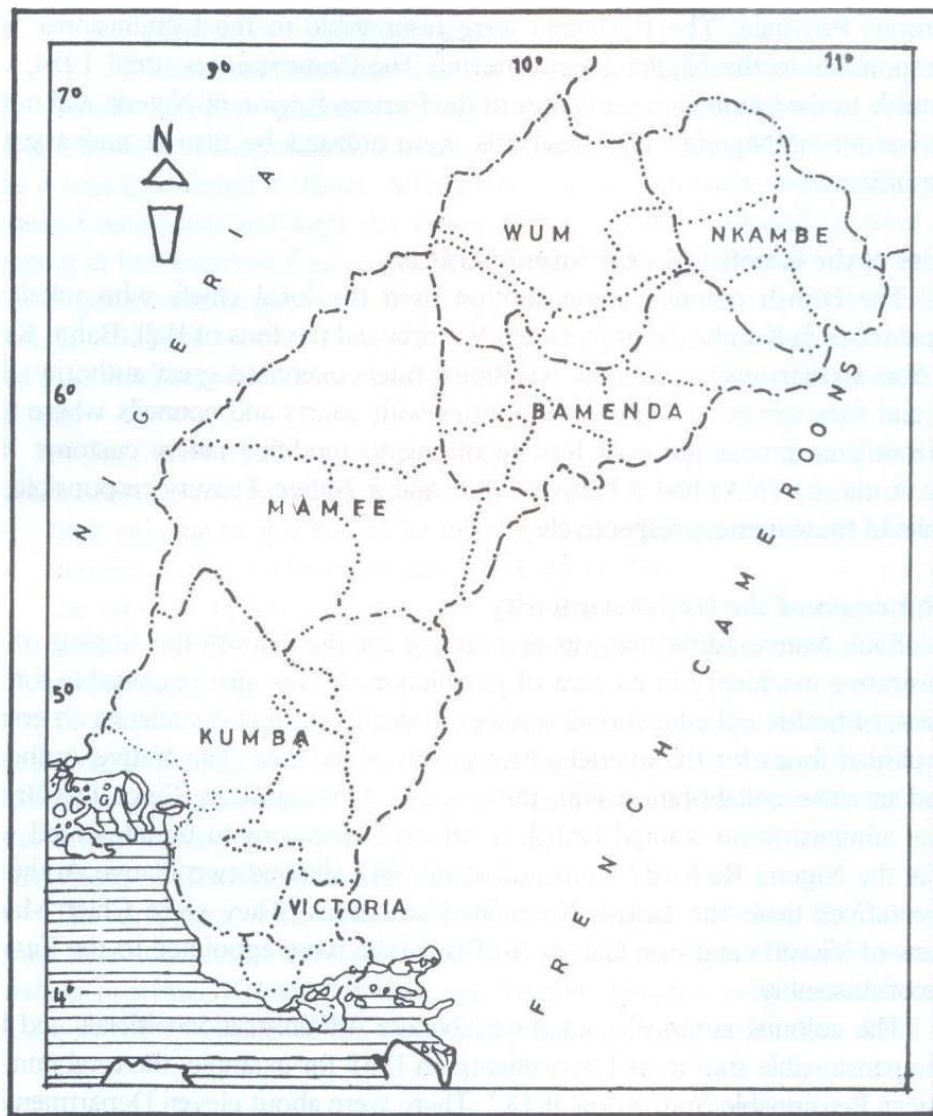
2.1 Background to the study

What is referred to today as the North-West Region (where Kom and Bali are situated) was commonly referred to as the Grassfield in colonial literature. Under the colonial regimes, the western Grassfield constituted part of the mandate of the League of Nations (1922-1945) after the Germans were defeated in the First World War and were forced to yield their overseas territories, of which, German Cameroon was one. This region later became known as the Trust Territory under the United Nations (1946- 1961) and was governed on behalf of

the United Nations by Britain (Ndobegang & Samah 2009). Under the British, the territory became known as Southern Cameroons, which was administered through Nigeria (from 1922-1961) but not as part of the colony (Kah 2011).

The territory was initially administered as the Bamenda Division until 1949 when the name was changed to Bamenda Province. The Bamenda Division was one of the two provinces/regions of Southern Cameroons, the other being the Cameroons Division (what is today known as South-West Region) whose headquarters was changed from Victoria to Buea (Chem-Langhee 1983). The Bamenda Province was further divided into three divisions namely; the Bamenda, Wum and Nkambe divisions (see figure 1).

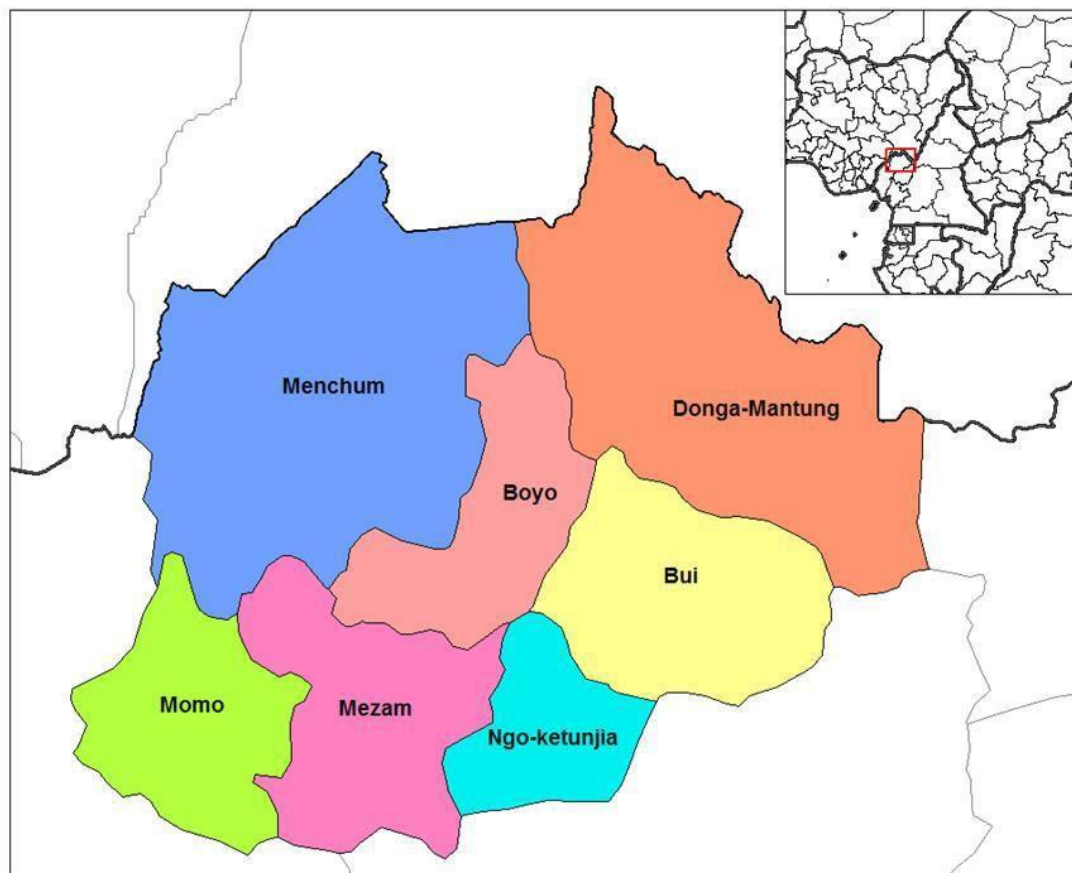
Figure 1: Map of former British Southern Cameroons 1946-1961



Source: (Kah 2011)

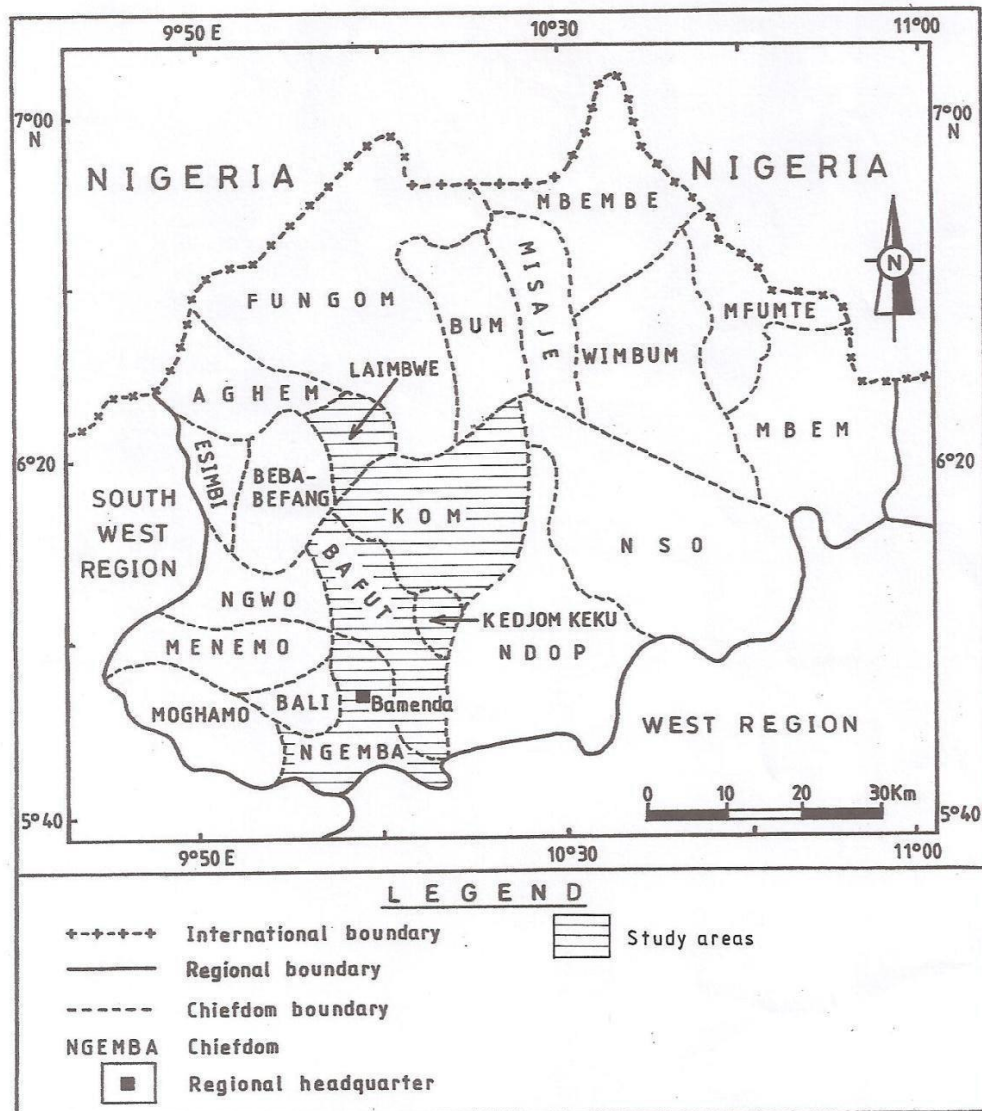
Another change of name took place at independence, when West Cameroon reunified with La Republique du Cameroun in 1961. La Republique du Cameroon was formerly known as French Cameroon which gained independence in 1960. Before 1960, it was a Mandate and a Trust territory of the League of Nations and United Nation respectively. The region (Bamenda Division) was again renamed as the North-West Province after 1961. Much later in 2008 and through a presidential decree, the name changed to North-West Region. It is today one of the ten regions of Cameroon and consists of seven divisions (Boyo, Bui, Donga Mantung, Menchum, Mezam, Momo, and Ngo-Ketunjia) (Kah 2011). The North-West Region is made up of centralised chieftaincy institutions (erstwhile referred to as fondoms- where the rulers enjoyed absolute power) whose demographic histories indicate pre-colonial migratory trajectories, adjustment of cultural patterns and the co-option of new cultural practices to accommodate the Grassfield ecology (Nkwi 1987). See figure two and three below which show the seven divisions that currently make up the North-West Region and the ethnic map of the region respectively. Popular views within the North-West contend that the region has not benefitted much from state development initiatives since independence. It is these sentiments that dominate popular opinion in the North-West of Cameroon. Such feelings partly explain why the strongest opposition party in Cameroon, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) comes from there. Somewhat dramatically, the people describe themselves as the 'Bagdad of Cameroon', a phrase that has been coined to highlight the state of disorder in the region.

Figure 2: Map showing the seven divisions of the North-West Region in Cameroon



Source: <https://www.google.com.au/search?q=MAP+OF+NORTH+WEST+CAMEROON&rlz=1C1GGR>

Figure 3: Ethnic Map of the Bamenda Grassfield



Source: Kah (2011)

2.2 Research design

This thesis is a comparative study and every comparative study begins with an assumption about the comparability of the phenomena under investigation. An assumption that it is, at a certain level of analysis, meaningful to compare the cases along a particular dimension. Sonderweg (1999 p. 49) contends that the result of such a comparison depends on the selection of the subjects of comparison. A key consideration is the extent to which the cases are comparable and the conditions that are required to make any comparison among them meaningful. Comparative research requires that the researcher deploys tools that enable him/her to penetrate beyond the apparent similarities to grasp the context and diverse cultural meanings attached to the phenomena under investigation (Reza 2011). The use of an

interpretative research approach in this study becomes relevant as it aims to understand the way people make meaning through their lived experiences which is context specific.

Bevir and Rhodes (2004) posit that '[i]nterpretative approaches begin from the insight that to understand actions, practices and institutions we need to grasp the relevant meanings, the beliefs and preferences of the people involved' (Bevir & Rhodes 2004 p. 1). They also contend that '[i]nterpretative approaches focus on the meanings that shape actions and institutions, and the ways in which they do so' (Bevir & Rhodes 2004 p. 17). Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meaning participants assign to them (Orlikowski & Baroudi 1991). The use of an interpretive approach in the conduct of this research provided the basis for understanding how communities construct their identities, relationships and how this shapes traditional governance, but also how it determines their attitudes towards conflict. Attention was focussed on actors, practices, beliefs, and discourses that define how meanings are constructed and how this informed individual and community actions to participate in or refrain from conflict.

The choice of the interpretative approach in this study was preferred over the positivist perspective in research, which treats research participants as objects of knowledge to produce scientific knowledge (Creswell 1998). A positivist approach, which relies heavily on experimental and manipulative methods, strives to maintain a distance between the subjective biases of the researcher and the assumed objective reality of the study (Creswell 1998). Creswell further argues that using this approach can impede understanding the research subjects from their own perspectives. Although quantitative studies of conflict are useful as they help to predict where and under what conditions that conflict might breakout, these studies often centre on abstract structures such as the state and civil society, rather than the meanings provided by chiefs, local officials, local people, the public, and intellectuals.

2.2.1 The structure of the comparison between Kom and Bali in this thesis

Existing background knowledge on Kom and Bali suggests that despite their historical specificities and the pattern of ethnic formation over time, there exist clear similarities between the two communities making them suitable sites of comparisons in this research.

For example, the description of the field sites shows that both Kom and Bali fondoms have centralised systems of administration with the fons as the paramount authority. Although power appears to be the prerogative of the sovereign (the fon), it is hardly only exercised by the sovereign. It is exercised at the macro and micro level of everyday lives through institutions but also through local myths that enforce how power is acquiesced within these communities. In addition, although fons in Kom and Bali make claims to absolute authority in all state affairs, there is in fact a distribution of authority among the organs of government which limit the authority of the fons in constitutional ways.

Furthermore, both Kom and Bali depend on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood and with the steady population increase (with Bali estimated at 135000 and Kom at 315000 inhabitants) there is increased competition for arable land. The scarcity of land is further compounded by the large presence of Fulani grazers who depend on traditional grazing methods like transhumance. The competition between farmers and grazers result in local conflicts which has become characteristic of the North-West Region. There is also a strong sense of similarity in the social lives of Kom and Bali with regards to membership to social groups and associations. Both communities have a history of migration before eventually settling at their present locations. In the process of migration, they all intermingled with other cultures from other communities resulting in cultural hybridisation although to varying degrees. These great historical processes have all been instrumental in remaking the economy and social wellbeing of these communities similar in terms of how they bond and interact with each other.

It is on the basis of these similarities that this thesis seeks to understand why Bali (which has similar indigenous political institutions and almost the same level competition over scarce land as Kom) has experienced significant violent conflicts, while this is not the case in Kom. To understand this difference in relation to conflict escalation in Kom and Bali, this thesis will explore factors that account for this variation in conflict outcomes between the two communities. The first element of comparison focusses on the impact of colonial (German and the British) legacies in Kom and in Bali (see Chapter Four). It looks at the relations that these communities had with colonial regimes, how this affected traditional institutions and their perceived legitimacy, and what the implications are for their role in managing local conflicts today.

The second part of the comparison zooms in on the institutional architecture and functions of traditional institutions in Kom and Bali (see Chapter Five). These communities are compared under three broad headings: the exercise of power, conflict management practices and lastly local techniques of law enforcement. By comparing local governance in Kom and Bali under the above categories, I make the argument that the patterns of spatial village settlement and the ways in which minority groups became co-opted with larger groups especially in Bali significantly affected the extent to which the dominant groups in Bali can establish their authority over the smaller groups and influences the methods through which local conflicts are managed.

The third element of comparison then compares the activities of politicians within their home villages in Kom and Bali (Chapter Seven). The comparison focusses on the linkages between politicians and their home villages. The comparison is carried out under four broad categories. The first is local elites and the politicisation of traditional institutions. The second is the administrative governance patterning to claims to territory, rights and privileges. The third category is political access and exclusion in terms of party politics in Kom and Bali. The fourth and final category compares the political dynamics within these communities. The focus in the fourth category is to compare electoral incentives for ethnic violence and the effects of votes on the level of mobilisation in Kom and Bali.

The comparison on the nature of elite politics in Kom and Bali helps to demonstrate the different ways and techniques through which conflict entrepreneurs manipulate ethnic identities for political gains. The relationship that conflict entrepreneurs establish with traditional leaders has an impact on how such traditional leaders are perceived as legitimate depending on the community which in turn affect their ability to mediate on local conflicts. The last aspect of comparison between Kom and Bali in this thesis looks at how the legitimacy of traditional leaders in Kom and Bali is affected by their political choices (Chapters Eight and Nine). The comparison falls in two broad categories which looks at the construct of legitimacy and the strategies of claiming legitimacy in Kom and Bali.

Whereas this thesis is principally focussed in Kom and Bali as the research sites, Bawock represents a sub community in Bali that will be treated distinctively in some chapters (Chapters Six and Seven). Bawock represents one of the villages in Bali subdivision that was

co-opted into the polity in the pre-colonial days. While Bawock and Bali cohabited peacefully in the past, the new Fon of Bawock after his enthronement has consistently challenged the authority of Bali Fon over Bawock. He has been very categorical on his claims that Bawock was never at any point of their history part of Bali and it was only due to the cunning manipulation of the people of Bali that his predecessors (mainly his father) were subsumed into Bali polity. He has thus declared Bawock an independent community and requested in 2005 that the government demarcate Bawock's boundary with Bali. This triggered the Bali-Bawock conflict, which is treated in detail in chapter six. Chapter Seven compares the nature of elite politics in Kom and Bali to show how these identities in Bali are instrumentalised for political gains, while this is not the case in Kom.

2.3 Study area of this research: Kom and Bali

The fieldwork for this research was carried out with members of the Kom and Bali ethnic groups, found in two divisions (Kom in Boyo division and Bali in Mezam division) in the North-West Region of Cameroon. The sites were selected to explore conflict dynamics and their absence within these communities. In addition, I sought to understand the possible factors that contribute to conflict outcomes and/or the minimal occurrence of conflicts within these two regions. As explained in chapter one, Bali has experienced significant conflict within the region. Having acquired the present location through conquest, Bali people set up a polity that remained alert and prepared to defend its borders against aggrieved neighbours (Ndangam 2014; Ndi 2013).

Some examples of the invasion of Bali by neighbouring communities could be traced as far back as 1952 when the Widikum ethnic groups carried out a concerted attack on Bali (Nyamndi 1988). Bali has also faced internal conflicts with some of her villages that sought to gain autonomous status. In 2005, Bali experienced conflict with Bawock, a village within Bali subdivision. Central issues raised in the Bali-Bawock conflict include identity, land boundary disputes and power for recognition in the North-West Region. The tensions are also further accentuated by farmer-grazer conflicts which increase local competition on arable land and the role of political elites. In Kom, on the contrary, despite the similar political order and similar pressure on land, tensions have not manifested in the same violent way as observed in Bali. This study sought to understand the factors that account for the variation in conflict

incidence in Bali and Kom given that they have similar socio-cultural and political systems of governance structures.

2.3.1 Research site one: Bali Nyonga

Bali is a centralised fondom where the Fon wields an absolute kind of power in the sense that he prevails over all other forms of authority in the area and, in the traditional understanding, he does not yield to any higher supreme authority. At his discretion, the Fon may delegate his prerogatives to his subordinates like the sub-chiefs (this is further elaborated in Chapter Five). Bali is situated at the foot of the Western highland, close to the Mbu- Baba highlands. Bali has a level topography with broad valleys and low lands that stretch from Mantum to the Baforchu (Mbu) highlands and extend to Bawock and the fertile farmland valleys of Mbufung. These topographies endowed with savannah pastures provide the grazing land for cattle farmers (Sone 2012).

Figure 4: Map of Bali showing the main villages



Source: <https://www.google.com.au/search?q=map+of+bali+nyonga&rlz=1C1GGRV>

Bali has clear gender roles patterning to farming which involves the traditional division of labour between men and women during farming seasons. Men are those who generally clear the bushes and women till the soil and plant the food that feeds the family.⁵ While farming is largely subsistence, commercial farming is steadily on the rise in Bali which is now regarded as the bread basket of the North-West Region.⁶ There are no communal farms in Bali. Farmlands are individually owned and in polygamous homes, the husband would divide the land and portion to his wives so that they could individually cultivate and grow food to feed their house hold and to sell the excess produce to afford other basic needs like medical care.

The main cash crop that is grown in Bali, like in almost all the North-West Region, is the Arabica coffee. Farmers organise themselves through cooperatives to market their produce after it has been harvested, processed and the beans dried. The impact of population growth and expansion in farming activities implies the land available for grazers has become very limited resulting to over-grazing, which leads to soil erosion (Sone 2012). Continuous soil erosion has left large parts of the land unfertile and increased the competition over patches of fertile land around the lowlands and valleys of Bali, both between farmers and grazers, and between farmers themselves (Sone 2012).

2.3.2 Research site two: Kom

The other site for this research was Kom which is situated in the central mountainous regions of the Bamenda Grassfield. Kom exhibits socio-cultural attributes that bear great similarities with the rest of the North-West Region (such as the manjong -which in pre-colonial times served as military clubs, political institutions such as the Kwifoyn) but also manifests cultural traits which distinguishes it from the other communities in the region particularly the Kom matrilineal institutions. Kom fondom is believed to have been founded about the mid-19th century (Chilver & Kaberry 1967). The Kom fondom, like most major fondoms in the Grassfield like Bali, Bafut and Nso, emerged out of conquest and the politics of inclusion and exclusion through warfare which led to the subjection of weaker neighbours (Nkwi 1976).

As a result, Kom includes sub-fondoms which were incorporated into Kom as vassal states through military conquest or through voluntary agreements where such smaller ethnic groups

⁵ Interview with a Bali elite 7th July 2015 -Bali.

⁶ Ibid.

requested protection from Kom against warrior fondoms like the Bafut, Bali and Nso. The vassal groups that were incorporated into Kom do not constitute what Nkwi (1976) refers to as Kom proper. These vassal states are: Achain, Ake, Ajung, Mbesinaku, Mbueni, Baiso, Baicham, Mejang, Mbengkas, and Mejung. The Kom fondom is the second largest fondom in the North-West Region after Nso (Chilver & Kaberry 1967 p.33).

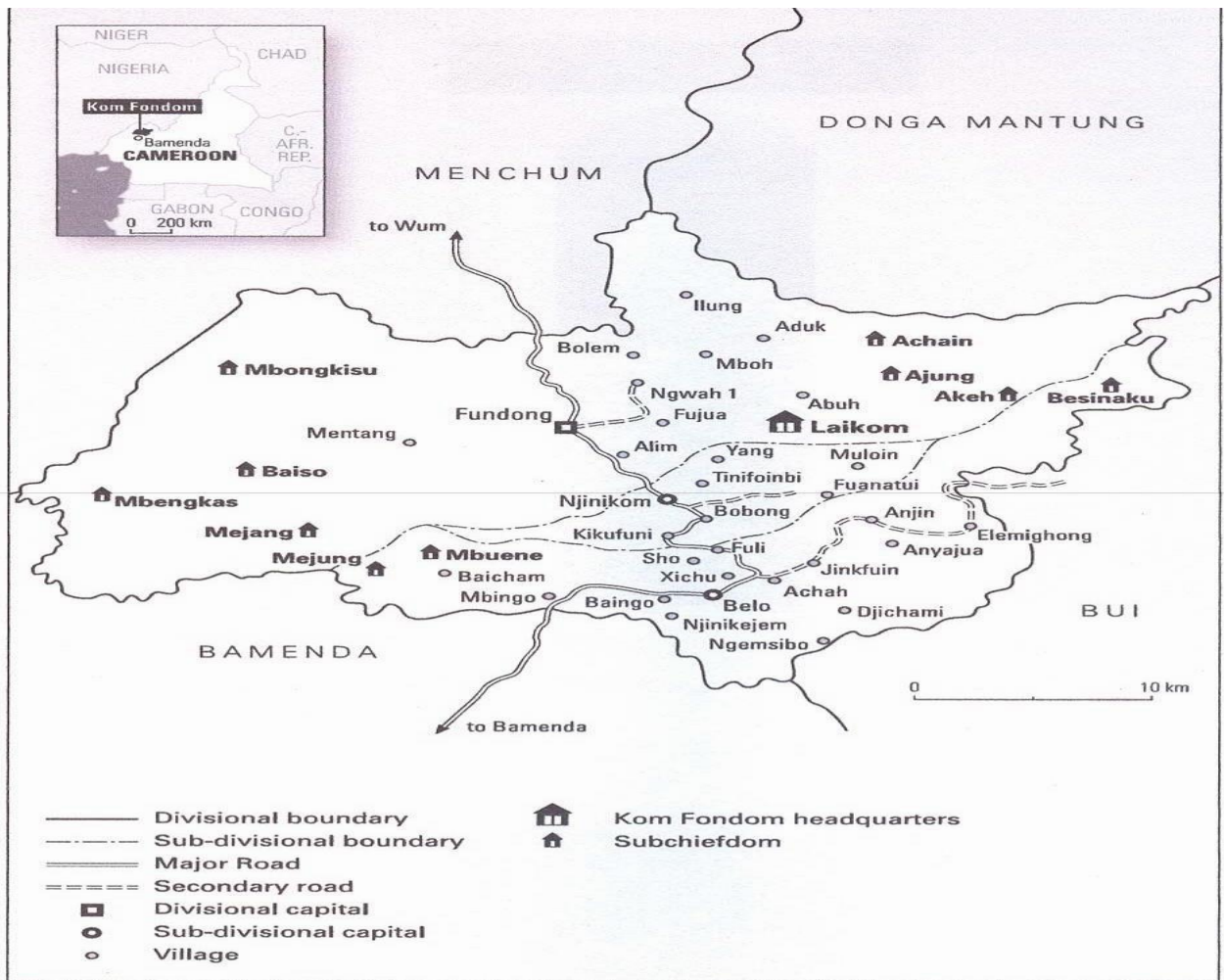
Politics in the Kom fondom, as is the case in the region more generally, is centred around the fon. Kom is largely dominated by political and social hierarchies based on kinship and lineages, on social and political status (see more of this in chapter five). Some background knowledge of structural features of Kom proper is necessary to the overall understanding of the territorial claims of clans in Kom. What is referred to as Kom proper is made of two sectors known as Abasakom and Nggvvin-Kijem. The traditional capital is Laikom; the place where the Kom people first settled on their arrival in Kom. It is from Laikom that as the population increased; they moved and founded other village settlements in the two sectors (Nkwi 1973). Kom proper is made up of 42 villages and the political head of a village is referred to as a Bonte who is answerable to the paramount Fon of Kom.⁷ Every village was established by a clan man whose successors by virtue of first settlement continue to control the land politically, socially and religiously.⁸ The principle of first settler in Kom does not only give the individual political leadership, but also enables transferral of the right to acquire large portions of land which as a result attracts his blood relatives and friends to become his subjects (Nkwi 1973). This pattern of settlement which connects with ownership and control of land partly explains the dispersed nature of Kom clans given that those who could settle in each place were not necessarily descent of the same clan. In addition, neolocality⁹, affinity and friendly relations are the major factors that account for mixture of clans on a territorial unit such as a village in Kom (Nkwi 1973).

⁷ Interview with a Kom elder (FGDs) 3rd -May 2015 Fujua-Kom.

⁸ Interview with a Kom notable, 1st May 2015- Ngwah-Kom.

⁹ Neolocal residence is a type of post-marital residence in which a newly married couple resides separately from both the husband's natal household and the wife's natal household.

Figure 5: Kom fondom showing its villages and sub-fondoms (vassalstates)



Source: (Chilver & Kaberry 1967)

2.4 Data collection methods and instruments

This research was carried out in Cameroon between February and September of 2015 during which I spent eight months in the field for data collection. Data was obtained through different methods including interviews, observations and archival materials. The use of these different method was exciting. Not only did it enhance my own knowledge of research, it lent rigour to the research findings (Taylor 1993). Norman et al. (1992) adds that, if seen as a process of completion and not confirmation, triangulation can contribute greatly in giving a complete picture of the jigsaw puzzle. Others like Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005 p.41) argue that: 'advocates of triangulation recognise that different results will be obtained by using different research methods.' Therefore, the use of these different data collection methods was to ensure the validity/accuracy of the data.

2.4.1 Individual in-depth interviews

Table 1: Individual interviews conducted

Individual interviews	Total number	Kom	Gender		Bali	Gender	
	45	15	Men	Women	30	Men	Women
			10	5		20	10

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), individual interviews enable the study participants to capture the phenomenon investigated in their own words. According to White (2000), individual experiences are extraordinarily rich historical sources even if the stories are not entirely true. What an individual experience consists of, how it is to be told, and whom it is to be told to, all reveal a social imaginary about who thinks what and what constitutes credibility. The reliability of such individual experiences is not necessarily distorted by truth hidden by a secret. Rather, scholars such as White (2000) see it as the ideas and imaginings by which people disclose what should not be made public, and how they should carry out concealing one narrative with another. Such insights involve an inclusive social narrative which is based on personal experiences and individuals' ability to report their views with some reliability. DeVault (1990) contends that through interviews, we build more from what we share with respondents than from disciplinary categories that we bring to research encounters. In order to do this, researchers need to interview in ways that allow the exploration of incompletely articulated aspects of respondents' experiences.

All interviews conducted for this research were audio recorded with permission from the participants and each interview lasted for about an hour. The study participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy (Engel & Schutt 2010). Purposive sampling permitted me to recruit respondents familiar with the issues of my research (Gall & Borg 1996; Creswell 2003). This included people who traditionally hold positions of power and authority within Kom and Bali communities. Local party elites and local state bureaucrats within Bali (Bawock) and Kom were also recruited for this study. Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2006) contend that the use of purposive sampling in qualitative research leads to the selection of respondents where the phenomena in which the researcher is interested is most likely to occur. Each of these data collection methods is discussed in detail below.

2.4.2 Participant selection and sample categories

The method of participant recruitment was slightly different in Kom and Bali. The reason was because Kom and Bali have different dynamics with respect to conflicts; Kom has not experienced any violent conflict in contrast to Bali. I conducted both interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Kom because there was no fear of animosity among participants. In Bali (Bawock), in-depth interviews and participant observations were the only two data collection methods used. I chose individual interviews over discussions in focus groups in Bali because this case study looked at a long-standing conflict between Bali and Bawock that also had to do with issues of their values and cultures. In part to remedy this, I conducted a larger number of interviews in Bali.

Participants were identified through the snowball sampling technique in conjunction with purposive sampling. Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2006) assert that the use of purposive sampling in qualitative research leads to the selection of respondents where the phenomena in which the researcher is interested is most likely to occur. The age limit for the study participants was 18 years old and above. This cut off age limit was relevant because from 18 years, the participants are considered adults according to their cultural context, and are positioned to comprehend the history and cultures of their people and the significance of the issues under contention (Silverman 2010). The recruitment of study participants included both women and men. This is because in Kom and Bali, there are clearly defined structures of power/conflict management that are distinctly controlled by men and women within these communities. It was thus important to hear from these men and also women.

The key informants in this study were mainly traditional leaders, experts (staff at non-government organisations (NGOs), journalists and academics who have written about the Bali Bawock conflict in 2007), local government officials in Kom and Bali (political representatives), state bureaucrats (Divisional Officers, Police Officers, and magistrates), and community members within Kom and Bali localities. Each of this is briefly discussed below.

2.4.2.1 Traditional authorities:

I conducted a total of thirteen (13) interviews with traditional leaders. Twelve (12) of these interviewees in this category were men and only one (1) was a female. Fondoms are patriarchal in nature and only males are enthroned as traditional leaders and family heads

with the exceptions of queen mothers. Those interviewed included two (2) first class fons, four (4) second class Fons, four (4) third class Fons, three (3) clan heads and (1) Queen (in Kom) within the communities of Kom and Bali. I relied on chain referral to identify and recruit this category of informant in this study. Traditional authorities were important sources of information because of their role as custodians of local customs. Traditional leaders provided deeper insight on how local conflicts have been resolved in the past within the context of customary laws and the extent to which these systems continue to function under the modern state.

2.4.2.2 Experts with informed opinion over the Bali-Bawock conflict:

This category of respondents included journalists and other civil society actors who covered the years of the Bali-Bawock conflict but were not necessarily indigenes¹⁰ from these communities (Bali and Bawock). A total of eight (8) interviews were conducted in this category, three (3) of whom were female working with groups like Justice and Peace Services (JPS). This category of respondents was relevant because they narrated the events of the conflict as they saw it from an outsider perspective.

2.4.2.3 Elected local government officials:

Seven (7) interviews were conducted in this category, two (2) of whom were women. This category included mainly elected government officials (mayors, local councillors and members of parliament). Talking with elected officials like the mayor and councillors gave me a deeper understanding of how they perceive the role of traditional authorities in grassroots governance in Cameroon.

2.4.2.4 Local state bureaucrats:

I conducted five (5) interviews with local state bureaucrats in Kom and Bali, of whom two (2) were women. In Kom, interviews were conducted mainly with local bureaucrats who were office holders (D.O.s and court officials) at the time of this study. The identification and recruitment process in Bali was slightly different to Kom. This was because most of the state bureaucrats who mediated/investigated the Bali-Bawock conflict were not the office holders at time of this study. Most of them had been transferred to other regions of the country either

¹⁰Indigenes here refers to people who trace their origin to either Bali and Kom.

in their same capacity or promoted to higher positions. I had to rely on chain referral to identify and recruit this category of informant in this study.

2.4.2.5 Community members:

This category was made up of local respondents recruited in Kom and Bali who could narrate their experiences with traditional structures of governance vis-à-vis the local state agencies within their communities. A total of twelve (12) respondents were interviewed within this category in Kom and Bali. The informants who participated under this category were mostly referred to me by key informants I contacted in the field. However, the final decision of who could participate in the study was made by me. Only those community members who were resident within these communities were eligible to participate. Their narratives provided a sense of how they perceive their local leaders and how much trust the local people place on traditional systems.

2.4.3 Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)

Table 2: Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussions in Kom	Total no of participants	Number of FGDs	Gender	
			Men	Women
	21	3	12	9

In total, three FGDs were carried out in Kom. Morgan (1997 p.17) maintains: ‘as a self-contained method, FGD can either explore new research areas or examine well-known research questions from the research participants’ own perspective.’ FGDs provide an opportunity to encourage triangulation in research (Morgan & Spanish 1984). Within the realm of qualitative methods, FGDs have much to offer as a supplement to other qualitative techniques, such as interviews and participant observation. The real value of FGDs, as with any qualitative method, comes from the researcher's exposure to the participants' own thoughts and means of self-expression (Morgan & Spanish 1984; Hennink 2013; Randle et al. 2014). A FGD was constituted for each of the three administrative subdivisions that make up the Kom ethnic community. Each FGD had seven (7) members. Each group had three (3) women except for FGDs in Belo where only two (2) women accepted to participate. This was

a big enough number to ensure continued discussion of the study issues by members and it was also small enough to control and to motivate the participation of all members (Silverman 2010; Padgett 1998; Stewart & Shamdasani 1990).

The FGDs were held in 'village compounds' since all the participants said they felt comfortable there. Also, given that these were village compounds¹¹, they were easily accessible to all study participants in Kom. I was the moderator of the FGDs: my role was to build rapport with the participants, facilitate the discussion, motivate participant interaction and probe when statements seemed not to give full and clear meanings (Frey & Fontana 1993; Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011; Kitzinger & Barbour 1999; Wilkinson 2006).

2.4.4 Observation

I interacted with people in public places to understand how people in Kom but also between Bali and Bawock interact (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011). I visited local markets in Bali and Kom. I also attended traditional activities within these communities at the palaces and at the village level. My observations in both Kom and Bali gave me a deeper understanding of what locals think about traditional leaders and the states within their communities. These observations became part of my field notes that were used in my analysis.

2.4.5 Archival materials

I also visited the National Archives Bureau (NAB) during my field work. The NAB was established in 1959 by two British anthropologists (Edwin and Shirley Ardener). There are over 20 000 files in the NAB that unfortunately are not kept in good condition. Some of the files have been destroyed by rats. I still managed to access most of the files on North-West Cameroon and the two regions in question that were largely written or compiled by British colonial administrators. These files were: Assessments, Intelligence and Annual Reports of various administrative divisions submitted by D.O.s to the offices of the League of Nation and United Nations. The files in the archives were important as they provided vital information on the nature of chieftaincy structures prior to and during colonial rule right up to the eve of independence.

¹¹ Village compounds represent the assembly ground for public events in the village like trials, libations etc. It is often the residence of the village head.

2.5 Data interpretation and ethical considerations

Using NVivo 9, thematic data analysis (Dudley 2010; Glesne 2011) was carried out where themes, subthemes, categories and subcategories were developed during and after data collection through coding (Boeije 2010; Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011; Strauss & Corbin 1998). I did multiple line by line, whole sentences and paragraph reading of transcripts to come up with codes in which data were segmented (Glesne 2011; Strauss & Corbin 1998). Through comparing the codes for similarities and differences, the data were grouped into categories and subcategories as suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008). I compared the categories and subcategories to observe the relationships between them. The relationships between the categories and subcategories resulted in developing themes and subthemes. However, the concepts noted during literature review and the three research questions also guided the process of coding and themes development.

Before carrying out fieldwork/data collection, I obtained ethics approval from the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee. In Cameroon, I discussed the research with the administrators and paramount rulers of Bali (Bawock) and Kom before I began data collection. To guarantee the rights and welfare of the study participants, each participant received a copy of the consent form, explicitly describing the ways in which the rights and welfare of the participants would be promoted. For those who could not read, I read and explained each statement in the 'pidgin language' which is the common medium of communication within the research sites.

To ensure voluntary participation in the study, each potential participant who indicated willingness to participate in the study was given a copy of an informed consent statement to sign. However, before signing, I explained each statement to the potential participant. The informed consent form clearly indicated that participant's participation was voluntary, and that confidentiality and privacy would be ensured by the researcher. To promote the participants' welfare, I ensured that interviews and FGDs were conducted in a place where the interviewees felt comfortable. I carried out debriefings after every interview or FGD using the debriefing statement. This helped me to assess whether the participants needed counselling as a result of my study that necessitated referral to the Justice and Peace Service

(JPS)¹² for professional emotional support. However, to my knowledge, none of the participants required these services.

2.6 Positionality and limitations

Undertaking a purely qualitative research project of this nature has immense responsibility which requires the researcher to analyse the data collected through the lens of the people or communities involved in the research. This implies that the ability of the researcher to manage his /her own personal bias is critical to the outcome of the research. The research subjects themselves can also display bias, either from their own subjective bias, uncertainty caused by the research situation or because of influence from the researcher. This may be in the form of question bias where questions are framed in a particularly one-sided way; or sample bias, where the field chosen may not be an appropriate representation of the researcher's desired sample.

In view of the risk of one's personal bias, I would say my identity as a native of Kom which constitutes one of the sites of this study meant I knew a lot more of Kom than other communities like Bali before I approached the field. The implication is that my positionality and background as a Kom person risk playing a central role in the way this research process was conducted in the field as well as the outcome of the final text. This inherent bias of what I knew before undertaking field work posed the risk to influence the questions I asked, how I conducted the research, how I analysed the data and how I wrote the final thesis. The findings of my research might have been shaped by my identity as a researcher from Kom which filters the data from the field and other perceptions and interpretations of the fieldwork experience in a biased manner.

However, aware of the imminent risk that my identity could bring to this research, I approached the field through a different mindset. There are two central points that I would like to make here. Firstly, we must be aware that the data gathered in this kind of study is inherently subjective whether the researcher be an 'insider', or 'native', researcher or an 'outsider' researcher originating from beyond the culture in which they are conducting research. I entered both Kom and Bali knowing that it was necessary to approach the research

¹² JPS is a Human Right Organisation run by the Arch Diocese of Bamenda.

participants as human agents who are aware of and familiar with the research issues and not as objects while researching their customs. Fieldwork for this research was therefore predicated on the conviction that the knowledge of the interviewees in the field (at least regarding the questions being asked) is greater than what I know of them (Jackson 1985). Burawoy (1991) contends that, in this way, 'objectivity relies on the separation of the intellectual project from its process of production' (Burawoy 1991 p. 8). By understanding the field through the interviewees' perspective, I allowed the research to take a dialogical process (Kim 1994), structured both by me as the researcher and the communities that I set out to research. Kim (1994) argues that the dialogical nature of research increases the probability that the research may be transformed by the input of the researched. Moreover, it means that the researcher is a visible and integral part of the research setting. Indeed, it is important to say research is never complete 'until it includes an understanding of the active role of the analyst's self which is exercised throughout the research process' (Smith 1988 p.18; also see Evans 1988). By way of critical reflection, I became more aware of my own biases and ways of overcoming them. Secondly, I became more reflective and conscious of who I was in the research which shaped and enriched what I studied. I did this by critically interrogating my own views. In addition, I conducted more interviews in Bali than Kom which allowed the exploration of incompletely articulated aspects of respondent's experiences

My Kom identity therefore posed the risk of an asymmetrical comparison between Kom and Bali. The danger was that of undermining, or at least weakening, the possibility of conducting a balanced comparison. However, rigorous data collection and analytical procedures like triangulation were used to substantiate the validity of the data. In addition, spending eight months in the field was enough time to get close to the people of both communities and learn from their experiences. I was able to generate personal insights that were informed by their local perceptions and not my own views. In addition, this study was further limited by the fact that it was mainly a qualitative research focussed in the North-West of Cameroon and wouldn't necessarily represent the dynamics of other regions. The use of the qualitative approach helped to understand deeper processes with regards to the role of chiefs in conflict management and how that affects their legitimacy in the region. In this way, it provided vital details that would not have been captured through quantitatively designed research. However, it does not explore these questions in other regions of Cameroon like the South-West or French Cameroon where dynamics may be different.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter accomplished two things. Firstly, it discussed the background of the study in the North-West Region of Cameroon. By so doing, the chapter located the two fieldwork sites as well as examined the similarities and differences between the sites. Although each of the sites has some unique characteristics, this chapter shows that the sites have similarities that permit a comparison study of this nature. In addition, the chapter also discussed the research design which was used to carry out the study. In utilising the design, I clearly explained and described the process through which the research questions were answered. This includes the population and participant selection, data collection methods and instruments, data management and analysis, my positionality and ethical considerations. The chapter ended with an exposition of the challenges that were encountered in the conduct of this research and how that was resolved.

CHAPTER 3: ETHNIC CONFLICTS AND THE PLACE FOR TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POLITICS

3.0 Introduction

Scholars have used different theoretical perspectives to understand the root causes of conflicts between ethnic groups. This chapter sets out to clarify primarily my conceptual language in this thesis and to situate it within the different bodies of literature that this thesis contributes to. The primary contribution of this thesis will be an empirical one: to contribute to the ongoing debate on the relevance of traditional authorities in post-colonial African states. This chapter builds on the assumption that to understand the role that traditional authorities play, or could play, in maintaining a peaceful society, one needs to bring different kinds literature together.

The comparison between Bali and Kom pivots around the variation in conflict incidence between the two communities. This hinges on the perceived legitimacy of traditional authority, which then connects to a range of contextual variations between the two communities. This includes the broader colonial legacies, interactions between the fons and party politics and the state, as well as the demarcation of ethnic communities. This implies that to grasp the role of traditional authorities in dealing with conflict situations, one needs to understand ethnicity, conflict, traditional authority and the state. In this chapter, I will clarify how ethnicity is conceptualised and how this resonates with the communities in this study. This thesis will contribute to both the literature on conflicts, and the literature on the legitimacy of traditional authorities. That is, how traditional authorities construct their legitimacy and what counts for legitimacy to be resilient. The importance of this, I argue, is that one needs to understand traditional authorities in relation to their actions because the role a traditional authority can play depends on the kind of legitimacy that they hold for themselves, and the kinds of audiences that are involved.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I briefly review the debate within the literature that seeks to define the concept of ethnicity before stating how it is understood in this thesis. In the second part, I discuss the meaning of social conflict as it is understood and

used in this study. In this part, I also discuss the theoretical inquiry into the causes of ethnic conflict in Africa and the processes of mobilisation and instrumentalisation of political dis/order in Africa which connects the local communities within the broader national politics. In the process, I show the gaps within the literature to which this thesis seeks to contribute. This is precisely so where I argue that community aspiration and expectations may also limit the extent to which political elites can mobilise or influence local dynamics which mobilisation literature is less vocal about.

The third section connects the role of traditional authorities in party politics to the role that they can play as conflict mediators in hybrid political orders. It discusses the different schools of thought within the literature regarding the role that traditional authorities play, or could play, in multiparty politics in Africa. I also look at the implications for their legitimacy and their role in conflict management. By so doing, I take issue with the literature on traditional authorities that limits their legitimacy only to the state or their role in land governance. In this way, I seek to add more nuance to the literature by showing that different sources of legitimacy will matter depending on the policy field in question and the audiences that are involved.

3.1 A conceptual understanding of ethnicity

The debate about ethnicity is one that has been rehearsed at some length and is generally categorised with triad primordialists, instrumentalists and constructivists. This section summarises this debate before discussing how the concept is understood and used in this study. Purely primordial perspectives (that is, the idea that ethnicity is a natural category which is given and fixed) are not common in the scholarly literature, however elements of it can be found in seminal authors like Barth (1969). In his studies of ethnicity, Barth sees ethnic categories as 'organisational vessels that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems' (p.14). What Barth, by this definition and in his broader work, seems to suggest is that irrespective of whether groups interact with other groups across boundaries or whether they undergo a change in cultural content because of these contacts, the ethnic categories as such are basically constant and can be mobilised at

any time when deemed necessary, especially in a competitive situation. He sees ethnic attribution as a categorical ascription which classifies 'a person in terms of his basic most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background' (p.13).

Primordialists like Barth lay emphasis on the non-instrumental and the emotional character of ethnicity which, he argues, originates from real cultural interactions among groups, which distinguishes it from other bases of political identity and mobilisation. This school of thought has been criticised by others like Erikson (1994) who argues that ethnic organisation must simultaneously serve political goals and meet psychological needs for belonging and meaning. Erikson (1994) highlights the instrumental elements of ethnicity and asserts that instrumentalism alerts us to the 'contingent, situational and circumstantial' use of ethnicity 'in the pursuit of material advantage'. There is however a significant level of agreement among scholars working on ethnicity who have collapsed primordialism and instrumentalism into a more nuanced, complex and historically grounded constructivist approach that has developed out of contemporary research (see Brubaker 2002; Le Vine 1997).

Scholars like Brubaker (2002), Le Vine (1997) and Cohen (1994) take a constructivist stance and argue that ethnic identities develop in response to functional requirements of groups in every society. From this perspective, it is how categories crystallise and how people's perceived and lived realities become real that takes on great importance. That explains why for some groups the ancestral ties are important, and for others more instrumental identities take on greater saliency which may or may not involve political processes. Unlike Barth who focusses mainly on cultural and historical connections between groups, Cohen (1994) for example, delimits ethnicity to political processes involving informal 'corporate groups'; that is, those who take interest in invoking culture and historical background of groups to consolidate ethnic crystallisation. To obtain the support of their potential followers, the leaders of such groups use 'primordial' symbols in their political strategies.

This study approaches ethnicity from this constructivist angle, where ethnicity is perceived not as crystallised entities, tangible and enduring social groups, but rather in dynamic relational and disaggregated terms (Le Vine 1997). This will mean perceiving ethnicity in

terms of institutional forms, cultural idioms, organisational routines, contingent events and practical categories that constitute such a group (Le Vine 1997). Brubaker (2002) and Le Vine (1997) both contend that, understood this way, ethnicity becomes a term that can be given meaning through the political, socio-cultural and psychological processes that take place within such groups. To fully understand it requires a more in-depth analysis of the elements that bound them as a group which are often contextually fluid (Brubaker 2002 p.167).

While the literature discussed above focusses more on self-perceptions of ethnicity, Brubaker (2002) provides deeper insights into the dynamics of group formation. Scholars such as Brubaker (2002) argue that to approach ethnicity as a process and not as a constant allows for better knowledge of how cohesion is built in a manner that promotes collective solidarity without implicitly assuming that collective group solidarity is always a constant. Ethnic configurations are always made up of groups (mutually interacting, bounded collectively with a sense of solidarity and common identity) and categories (which at best are a potential basis for group formation) (Le Vine 1997; Brubaker 2002). The degree to which any given category crystallises into a group is largely determined by the socio-cultural and political dynamics through which these categories are invested within such groups. This may include, among other things how access to scarce resources is perceived between categories, especially where other categories may be considered as outsiders (Brubaker 2002).

Ethnicity should be understood through the micro-politics that constitute these groups rather than to assume as a given that ethnic groups are homogenous in character. This should include how these categories appropriate, internalise, subvert, evade or transform the categories that are forced on them (Brubaker 2002). To see ethnicity in this way, through the different categories that may constitute an ethnic group, helps to shed light on the plethora of forms in which ethnicity exists and functions without necessarily having distinct boundaries. Such a fluid understanding of ethnicity tells us when groups may choose to collapse or reify ethnic boundaries depending on the interest they seek to protect. It facilitates an understanding of when ethnicity can crystallise in some given instances while remaining contingent in others. Some scholars contend that the interpretation of local

experiences in ethnic terms often comes from conflict entrepreneurs who mobilise the local through riot specialist to serve their political ends (see Brass 1997). The next section looks at some of these theoretical enquires into the causes of ethnic conflicts in Africa and shows the gaps in it that this study seeks to contribute to.

3.2 Meaning and causes of ethnic conflict

Boulding (1962 p.41) defined conflict as, 'a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources'. His definition of conflict describes any social discord resulting from almost any aspect of social interactions, including struggle over scarce resources which accounts for most ethnic conflicts (Jeong 2008). In addition, Boulding's definition includes both structural causes and an analysis of social interactions to account for conflict. Boulding's view on the meaning of conflict provides an understanding of how members of a given society perceive themselves in relation to others. That is, it sheds light on how communities build their attitudes and relationships and the kind of information that circulates between groups.

I use Boulding's conceptual definition of conflict in this thesis because he captures how social processes, and struggles over scarce resources, may trigger conflict. This way of understanding conflicts is particularly useful to my thesis because I examine the interaction of different communities and how such social interactions lead to conflicts. In addition, Boulding's perspective of seeing conflict as a product of social interaction is in line with what Lubkemann (2008) considers in his analysis of conflict as a 'social condition'. By seeing conflicts as a social condition, Lubkemann emphasises the socio-cultural implications and the day to day interaction of groups who are characterised by conflicts, especially when different ethnic categories/groups struggle to situate themselves within very scarce resources. The emergence of such ethnic groups/categories is influenced by multiple factors which include their shared histories, but in some cases, such groups simply emerge out of political mobilisation by politicians for their personal gains.

3.2.1 A theoretical enquiry into the causes of ethnic conflict

This section reviews some of the key theoretical perspectives on ethnic conflicts. It starts with a discussion of the literature that looks at the underlying dynamics of what accounts for violent conflict in Africa such as patrimonialism and patron client relationships. This section also examines mobilisation literature by Brass (1997) and Tambiah (1996), paying particular attention to their argument of how most ethnic conflicts are amplified by conflict entrepreneurs who perpetuate local violence for political ends. The second category of the literature I review sheds light on the agrarian factors and shows how affected youths under such circumstances can be instrumental in local conflicts situations. The third part seeks to examine the processes through which tensions can shift into violent conflicts. Drawing on this scholarship, I will interrogate the conceptualisation of patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism in post-colonial Africa as critical triggers of instability and violence (Chabal & Daloz 1999; Bayart 1993; Richards 1996; 2005; 2008; Losch 2000). Contrary to how it is being understood, patrimonial authority or legitimacy does not necessarily mean corruption, poor governance, or a weakstate.

Community and/or ethnic conflicts are described as social conditions driven by social struggles that vary between context and space. Lubkemann (2008), for example, contends that claims of identity, belonging and need for security may trigger social conflicts. He however observes that during such conflicts, individuals or different categories between ethnic groups may reconstitute their social identities in varying ways that produce new values and meanings to how they perceive their position in the conflict and help groups to crystallise an aspect of identity to take on greater salience (see Chapters Six and Seven). Lubkemann warns against the risk of generalising or simplifying what the causes of conflict may be, based on the assumption that conflicting groups are crystallised and distinctively constituted since that may eliminate the need to investigate the different actors and agencies at work. Lubkemann notes that through conflicts, individuals or groups not only commit to social agendas that were unconnected to the prime motive of the conflict but in some cases, conflicts become a means by which many exercise and even amplify their

agencies. The emphasis is the fact that, beyond the claims of incompatible interests, conflicts also illuminate how certain actors consolidate their positions.

The novelty of Lubkemann's argument is that he does not attribute violence solely to riot entrepreneurs. His position is that conflicts are continuously implicated in the negotiations of social interaction. That is, conflict is not necessarily anti-social but rather instead social in its very origins. The social practices among groups continuously reshape processes of social struggle. This is because such social processes among individuals or groups, even in the absence of physical violence, are intrinsically unstable and often defined by conflicts (Lubkemann 2008). To understand the causes of conflict, one needs an enquiry that investigates how violence amplifies and reproduces already existing but undisclosed forms of social struggles (Avruch & Black 1991). Avruch and Black (1991) note that this could be within or between groups that are disguised under common dispositions. These social struggles and how they determine conflict outcomes may elude any conflict research that focusses solely on the assumption that communities will always fight for a common cause.

Chabal and Daloz (1999) make a similar argument about the events in Rwanda which culminated in the conflict between the Tutsis and the Hutus in 1994. Although the genocide could be attributed to ethnic cleavages, Chabal and Daloz (1999) argue that it also had well-defined historical roots. It was a political conflict which became instrumentalised in ethnic terms. These were the socio-economic and political causes of dissatisfaction in Rwanda, dating back to dynamics engendered already in pre-colonial and colonial periods. That is, the intense economic and political marginalisation of the Hutu (dominant ethnic group) was aggravated under colonial rule by the Tutsi minority who were privileged by the Belgian administrators (Chabal & Daloz 1999). This marginalisation of the Hutu was imbedded in the politics of indirect rule where the people were controlled through pre-existing local power structures.

It is in this regard, Chabal and Daloz (1999) as well as Bayart (1993) assert that what is referred to as violent ethnic conflicts in Africa are often intended to serve the patrimonial purposes of the patron –client relationship. Bayart (1993), for example, opines that violent

activities across the continent exhibit an overlap between the spheres of clientelism and conflict. This implies that patrimonialism and the use of violence are sometimes perceived as legitimate by a given community in as much as patrons are understood to discharge their obligations to the clients. Under such circumstances, accountability takes the form of redistribution, as patrons, strive to sustain their networks, which implicitly provoke conflicts in the way they secure resources illicitly to keep such networks active (cf. Arriola 2009).

Chabal and Daloz (1999) cast a pessimistic view and contend that most of the conflicts in Africa occur where patrons fail to redistribute (often ill-gotten) wealth to their clients. It is often at this point that different groups (those who stood to benefit from patron's redistribution but no longer do) within the community agitate against perceived injustice or see their political leaders as illegitimate. Violence can be a response when the resources of patrons diminish and their ability to control disorder decreases. Violence becomes the means by which social and political negotiations are made, especially by those who exploit such conflicts to pursue their individual objectives, with the inevitable consequence of greater violence (Chabal & Daloz 1999). Furthermore, such struggles over political power between patrons lead to the disruption of political order in most African states. It gives rise to conflicts as a viable option, where disorder is instrumentalised to undemocratically hold on, or access, power (Bayart 1993; Chabal & Daloz 1999).

Chabal and Daloz (1999) cite the cases of Liberia and Sierra Leone, where the failures of the patrimonial political systems and the ambitions of political actors degenerated into violent conflicts. In the civil wars in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chabal and Daloz (1999) suggest that the communities accepted, however reluctantly, that violence was the only means to reform a political order with which they were disgruntled. The crux of their argument is that where political instrumentalisation of dis/order remains a resource, it becomes almost inevitable that conflicts are liable to occur. This is because people tend to lose the incentive to work for a more institutionalised ordering of society when they become entrepreneurs of conflicts by pursuing their own personal objective (Chabal & Daloz 1999).

Chabal and Daloz, however, pay less attention to the idea of cultural implications in violent conflicts. For them, the real cause of the conflicts in Africa is what they describe therefore as political 'instrumentalisation of disorder'. The overarching problem, however, with the literature in this regard is that although neopatrimonialism is present in almost every society, where patrons use state resources in order to secure the loyalty of clients within the state, the literature sees it as a phenomenon that is unique mostly to African political systems. This is so even though neopatrimonialism has features in all societies (Nyaluke 2014). To assume that neopatrimonialism is the sole essence of African politics which invariably leads to conflicts is essentialist and erroneous. Patrimonialism is a characteristic of every society though it is exercised in varying degrees. Personal connections and networks constitute inherent aspects of social relations which affects the way public institutions function. Even if high levels of institutional bureaucracy can act as an important check on such personal ties and relations, it would be untrue to assume that it can be eliminated. African conflicts cannot be reduced to neopatrimonialism.

Mustapha (2002) criticises this way of seeing the negative aspects of neopatrimonialism as embedded in African culture. For him, it is a stereotype which contributes to present the African continent mainly 'as a theatre of the absurd' (Mustapha 2002 p.2) without carefully analysing the underlying causes of the conflict that the continent undergoes. The overarching point I make here is that while the description of the neopatrimonial system in Africa as found in the literature is complex and generally not disputable, the way they explain the existence of the system (limited mostly to Africa) and the way that the literature sees neopatrimonialism as necessarily being a corrupt and illegitimate practice is too simplistic and problematic.

Bayart (1993) and Chabal and Daloz (1999) see the prevalence of neopatrimonialism in Africa to mean the lack of values, ideas, and experience especially in countries with conflicts that cannot support democracy, unity, and good governance. In other words, they assume there are no prior or existing cultures on which such a political system can be built, which then leads to the kinds of disorder we see in Africa as groups clamour for scarce resources

(Nyaluke 2014). The literature on political disorder in Africa captures the events in Africa mainly as a collective of individuals with only self-interests, where the people as a collective social reality is missing (Michael & Johnson 2009; Nyaluke 2014). Nyaluke (2014), for example, concludes that:

this biased and reductionist perspective on African politics robs nonelite groups of political agencies. The monochromic fixation on elite politics reduces African politics to the struggles for spoils among the elite. The tendency to ignore the consensus that may exist between the political elites and the communities is also eminent in the literature (Nyaluke 2015 p. 22).

This reductionist perspective on African politics and conflicts fails to capture the complex socio-cultural and political dynamics that define local communities with their chiefs on the one hand and their political elites on the other.

Richards (1996; 2005; 2008), Abdullah (1997), Kandeh (2001) and Losch (2000) expand on the logic of neopatrimonialism by highlighting the agrarian factors and the plight of youth. Richards (1996), writing in the context of the civil war in Sierra Leone, contends that the civil war was strongly connected to crisis of patrimonialism which had negative effects on schools, social services, jobs, infrastructures and ruined the hopes of youths in urban spaces. The youths were obliged to seek new survival options in the farms and as labourers in diamond digging pits. Richards contends that the war in Sierra Leone was centrally about how such resources were managed. Richards (2008) compares the Sierra Leonean experience with the agrarian drivers of the civil wars in the Ivory Coast and tries to build a broader understanding of the role that agrarian factors play in some of the bloody African civil wars in Africa. By analysing the two different ways in which lineage societies¹³ evolved during the colonial and post-colonial eras within the two countries, Richards contends that the motivation for youths who decided to take up arms relates to different trajectories of agrarian social change in both countries. In Ivory Coast, youths fought basically to uphold a lineage-based social order while in Sierra Leone, a comparable group of young militias strove to overturn the lineage social order that was in place which they felt excluded them from having access to land. Tensions

¹³ A lineage society is one organised for transfer of rights of access to land and other productive resources by lines of descent.

and conflicts between 'indigenes' and 'settlers' in Ivory Coast were often rooted in disputes over the content of land rights and other privileges that were handed to the settlers, whether as 'gift', 'purchase' or 'lease' (Richards 2008; Losch 2000). Losch notes that it was this problem of perceived non-Ivoirians versus indigenous Ivoirians that constituted a kind of common denominator behind the civic mobilisation of youths. Those who were labelled as non-Ivoirians were blamed by the youths for monopolising ancestral land. This was possible because of the collaboration that the perceived strangers had with chiefs who were accused of leasing native land to strangers at the detriment of local youths who had little or no land (Losch 2000).

Due to the actions of the youths, political authorities and traditional leaders could no longer support the settlers' interest without considering the retaliation of the youths (Losch 2000). From the conflict in Ivory Coast, Richards (2008) and Losch (2000) both offer a nuanced understanding of the drivers of conflict without vaguely lumping the causes of the conflict to neopatrimonialism. They do this by showing how economic crisis, in both urban and rural environments, and the hijacking of people's grievances by political elites competing for power and national resources, contributes to explaining both the vulnerability of those at the grassroots and how they eventually result in violent conflict.

Unlike the situation in Ivory Coast, the agrarian situation in Sierra Leone offered few chances of social and economic integration of a large underclass. According to Abdullah (1997) and Richards (2008), it was mostly the children of traditional leaders who had natural rights to farming while former slaves were to remain as clients. This brought pressure on the underclass which led to the intensification of 'class oppositions' within the ranked lineage mode of production. The idea was to replace the lineage social order that was in place in Sierra Leone (built on lines of descent over several centuries) with new forms of associations which brought rural communities into violent conflicts. The trigger of the conflict was therefore the desire to redress decisions that were made by traditional authorities and political elites about the management of familyland.

Although Richards (2008) and Losch (2000) try to move away from the over-generalisation that connects African conflict to neopatrimonialism, they are still embedded in neopatrimonial logic. Bangura (1997) criticises Richards' (1996) analysis of the war in Sierra Leone and contends that patrimonial elements, which Richards links to land ownership, constituted only one aspect of the problem of the Sierra Leone civil war. Bangura identifies other factors which included the uncompromising and systematic centralisation of power under the governing All People's Congress (APC), which came to power in 1968, following the victory they obtained in the elections of 1967. Bangura also highlights the systematic attempt that was made to destroy all forms of civic opposition (the labour unions, student unions, and the press) through repression and intimidation (Bangura 1997).

Bangura brings out the political dimensions that defined the Sierra Leonean civil war about which Richard (1996) remained silent. In addition, power was concentrated mainly in the capital while rural communities were neglected without any development. Such concentration of power in the city facilitated the task of the government to punish any group that opposed their actions. Local councils were dismantled, and traditional authorities became puppets of the government where they could be installed and uninstalled with total disregard for traditional procedures (Bangura 1997). Mkandawire (1991) and Bangura (1997) remain critical of any analysis of political dis/order that fails to place it in a concrete historical and political context that explores the complex factors that made conflicts, wars and options of political resistance. The argument they make is that the constant use of neopatrimonialism in the analysis of African conflicts obscures political realities in the African continent that vary in time and space. Mkandawire (1991) and Bangura (1997) place emphasis on the inequalities in the structures of power in Sierra Leone that became a trigger to one of the deadliest conflicts in African History.

The works by Richards (2000; 2008) and Bangura (1997) highlight the significance of agrarian issues and the role of community leadership like chiefs in this. Communal conflict is not simply a matter of state failure. They demonstrate that people are easily mobilised to fight when they feel that they are marginalised and that their privileged position within the

community is threatened by outsiders in collusion with their chiefs whom they expect to safeguard their interests. Under such circumstances, Ake (1993) contends, conflicts and ethnic crystallisation becomes more feasible - through the cynicism of political elites seeking easy strategies to power and/or through the survival strategies of ordinary people threatened by violent repression and exploitation. A conflict analysis, therefore, should include a micro-analysis of communities involved. This is important for two reasons: firstly, such an analysis of conflict brings in the dimensions of inequalities in access to the state and political representation. Secondly, it also draws attention to the formal and informal dimensions of political order.

Relating to Bali and Kom, the tensions and conflicts there relate to claims to land ownership (see Chapters Six and Seven). In Bali, such conflicts are triggered by contested rights to land ownership provoked by the settler-indigene dichotomy. Works like those of Richards (1996; 2008) and Bangura (1997) are insightful because they provide the lens through which one can recognise the variety of interests competing over land and other rural resources and to see how such competing interests fit within national politics and the circumstances under which they escalate or fail to escalate into violent conflicts.

However, both Richards (1996; 2008) and Bangura (1997) are less vocal about types of interactions that political elites, traditional leaders and the communities negotiate between themselves. Even Abdullah (1997), who talks of the use of Lumpens by political elites to initiate violence, falls short of detailing how they perpetuate and sustain these networks. It is thus important to understand the kinds of consensus or relationships that exist between political elites, traditional authorities and the grassroots communities and the circumstances under which local tensions may or may not escalate to violent conflicts. In this way, one captures the political potency of non-elite groups and how in some cases, their actions may even limit the extent to which political elites can manipulate local tensions, magnifying them to larger conflicts. Processes of mobilisation are therefore necessary in understanding conflict dynamics because we get to see how local tensions may shift into violent conflicts. Brass (1997) and Tambiah (1996) demonstrate these processes of mobilisation in their works

and examine how micro-level politics at local levels connects to national politics and how that sometimes results to conflicts.

Brass (1997) captures the processes through which communities get mobilised into violent conflicts by political elites and questions the account of ethnic conflict that links them strictly to primordial causes. He questions the primordialist explanation of political violence that attributes it to mainly immemorial enmities between ethnic groups in conflict. Although Brass's (1997) study is focussed on urban India, where he examined five separate incidents of violence in North India, his analysis is relevant in the context of my research as I also look at the processes of how local tensions get magnified by political elites in Cameroon. Brass (1997) contends that while any conflict situation is open to diverse interpretations, those which define it to the outside world are often not the accounts of the local people in the conflict.

Rather, it is those of patrons and other groups for whom the conflict provides an opportunity for them to foster their personal interests. Brass notes that violent events which serve a political purpose achieve prominence; they are 'magnified, distorted, and manipulated for external use in wider political arenas' (Brass 1997 p.178). According to Brass, while conflict may be inevitable, he contends that some relatively minor conflict situations with no ethnic connotation are often given a communal dimension by party elites which assist them to mobilise their followers. What Brass seeks to bring to the fore is the political utility of conflicts, by demonstrating how political elites achieve political gains by magnifying local tensions into violent conflicts. While this is not different from the other literature examined, Brass focusses more on how this happens.

In addition, Brass highlights the role of what he calls 'institutionalised riot systems' (Brass 1997 p.284). This involves established (formal or informal) groups of political activists; which he refers to as 'riot specialists' who connect directly with political institutions and mobilise the less privileged and the dispossessed to organise and instigate violence. Brass posits that these riot specialists, and the way they function within communities, are often well known to the political elites who sponsor their actions. Where disputes emerge, involving people

from different communities, networks of riot specialists are deployed to engender large scale violence. Whereas most tensions at the early stages of escalation could be prevented or brought under control, this is not often the case. This is because those in authority sometimes see their political purposes served by allowing such conflicts to degenerate into violent conflicts (Brass 1997). Nonetheless, questions of agency are not captured in his analysis.

Tambiah (1996), like Brass (1997), also focusses on the processes of mobilisation and adds another dimension to this argument. He relates ethnic conflicts more particularly to interests and objectives such as those originating from representative democracies and mass politics (Tambiah 1996). He observes that there is always an underlying political dimension to ethnic conflicts even if such conflicts are presented by political elites as primordial in nature. This entails the ability by 'conflict entrepreneurs' to use varying ways of communication to mobilise people into extreme violence. The eruption of conflicts that are labelled as ethnic has more features beyond being simply being instrumental (by class or elite interest), primordial (in the sense of deeply rooted historical differences) or 'constructionist' (which is allied with the instrumentalist) (Tambiah 1996). Tambiah uses two concepts; 'focalization' and 'transvaluation' to describe the dynamics of ethnic conflict. These are linked processes through which local tensions and little dispute involving locals in a physical confrontation with one another is magnified into larger conflicts involving people who normally were not directly connected with the issues under contestation. The progressive involvement of the whole community is usually the instrumentalisation of the conflict by conflict entrepreneurs who use political rhetoric to appeal to their emotions. Such political rhetoric often takes the conflict beyond the limits of the local contest. As Tambiah puts it:

focalisation progressively denudes local incidents and disputes of their contextual particulars, and transvaluation distorts, abstracts and aggregates those incidents into larger collective issues with broader interests to those who magnify them. (Tambiah 1996 p. 81)

The overarching emphasis that Tambiah (1996) makes with his concepts of focalisation and transvaluation, which is relevant in the context of this research, is that he helps to connect micro-politics and conflict dynamics to national politics. Both Brass (1997) and Tambiah

(1996) show us how local contentions could shift into violent conflicts. In the process to explain the mobilising factors that result in violence, the literature in this regard brings to the fore the connections between democratic politics and violence by emphasising the political utility of conflict.

However, while the literature demonstrates how some relatively minor conflict situations with no ethnic connotation are often given a national dimension by party elites which assist them to mobilise their followers, it is less vocal on the quiet role of unequally positioned villagers and intra-community negotiations in this process. The point here is that it is not all about structures but also about agency. That is, the literature does not fully engage with how community aspirations and expectations or agency may also put pressure and limit the extent to which political elites can influence local dynamics. This may have to do with the ways that political elites connect with grassroots population and their traditional institutions which has an impact on the ways their orders are voluntarily respected within such communities. This implies that the understanding of how communities get mobilised to engage in violent ethnic conflicts should be rooted in the context of intra and inter- community power dynamics. To limit the processes of mobilisation, however, only to the role of elites presupposes that such communities can be mobilised to fight at any time even without legitimate grievances or without conditions of perceived inequality between groups or communities.

Reducing African conflicts to what the neopatrimonial literature describes as 'the spirit of criminality' (Nyaluke 2014) obscures the way we study conflicts in the Africa without contributing in any significant way to how we understand the complex linkages between cultural, economic and political processes that may lead to the conflicts that we see in Africa. Understanding these linkages requires an understanding of how indigenous African polities (often through their chiefs) connect with the modern state as well as an understanding of the different types of tensions that ensue from such interactions and the eventual process of how they turn into violent conflicts.

The quest to understand the drivers of such a conflict could be limited by the lack of a thorough review of the sociology of inter- and intra-communal political dynamics contributing to the tensions. Works like those of Richards (1996;2008) and Bangura (1997) are thus important because they provide the lens through which one can recognise the variety of interests competing over land and other rural resources and to see how such competing interests fit within national politics and the circumstances under which they escalate or fail to escalate into violent conflicts. The next section connects the role of traditional authorities in democratic politics and the role that they could play as conflict mediators in hybrid political orders.

3.3 The role of traditional authority in conflict mediation, and their position in the political landscape

This section is set to clarify, first, how traditional authority is understood and used in the context of this study. It also explores the resilient nature of traditional authority within the post-colonial states in Africa by looking at the debate within the literature on the role they play, or could play, in multiparty politics. This debate is analysed in relation to the impact that their political choices have on their legitimacy and their role as conflict mediators in hybrid political orders. The final two sub-sections then zoom in on the sources and dynamics of the perceived legitimacy of traditional authority, and their role in conflict management within a hybrid political landscape.

3.3.1 Conceptualisation of traditional authority

The political landscapes of many African states constitute both state and non-state institutions that exercise public authority, and these institutions sometimes defy clear-cut distinctions in terms of local governance. This is because their borders and responsibilities are hardly neatly delineated. In most instances, the institutions that exercise public authority, usually emerge partly because of the failure of state institutions to rule effectively (Lund 2006). Public authority in this context becomes not an exclusive possession of government institutions but rather one of an intense institutional competition as they struggle to negotiate a space for themselves within a given political system. Through such intense

competition, non-state institutions try to legitimise their claims to power as they authorise, sanction or validate certain practices such as enforcing public order in rural communities (Lund 2006). The state, in this situation, becomes a space where both formal and informal institutions that exercise public authority function side by side. This study takes a relational perspective on the state and traditional authorities. The dichotomy between them will not be treated as a given, but rather as problematic, since such an approach tends to see state and society as fundamentally distinct entities (Lund 2006). In practice, traditional authority is often seen as both separate from (even opposite to) the state and yet also subject to state endorsement.

Different scholars such as Weber (1958), Cheka (2008), Crowder, Ikime and Parkman (1970), Logan (2008), Liff (2012), Beattie (1967) Baldwin (2013), Lutz and Wolf (2004) have highlighted the key elements of what constitutes traditional authority. These include the connections between traditional authorities and patriarchal traditions and the emphasis on local orientation and community focus. The contention in the debate, however is how to understand traditional authorities in a context where they are elected and require the approval of the state as a precondition for the state to see them as legitimate.

Weber (1958), a sociologist and historian, presents a tripartite classification of authorities which include: charismatic, traditional and legal authority. While Weber's classification is not limited to traditional authorities, he asserts that traditional authority is that which derives its power and authority from patriarchal tradition from ancient time which is passed on from generation to generation through inheritance. Weber describes traditional authority as 'the authority of the eternal yesterday' (Weber 1958 p. 3). In line with this view, Liff (2012) argues that traditional authority can be perceived as an authoritative set of cultural manifestations (rights and beliefs) exercised by local chiefs or a given group whose legitimacy is drawn from local ideas and indigenous origins. Liff further argues that traditional power is only legitimate to local communities if it can make use of symbols and practices that are identified as being historically indigenous by those within the given society (Liff 2012). Drawing on Liff (2012), it seems that the nexus between these two, local orientation and community focus, is central

in understanding the concept and legitimacy of traditional authority. Lutz and Wolf (2004) as well as Cheka (2008) contend that traditional authority would mean an institution or power that is obtained and passed on from one generation to the next based on their historical past.

It is disputable if the above definitions represent the meaning of traditional authority considering that both definitions do not adequately capture what is obtained in some countries in Africa (Kapa 2013). For example, in countries like Mozambique, Botswana and Lesotho, traditional authorities are often elected and need the approval of the state to recognise their authority as legitimate (Kyed 2006; Kapa 2013; Sharma 2005). Such elected traditional leaders may be ordinary community members, who do not have any connection with a pre-colonial past or traditional royalty. Even for those who can trace their authority to the pre-colonial historical past, the mere fact that they are elected and require the approval of the modern state for legitimacy compromises the relationship between traditional authority and the pre-colonial past. Such acts undermine the meaning of the word 'tradition' within these institutions (Geschiere 1993). Cheka argues that the word 'traditional' as it has come to be used today within the African political systems, should be used with caution, as 'traditional' was a colonial terminology which was meant to contrast indigenous leadership with that which was represented by the colonial or Western powers (Cheka 2008).

Given the difficulty in establishing a straightforward definition, Bailey (1968) and Logan (2008) contend that traditional authorities should be seen as institutions with broad diversity, but that also share similar characteristics. They generally ascend their post by inheritance or through democratic elections. More importantly, they draw their inspiration from indigenous cultural values and customs, which is not the case with elected officials within the modern state (Logan 2008). They draw their inspiration with past tradition which requires conformity with the history and culture of the people. Tradition and customs which do not preclude innovation to a limited degree are thus required to appear compatible with the past (see also Hobsbawm & Terence 1983; Terence 1993). In as much as tradition remains open and flexible to modern influences as they engage in complex relations with the state, a formal adherence to precedent is needed for tradition to be considered as such (Logan 2008 p.21).

Drawing on the above discussion mainly from Bailey (1968) and Logan (2008), I wish to establish how this concept is understood and applied in this study. Traditional authority is considered in this study as an institution that obtains its power and legitimacy partly from pre-colonial cultural values and customs among indigenous groupings that identify with such customs. The institution of traditional authority may exist independent of whether it is created or acknowledged by the contemporary law. Moreover, traditional authority in Bailey's words:

partly regulated by, and partly independent of, larger encapsulating political structures; and which so to speak, fight battles with these larger structures in a way which seldom ends in victory, rarely in dramatic defeat, but usually in a long-drawn stalemate and defeat by attrition. (Bailey 1968 p.281)

The term traditional authority in this study is principally symbolised by the institution of the chiefs in the case of Cameroon. However, beyond this scope, the concept is also broadened to include other traditional authorities such as family group heads, title holders, village council members and local regulatory societies within indigenous communities (Nkwi 1979). Traditional authorities under colonial and post-colonial regimes have experienced institutional and functional changes but have remained resilient. However, the question that arises is what role do they play in multi-party democracy and local conflicts in Africa and what impact can that have on their legitimacy from both the local communities and the state?

3.3.2 The role of traditional authorities in multi-party politics in Africa

Part of the argument that I make in this thesis is that traditional leaders can play an active role in national politics and still retain their local prowess to manage local conflicts, but that this is only possible if they enter the political scene with a level of neutrality, i.e. to represent the whole of their community. Relying on the state for legitimacy gives traditional leaders a temporal support for their leadership which can only last if their actions are perceived to be in the best interest of the different audiences involved. Traditional authorities may gain or lose legitimacy to different parts of their constituency depending on the political choices they make. A closer look at the literature suggests two prevailing schools of thoughts. The first contends that traditional institutions are obsolete and need to be abolished if Africa is to truly achieve

‘good governance’. The second is of those who hold the view that traditional authority has a pivotal role to play in multi-party politics and ‘good governance’ in Africa. Proponents of this view contend that traditional authorities should co-exist with the modern state especially because of the skills they possess in managing local conflicts.

The first school of thought-the argument for the abolition of traditional institutions- is represented by scholars like Maloka (1995), Mamdani (2001; 1996) and Ntsebeza (2005). For example, in his work ‘Citizens and Subjects’ conducted within the context of South Africa, Mamdani (1996) argues that African states under colonial rule were ‘bifurcated,’ with different set of rules/authorities for urban ‘citizens’ who were under the state and rural ‘subjects’ under traditional authorities. According to Mamdani (1996), divide and rule distinguished nationals between urban and rural communities. Mamdani (1996) then asserts that colonial regimes backed the policy of indirect rule on grounds that tradition and custom were local forms of social organisations. This created the assumption that Africans were made up of multiple identities. This assumption became enforced as a strategy to manage the local people. They empowered chiefs with central roles, especially in rural communities as auxiliaries of the colonial power (Mamdani 1996 pp.22-24).

Mamdani (1996) further submits that at independence, post-colonial African states have continued with these colonial legacies without modifications. To resolve this impasse, Mamdani (1996) suggests a total demolition of the ‘bifurcated state’. What is required, he says is ‘an endeavour to link the urban and the rural –and thereby a series of related binary opposites such as rights and customs, representation and participation, centralisation and decentralisation civil society and community–in ways that have not yet been done’ (Mamdani 1996 p.34). Ntsebeza (2005), like Mamdani (1996), agrees that traditional authority was despotic but disagrees on whether they were decentralised. Whereas Mamdani contends that traditional authority was ‘decentralised despotism’, Ntsebeza (2005) argues that Native Authority was only despotic and not decentralised. The problem with these two arguments is that such a black and white position with regards to the decentralised nature of traditional authority obscures a deeper understanding of these institutions.

The second school of thought, i.e. the co-existence argument, is propagated by scholars like Sklar (1994), who contends that traditional authority can co-exist with the modern state in what Sklar refers to as 'mixed government'. A mixed government in his view is 'one that sees traditional authority as a political resource without diminishing the authority of the sovereign state' (Sklar 1994 p.1). Sklar accords traditional authority 'a second dimension of political space – a dimension behind the sovereign state' (Sklar 1994 p.1) His submission is that these two sources of authorities could co-exist, wherein traditional authority will operate like a separate source of political authority embedded in tradition. This, to him, cancels out what Mamdani refers to as the bifurcation between citizens and 'subjects', where those who are governed by traditional authorities could simultaneously be 'subjects' of chiefs and citizens of the state. Sklar thinks this is sustainable because there will be no rivalry between the two sources of authority given that roles would clearly be defined (Sklar 1994). For him, traditional authority prevails in offering moral and political authority, especially the enforcement of 'civic, moral and social orders' (Sklar 1994 p.2).

Sklar's opinion has come under critique from scholars like Bank and Southhall (1996) and Ray (1996), who argue that democracy in Africa will be undermined when traditional authorities take part in national politics. Drawing from their own research in South Africa, they opine that traditional authorities destroyed the basis of their legitimacy when they became complicit with the Apartheid government. Ray (1996), whose research looked at power and legitimacy between traditional authorities and the modern state in Ghana, asserts that traditional authorities and the modern state are parallel. Ray (1996) thinks the two forms of authorities have different sources of legitimacy for their political positions. Traditional authorities, from Ray's point of view, get their legitimacy from their pre-colonial historical routes while the modern states are relics and continuation of colonial legacies (1996 p.181). Ray's conclusion is that any efforts to enable the co-existence of these opposing forms of

authority (that is, the state and traditional authority) only lead to several political, developmental and conceptual problems (Ray 1996 p.13).

Ray (1996) and Van Trotha (1996) advocate a role for traditional leaders, arguing that one of the areas where these leaders have often triumphed was in the domain of judicial issues and their traditional skills in conflict management. Traditional authorities can still contribute to local judicial matters despite repressive attempts from both colonial and post-colonial regimes to suppress their contribution in this regard. Von Trotha (1996) thinks traditional authorities should be given a role in local judicial and development issues within their respective communities. He also suggests that independent legal institutions should be put in place. These legal institutions should handle local problems and disputes except for criminal offenses and violence. He finally suggests that a second chamber of legislation be created for chiefs to ensure that these local communities relate to the central state.

Skalnik (1996) and Ismail (1999) reinforce the argument for the need for a role for chiefs in national politics and criticise those who argue that traditional authorities should simply co-exist with the modern state without any concrete suggestions. Ismail (1999), for example, criticises the fact that the argument for traditional authorities to simply co-exist with the state has resulted in the marginalisation of traditional authorities in regard to the role they play, which he sees as the 'mere symbolic retention of the institution' (Ismail 1999 p.1). Skalnik (1996) believes that different elements of leadership within the African societies had their roots in different traditions and localities which varied widely. This explains why there was minimal challenge for power and domination within these societies. Rather, what existed was plurality of authority derived from different segments of the society (Skalnik 1996 p.111).

The implication is that these political orders did not claim any monopoly of knowledge as they learned from each other while simultaneously respecting each other's authority. By acknowledging that indigenous systems and state systems are not exclusively perfect but that they both have aspects that could be integrated to achieve 'good governance', the co-existence argument implicitly suggests what Osabu-Kle (2000 p.100) refers to as hybrid institutions; that is, taking different aspects from both forms of authority. What emerges from this debate is the observation that the extent of chief involvement in national politics impacts

on their legitimacy and the role that they can play as conflict mediators in hybrid political orders.

3.3.3 Understanding and constructing legitimacy

Legitimacy is central to the discussion on the nature of traditional authorities and their contemporary role. This section discusses the sources of this legitimacy and how that affects their ability to address local conflict. I briefly examine the different types of legitimacy within the literature that traditional authorities can gain for themselves and what these different forms of legitimacy mean to their power and authority. There is near consensus among scholars that legitimacy is socially constructed, and that it pivots on social credibility and acceptability. According to Black (2008), legitimacy is about views, feelings and assumptions where the actions of a leader are perceived as desirable, proper, or appropriate within some 'socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions' (Black 2008 p.16). These are the perceptions that give the right and the power to govern (Black 2008). The nature of power relations which leaders may have, according to Weber (1958), is perceived to be legitimate when those involved consent to the exercise of such power. Beetham (1991) emphasises the fact that such consent must come from both those that the leader seeks to govern and those on whose behalf the leader purports to govern. Leaders as such perform certain actions and build multiple relationships to gain legitimacy (Black 2008). Black, however, notes that whether a leader is legitimate or not depends on how his or her authority is accepted by others and particularly the reasons why he or she may be accepted.

Suchman (1995) highlights three reasons for which a leader could be accepted. These include; (1) pragmatism; which is the belief that such a leader can provide either the direct or indirect interest of his subjects. It could be, (2) morally based, where a leader's actions are seen to be morally justifiable within that context. A leader can also gain legitimacy on, (3) a cognitive basis, where a leader is seen to be inevitable to those he governs. In this context, a leader is not necessarily legitimate because he/she has legal authority (Black 2008). To identify the legitimacy of a leader based on legal validity alone may be unproductive especially in a context where the regulatory authority is an informal state actor. This is because legitimacy lies in the values, interests and expectations, and cognitive perceptions of the communities

that evaluate and interpret the actions of the leaders (Black 2008; Williams 2010). This is opposed to the positivist perspective of legitimacy where a law can be seen to be legitimate simply because it is legal (Schmitt 2004). This implies that different communities use different sets of evaluations to determine whether a leader is legitimate or not.

Whatever role traditional authorities can play in building peace across African societies, it remains contingent on the kind of legitimacy that they build for themselves among the legitimacy communities that exist in their societies. While the current debate in the literature tries to link the legitimacy of chiefs either to the state or their role as custodians of tradition, the situation appears to be more complex than just these two sources of legitimisation. Traditional authorities hold different sources of legitimacy and it is not strictly the quality of any one source of legitimacy that provides the basis for its political institutions and order. According to Moe (2011) it is rather the ability of traditional authorities to control multiple sources of legitimacy to satisfy the different legitimacy communities that determines the role that they can play in building local peace at the grassroots. To build and sustain multiple legitimacies requires flexibility and pragmatism on the part of chiefs, primarily because there is no consensus among the legitimacy communities of what constitutes legitimate and efficient governance (Moe 2011).

Talking of multiple sources of legitimacy, besides Suchman (1995) who highlights the pragmatic, moral and cognitive dimension of legitimacy, other scholars such as Schatzberg (2001), Tyler (1997), Tyler and Lind (1992), Black (2008), Williams (2010) and Lavi (2016) have all added their voices to the discourse around the different sources of legitimacy that leaders may use to legitimise their authority. These different sources are predominantly moral legitimacy, material legitimacy, discursive or performative legitimacy and relational legitimacy. Schatzberg (2001) contends that the moral dimension of legitimacy is derived from the underlying norms, myths and symbols that each community or social group adopts

to judge what they perceive as correct political actions. It is such norms, myth and symbols that Schatzberg (2001) contends offer the lens that shapes the structures of authority as well as the idea of how things ought to be versus 'what is'.

Besides moral legitimacy, Tyler (1997) notes that political actors are considered legitimate when they are cognitively perceived as promoting the material interests of the individuals or groups. Individuals or groups often react to these material aspects of their experiences with authorities. In some instances, where political actors lack institutional capacity, they may decide to make some promises to realise certain developmental projects within the community to raise expectations (Williams 2010). These, according to Williams, are strategies to build trust and to rekindle moral order. The cognitive aspect from the community is what Suchman (1995) contends determine their legitimacy and is the most important dimension of legitimacy.

Principles of reciprocity is what most African societies use to build and strengthen patron-client relationships. Through these networks, the patrons and clients create trust and affection between them (Arriola 2009). Irrespective of how we see these patron-client relationships, they remain the principal mechanism regulating political and economic life in African countries (Bratton & van de Walle 1997). Although political elites are perceived as self-seeking without any ideological commitment, Arriola (2009) argues that patronage constitutes a form of legitimation, rather than a form of illegitimate power in the continent. Patronage is not limited to material relations.

Patronage sometimes needs to be acted upon to boost the cognitive level of the community that such a leader has the community's interest at heart (Lavi 2016). Lavi (2016) connects patronage thus to the performative dimension of legitimacy (the third dimension of legitimacy) and describes it as a social fiction, perpetually constructed through social enactments, performances, and imaginations. For Lavi, legitimacy does not only change over time, but it is constantly constructed in the public discourse. The last dimension of legitimacy is what Tyler (1997) describes as the relational legitimacy. From a relational perspective, Tyler (1997) contends that an authority is perceived as legitimate when he/she affirms individuals' social identities and bolsters their sense of self-worth.

3.3.4 Engaging traditional authorities in conflict management

Given the debate on the role of fons in party politics and what that means for their legitimacy, the concern then is on how the interface of state and non-state institutions like traditional authorities affects governance especially with regards to conflicts that are rooted in local dynamics. These concerns also raise questions about peace and stability. One such concern is why such interactions between the state and traditional authorities is sometimes associated with reducing violent conflict, as, for example, in the post-1994 transition in parts of South Africa (Williams 2004), while in other cases, such interface is associated with conflict itself like in Uganda (Goodfellow & Lindermann 2013). John and Putzel (2009) and Khan (2010) acknowledge such tensions between groups in their works and propose a form of political settlement that can help to foster peace between rival groups. John and Putzel (2009) and Khan (2010) use the concept of political settlement to capture the forms of social orders that result from political compromises between powerful groups in societies that set the context for institutional policies.

Khan (2010) defines political settlement as ‘a combination of power and institutions that is mutually compatible and sustainable in terms of economic and political viability’ (Khan 2010 p.4). For him, both power distribution and institutions between rival groups need some form of compatibility for political settlement to be sustainable. If not, he argues that powerful groups that may feel marginalised from such power distribution or institutional structure will strive for change. The broader implication of Khan’s argument is that conflicts are more likely to occur in conditions where larger groups perceive a sense of inequality in the underlying distribution of power. Any arrangement for political settlement needs to be compatible and sustainable. This is because institutions both formal and informal, have to achieve the minimum levels of economic performance and political stability that are required for the reproduction of particular societies (Khan 2010). The concept of political settlement helps to explain why similar institutions may operate and produce different outcomes in different

contexts. Thus, political settlement is important to build good governance reforms since it helps to identify the most appropriate and similar institutions in particular contexts (Khan 2010).

In developing countries like Africa, political settlement takes the form of 'clientelist', which is the exercise of power through informal networks, typically patron-client relations of different arrangements. According to Khan (2010), clientelist political settlement in developing countries becomes most appropriate where formal productive rights are there but is only partially enforced. Political settlement is also applicable in a context where there exist groups that can influence economic decisions irrespective of their formal rights to do so. This implies that instead of seeing the state as a single actor in local governance, John and Putzel (2009) argue that clientelist political settlements in developing countries attest to the fact that the state is founded on a historically determined balance of power between contending interests. This means that the state does not have the monopoly of violence and, as such, the establishment of political order and peace requires the creation of incentives for groups to compete for resources through nonviolent mechanisms—that is, to reach a political settlement.

Goodfellow and Lindermann (2013) suggest that the chances of violent conflict would be reduced if the state recognises and allocates legitimate roles for the traditional institutions, and the traditional authority in question does not attempt to usurp roles and functions claimed by state institutions. Goodman and Linderman (2013), in their research on institutional clashes in Uganda bring to the fore the institutional disputes over land in Buganda(Uganda). They argue it was the institutional clashes relating to land management that stimulated the breakdown in the relationship between the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government and the Buganda Kings, which eventually fuelled a violent conflict. That is, those who fuelled the conflict, including chiefs and state officials, were the same people who ostensibly claimed to be conflict mediators. In other words, it was the merger of both formal and informal state actors in the management of land that inevitably led to the clash between the two institutions in Uganda. Conflict became almost unavoidable because of the tenacity with which the traditional authorities clung to institutions to protect their land right based on customary land tenure which gave them moral authority, while the government threatened by the Kingdom's popularity and influence perpetuated conflict as

they tried to impose its legal authority over national land. A conflict such as that captured by Goodman and Linderman (2013) questions the role that traditional authorities can play in mediating local conflicts given that although they both occupy the same space, they operate under different norms. Scholars like Boege et al. (2008) have referred to these types of arrangements as hybrid political orders, where rival forms of political orders and authorities are perceived as more authentic ways of building peace and not as symptoms of failure and/or disorder. In this arrangement of hybridity, Boege et al. (2008) acknowledge the role that non-state actors like traditional authorities can play in conflict management at the community level. They argue that in a context of political disorder, the state becomes only one of several orders that provide security and conflict management.

Meagher (2012) describes hybridity in the context of weak states, where the state in such context is obliged to function alongside non-state actors in the exercise of public authority. She however remains sceptical that such collaboration between states and non-state actors would lead to efficient and socially legitimate governance at the grassroots. In some instances, it rather leads to reification of violent and illegitimate forms of order that disrupts local stability. Even in a context where there is stability, Meagher contends such stability may not necessarily mean that there is social justice. For Meagher, proponents of hybrid political governance sometimes essentialise non-state actors, misconstruing coercive forms of governance as popular legitimacy.

Boege et al. (2009) use their example of Sungusungu in Somaliland, a traditional system that collaborated with the state, to show how traditional authorities adopt local modes of governance that cooperate with the state and thereby create new but informal platforms of conflict management. Menkhaus (2007) thus contends that similar orders like Sungusungu could be vital in situations where the state is absent or weak at the grassroots like the case of Somalia. He notes that:

[the] best hope for state revival may lie in the explicit pursuit of a mediated state – in which a central government with limited power and capacity relies on a diverse range of local authorities to execute core functions of government and mediate relations between local communities and the state. In this approach, the top-down project of building a central government and the organic emergence of informal polities are not viewed as antithetical (though they are invariably political rivals, coexisting in uneasy partnership), but are instead harmonized or nested together in a

negotiated division of labour (Menkhaus 2007 p.103).

What Menkhaus (2007) and Boege et al. (2008; 2009) imply is that the maintenance of peace and order within the grassroots community is not the sole responsibility of the state authority. Rather, the state institutions split responsibilities with non- state actors like chiefs especially at the community level where they understand the local dynamics in Africa. Their argument highlights the role that traditional authorities can play in addressing local conflicts by emphasising the local embeddedness in hybrid systems of authority.

What this means is that traditional authorities can help to anchor state authority in local norms, indigenous institutions and localised ideas of legitimacy or help fill the gap where the state is weak or absent. State institutions and approaches to conflict management will therefore function better if they do not appear foreign to the people and are embedded in local reality (Raeymaekers 2010). Goodfellow and Lindermann (2013) in the context of Uganda, observed how native laws, which varied from those of the state, co-existed and were applied where need arose. The argument that Goodfellow and Lindermann (2013) make is that despite the criticism, hybrid political orders can facilitate peace building where there exists a clear demarcation of roles between state and non-state institutions.

Although Goodfellow and Lindermann (2013) remain positive about the merits of hybrid political orders, they are also aware it can lead to instability if the state does not allow the non-state actors competing for authority with the state to perform their roles, or if the traditional authority seeks to perform roles that the state thinks are within its exclusive competence. This implies that traditional authorities can operate both as conflict entrepreneurs and as mediators depending on the issues involved and what they stand to lose or benefit from an envisaged outcome (Doornbos 2010).

What Meagher (2012) suggests is that issues of order need to be connected to a deeper understanding of not just embeddedness but of the type of legitimacy and the sources of power that drive the agenda of certain non-state actors. This is important in Africa in understanding the role that traditional leaders could play in conflict management because it helps to unravel the connections that a fon may have with the formal state. Doornbos (2010) contends that any researcher that seeks to contribute significantly to theory in this regard will

have to adopt a comparative research analysis. This is because such a comparative study allows one to capture the divergent impacts of regulatory struggles in different political and institutional contexts. Regarding Kom and Bali, the understanding of the different strategies through which the fons acquire recognition and legitimacy, and the shifts in power and accountability that take place in the process, remain important to understand those in whose interest the fons operate and the extent to which they can have any impact on conflict management at the local level. This is because the audience that traditional authorities serve determines their legitimacy and resilience (Renders & Terlinden 2010).

3.4 Conclusion.

This chapter has clarified my conceptual language in this thesis and situated it within the different bodies of literature to which this thesis contributes. To understand the role of traditional authorities in dealing with conflict situations, the chapter brought together literature on ethnicity, conflict, and the conceptualisation of traditional authority placed within hybrid political orders. I have defined ethnicity in constructivist terms, and I have argued that one needs to see and understand traditional authorities in relational terms. What role a traditional authority like a fon can play as a conflict mediator depends on the kind of legitimacy that he holds in relation to various constituencies. I have thus taken issue with the literature that either limits the legitimacy of fons to questions of land governance or portrays it as a derivative of state power. The chapter has also examined the literature on the causes of conflict in Africa, and the literature on the processes of mobilisation. I discussed the notions of patrimonialism and patron-client relationship in post-colonial Africa as critical triggers of instability and violence. Contrary to the prevalent interpretation, patrimonial authority or legitimacy does not necessarily mean corruption, bad governance or weak state institutions.

I have argued that this way of understanding African politics is a reductionist perspective that fails to capture the complex socio-cultural and political dynamics which define local communities with their chiefs on the one hand and their political elites on the other. In addition, I examined the literature that attributes conflict in Africa to agrarian factors. This is important because it broadens our view from purely focussing on the state and its shortcomings and instead fixes our gaze on issues at the level of community and their

leadership. I have also shown how the literature ignores the kinds of consensus or relationships that exist between political elites, traditional authorities and the grassroots communities and the circumstances under which local tensions may or may not escalate to violent conflicts.

This chapter has engaged with the literature which demonstrates that legitimacy builds on the values, interests and expectations, and cognitive perceptions of the legitimacy communities. I have argued that in the context of hybrid political orders, there is the need to focus on the institutional embeddedness, where a leader exercises his authority and where the legitimacy communities are situated. Institutional embeddedness is necessary to understand how legitimacy is constructed by both the different audiences and the leaders who respond to such expectations. Different audiences both within and outside of a leader's community may have different views regarding the importance and validity of the legitimacy claims and how they expect leaders to respond to such claims. The choices that leaders make can have implications for their ability to manage and mediate local conflicts. It is thus critical to understand the resilience of the different sources of legitimacy that could increase the impact that traditional authorities have on local conflicts as mediator.

CHAPTER 4: THE EVOLUTION OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES IN CAMEROON

4.0 Introduction

This chapter contends that the authority of traditional institutions in terms of local governance in Cameroon varies widely. This variation is partly dependent on whether a community is an acephalous or centralised society. Their authority is also determined by the extent to which a given community interacted with colonial regimes. With respect to Kom and Bali, this chapter, through a review of the literature on colonial narratives, demonstrates that the two communities related differently with colonial administrations (especially the Germans) in Cameroon. Under the German colonial regime, it shows Bali became a sub-imperial power in the Grassfield which attracted a lot of animosity with her neighbours and affected her relationship with different ethnic groups after independence. Kom had a strained relationship with the Germans and resisted the German colonial rule for seven months before they were subjugated to colonial authority.

This chapter therefore explores the ways in which traditional institutions in Kom and Bali had been weakened or strengthened by colonial rule. By reviewing the impact of colonial rule on traditional institutions, the chapter emphasises the idea that even in the cases of the most traditional groups in Cameroon, their positions and institutions were still deeply affected by the processes of state formation ever since the colonial conquest and in the post-colonial era. The chapter argues that the differences between Kom and Bali in how they interacted with colonial rulers partially accounts for the seemingly unending conflicts that have engulfed Bali, as opposed to the relative stability in Kom. The first section explores the nature of traditional political structures prior to colonisation and the introduction of the different colonial systems (notably Germany and Britain) in Cameroon. This is followed by the German colonial era and the relation they established with different communities like Bali and Kom right up till the outbreak of the First World War and their eventual exit from Cameroon.

The second section explores the British colonial administration which took over the Grassfield region from the Germans. It unpacks the British colonial relationship with traditional authorities and the challenges encountered until the eve of independence. The section

explores the birth of the women's movement and other social movements that challenged the colonial authorities but also certain practices (like the exclusion of women in decision making) of traditional leaders and the educated elites who stood against the idea of indirect rule. With regards to the post-colonial state, this chapter contributes to the thesis' broader argument by showing the extent to which traditional authorities have been accommodated within the decentralised structures of governance in Cameroon, as provided for by law No 77/245 of July 1977. This law defines traditional authorities as auxiliaries of the state at the local levels. This section helps in understanding the basis of the complex relationship between the state and traditional leaders in Cameroon.

4.1 Cameroon at the eve of colonisation

Many different forms of traditional governance systems have been recorded in Cameroon prior to colonisation (see Chilver 1963, 1966; Kaberry 1967; Nkwi 1976; Geschiere 1993). The South Eastern and the South-Western regions often referred to as the forest regions were predominantly segmentary societies (acephalous), and chieftaincy systems in these regions were at best very weak (Geschiere 1993). Geschiere (1993) further notes that these societies were not familiar with any form of rulership through a central authority. Settlements were sparsely scattered into autonomous units under the leadership of a recognised family head. Power within these communities was clearly vested in the hands of the elders. While this was the case around the forest regions of Cameroon, the Western, Northern, and North-Western regions of Cameroon are documented to have had very moderately centralised traditional systems (Nkwi 1979; Kaberry 1969 Jua 1995; Ndobegang & Samah 2009). Nkwi (1979) for example contends that power within these regions was exerted by a very strong central authority and enjoyed total respect from their subjects. Most of these centralised chieftaincies in the Grassfield were largely an agglomeration of mini states, which were constituted and enlarged through conquest (Nkwi 1979).

These indigenous traditional systems fell under the influence of different colonial masters. Cameroon was a German colony in 1884 to 1914 when the First World War broke out. During this period, the German authorities organised their administration around the traditional

systems that they found. Where these authorities were absent, the Germans imposed indigenous central authorities, which were aimed at facilitating colonial regimes to pacify the local people (Geschiere 1993). The defeat of the Germans in Europe and in her overseas territories by the Allied forces marked the end of the German colonial period in Cameroon. Britain and France whose joint effort had ousted the Germans from Cameroon concomitantly became the new colonial rulers dividing the territory into two unequal parts (20% for Britain and 80% for France) (Ngoh 1996; Ndobegang & Samah 2009). Britain and France governed Cameroon as a mandated territory of the League of Nations and much later in 1945 as a Trust territory of the United Nations after the collapse of the League of Nations. Both Britain and France built their governance structures almost on the same foundations of traditional authorities as the Germans (Ndi 2013). Almost the same position was accorded to traditional rulers, as middlemen and facilitators between the French and British administrations on one hand and their subjects on the other (Ndobegang & Samah 2009; Geschiere 1993).

4.2 Cameroon under German colonial rule: An exploration of Bali and Kom

The Germans, after the effective colonisation of Cameroon on 12th July 1884, took advantage of the traditional administrative systems that they encountered to gain access to the local population for labour and revenue collection (Ardener 1968; Nkwi 1979; Geschiere 1993; Burnham 2009). The Germans built their administration in these areas strictly relying on these traditional governance structures (Geschiere 1993).

4.2.1 Bali under the German colonial administration

The Germans established strong ties with the Fon of Bali which served as the gateway to the Bamenda Grassfield. Zintgraff – the first German explorer who embarked on a major expedition to the North-West opted for the unification of the entire Grassfield region under the Fon of Bali, who was supposed to be answerable only to the German administration (Fowler 1996 p.88). Zintgraff was fascinated by the military prowess of the Bali warriors that he met on his arrival in the Grassfield. The Bali fondom, besides being militarily endowed, had a well-organised political system in a region which was geographically surrounded by Widikum ethnic groups described to have been acephalous communities before the advent of colonisation (Nyamndi 1988).

The Bali political structures fitted in well within the framework of the German colonial policy of indirect rule (Ndobegang & Samah 2009). Through indirect rule, the Germans were able to minimise costs by using the well-structured Bali political systems to rule over the acephalous Widikum ethnic groups. Thus, Zintgraff negotiated a 'Blood-Pact' treaty¹⁴ of protection with Fon Galega of Bali in August of 1891 (Ndi 2013). Through the terms of the treaty, Fon Galega was recognised as the paramount Fon of the neighbouring ethnic communities in the Grassfield. The Germans supplied the local Bali warriors with M-71 loading rifles, and German soldiers trained the Bali warriors who were called the Bali-Truppe (Ndi 2013).

The Bali treaty with the Germans affected the local power dynamics in favour of the Bali, especially with the introduction of superior weapons and improved military skills. Under the German supervision, the Bali-Truppe (German appellation of the Bali Army) in union with the few allied communities attacked hostile/competing ethnic communities such as the Moghamos and the Baforchu, which gave Bali the opportunity to influence the economic and political activities of the region (Nyamndi 1988). Many ethnic communities in the region developed enmities with Bali because of the aggressive attacks on their communities (Nyamndi 1988; Ndi 2013). Such animosity only added to that of other integral sub-groups like the Bawock (see chapter six for a detail discussion about Bawock) group within Bali subdivision, who have similar historical grievances of subjugation against Bali.

The Bawock are said to have migrated around 1905 from Bangante in Ndé Division in the southern part of the Francophone West Province to their current location in Bali subdivision. Despite cultural exchanges and intermarriage with different groups in the region for over a century, the Bawock village still perceived themselves to be significantly different within the region (Chilver 1964). Most people in Bawock identify themselves as Bamileke (the dominant ethnic grouping in the West-Region which is a part of Francophone Cameroon). Most people in Bali subdivision identify themselves as Bali Nyonga. Most of the population of Bawock are Anglophone, but they are happy to identify with French speakers. This emphasis here is important because it shows that military exploits both before and after the arrival of the Germans enabled Bali to assume formal administrative control over many neighbouring fondoms that could not resist their military strength.

¹⁴ The Blood-Pact was a friendly treaty that brought the Germans and Bali together as allies.

Throughout the German colonial era in Cameroon, the Bali fondom supplied thousands of workers to the coastal plantations (Fowler 1996; Ndi 2013). Most of these labour recruits came from subjugated neighbouring communities like the Meta and Moghamo ethnic groups. The labour recruits died while at the plantation because of climatic conditions. The demand for labour increased as the plantations expanded, which meant that pressure mounted on Bali to increase her quota of labour supply to meet the required labour supply. Bali in the end depended on her neighbours for the recruitment rather than the core Bali people (Fowler 1996). Not only were Bali people recruiting labour destined for the German plantation in the coast, they were also retaining slaves in Bali who could be used when demand for labour in the coast increased. They mobilised the skilled Bali warriors with M-71 rifles to attack the surrounding villages.

Russell (1980) asserts that in 1899, the Fon of Bali was expected to meet a labour supply quota of one thousand men for the Germans. He was allowed a free hand to use whatever means he could to meet the demand. More than any other factor at the time, Fowler (1996) notes that the forceful recruitment of labour from neighbouring fondoms largely accounted for an enduring enmity with Bali people. These neighbouring communities also stirred anger against Bali Fon because they were never to reunite with their families (Ndi 2013). Ndi further notes that most of those who were carried to the coast died due to poor climatic conditions and dysentery that was prevailing in the coast at the time. The forceful recruitment of labourers and slave raiding threatened these neighbouring villages because farm land was also confiscated in the process, which determined their existence and livelihoods (Fowler 1996). Villages that benefited from access to important trade routes and markets were being overpowered by the Bali, as were the Germans. These were crucial years for these ethnic groups, and they have lived with these animosities against the people of Bali Nyonga.

In addition, the German administration tried to determine which communities in the Grassfield were the legitimate subjects of Bali. On the 15th of July 1904, the Germans recommended that Pinyin (a rival ethnic group) be placed under Bali. When this was reported to the Fon of Bali, the latter added seventeen other ethnic groups to the list. Some fondoms refused submission to Bali and were pacified through the help of German troops (Fowler 1996). By 1905 and in the presence of over 47 Fons, the Germans formally installed the Fon of

Bali as the paramount fon of 31 communities in the Grassfield (Chilver 1967). Chilver further notes that in 1906, the Germans forcefully resettled eleven Meta villages into Bali territory to ensure the easy collection of colonial taxes. These communities were physically detached and settled in Bali, giving Bali ownership of their land. The Germans assumed that by empowering the Fon of Bali as a paramount Fon over the region, they would ensure his loyalty to their cause and increase his effectiveness as an agent in recruiting labour and collecting taxes. Chilver (1967 p. 499) notes that most of the 47 Fons who attended the ceremony never fully understood its implications and thought the Fon of Bali was only commissioned to act as a mediator between them and the Germans. These villages attempted rebellions which however never succeeded; rather, they were only further punished by the Germans for their insubordination to Bali (Nyamndi 1988).

Bali under colonial rule, like in the pre-colonial period, continued to develop its social mechanism within the fondom by absorbing and integrating immigrants into its social fabric. This form of social policy was consolidated under the German labour recruiting practices which added these 31 new fondoms to Bali. These meant an influx of the total population of Bali with settlers from Moghamo, Baforchu (Santa) and the other Widikum villages. Fowler (1996) notes that such resettlement of people from different ethnic groups increased the population of Bali to over 20,000 inhabitants in 1907. The strength of Bali over her neighbours dating back to pre-colonial days resulted from a carefully constructed internal organisation designed to integrate foreigners to the Bali polity. It was customary within Bali Nyonga that these immigrants were integrated within the society in so far as they took the oath of allegiance to the Fon and agreed to respect the Bali tradition (Ndi 2013). Although some of these communities later claimed their autonomy, passions are still roused over their colonial boundaries with Bali Nyonga which affected their farmlands. The memories of the raids by Bali warriors, the forceful appropriation of their farmlands with the assistance of the Germans lives on. The grief about the extraction of labour to work in the coastal plantations left scars of enmity that has resulted in lasting bitterness against the Bali people (Nyamndi 1988).

The fact that only men were transported to the plantations means that these men left their wives behind to struggle for themselves to feed their families. And unfortunately, most of these men did not return, as some had died due to harsh climatic conditions or married new

wives on the coast (Ndi 2013). Bali had to absorb these women which resulted in a demographic imbalance (Fowler 1996). What is important here is the fact that the situation arising out of the influx of women was such that traditional titled men were appointed to provide the basic needs of these women who were never sure of reuniting with their husbands. Special advisers to the Fon as privy councillors (the Gwans) were often chosen to take note of new groups of female immigrants whose husbands were taken to work in the plantations (Ndi 2013). They ensured that these women were properly allocated among the elders as new wives, housemaids and concubines, while their husbands were forcibly recruited to work in the German plantations on the coast (Ndobegang & Samah 2009). The Anti-Bali sentiments within the region and within Bali are partly a result of this animosity among some of her subjects who often trace their histories of origin and belonging elsewhere (Ndi 2013).

4.2.2 Kom under the German colonial administration

Until the passage of the German explorer (Dr Eugen Zintgraff) through Kom in 1889, there was little contact made between the Kom and the German colonial administrators. Nkwi (1976) notes that Kom appeared to have met the demand for labour by the Germans which was needed to open the region from 1902 to 1904. The Kom complied with the supply of labour for building and expanding of military stations specifically in the Bamenda Grassfield. However, by late 1904, the Fon of Kom resisted what he saw as the excessive demand for labour (Nkwi 1976). This infuriated the Germans who led a military campaign to suppress the Kom people. In contrast to Bali, Kom resisted the German administration and was only forced to compliance through subjugation. The Kom resistance to German rule which began in 1904 lasted for seven months (Nkwi 1976). Nkwi (1976) further notes that the Germans decided to make peace with the Fon since he was adamant to lay down arms.

By 1905, the Kom were effectively under German military occupation and loyal to the German demand for labour. The Fon of Kom supplied labour to work in the roads and the opening of the Bamenda military station. Again, it is important to emphasise and contrast the way labour recruitment was conducted in Kom to the situation in Bali. This is important because it speaks to the high level of animosity that Bali has with her neighbours which is less so in Kom. In Kom, labour was constituted mainly by core Kom recruits and other recruits

that came from the Kom vassal state in the form of taxes to the colonial government (Nkwi 1976; Chilver and Kaberry 1961). The supply of labour from Kom vassal states was a form of tax which the people had a choice to pay either by cash or kind through human labour (Chilver and Kaberry 1961). These communities were not suppressed by Kom fons for the sole purpose of extracting labour as was the situation in Bali.

A point worth mentioning in Kom is that the relationship between Kom and her vassal fondoms was well defined and most of these vassals had been present even before the arrival of Kom (Nkwi 1976). Some others had only fallen under Kom hegemony as they sought protection against very powerful neighbours like the Bafut and Nso. Even so, these sub-fondoms were not integrated within the core Kom as they could maintain their cultures and territory exactly as they were before the arrival of Kom (Nkwi 1976). Even in a situation where a vassal fondom was to be displaced to a new location (usually at the peripheries of Kom), The Fon ensured that these communities were given a clearly distinct territory. The Fon also ensured that the cultures of such displaced groups remained intact (Nkwi 1976).

4.2.3 The end of German colonial rule in Cameroon

Towards the end of German rule in Cameroon in 1914, the relationship between Bali fondom and the Germans had deteriorated. This was because of Bali's brazen use of skilled warriors and superior weapons to suppress their neighbours even when it was no longer required by the Germans (Ndi 2013). Such force was no longer needed by the Germans given that the area was already under German colonial rule. In addition, Bali was already threatening German trading interests by becoming traders themselves in the region against the wish of the Germans (Fowler 1996). The Bali used their warriors, armed with M-71 rifles to form armed trading parties that extended Bali interest within the Grassfield and beyond. This culminated in the strained relationship between Bali and the Germans towards the last days of her administration in the Grassfield. As a result, the Germans returned most of the vassal fondoms back to independence (Ndobegang & Samah 2009).

If the Germans had become less hostile in the way they treated traditional authority by 1910, it was not the case when the First World War broke out in 1914. The war signalled the return of German pre-emptive brutality against any anticipated violence to the colonial administration

from local chiefs (Ndobegang & Samah 2009). Such increased brutality was to ensure total submission from traditional leaders and their subjects, whom they needed to fight the Anglo-French forces who had taken the war to German colonies. The Germans were mindful of the fact that the war was to be extended to her colonies (Ngoh 1996). The implication of this was that the spread of any anti-German sentiment among the locals, promoted by their chiefs, could frustrate the German defence systems that partly relied on indigenous militia. Traditional authorities were placed under serious scrutiny. This was mostly the case of chiefs who had resisted German authority in the earlier years of their expansion (Ngoh 1987; Ndobegang & Samah 2009). The Germans were eventually defeated by the Anglo-French forces which marked the end of the German reign in Cameroon by 1916 (Kah 2011).

4.3 Traditional authority under British colonial rule.

The British gave relatively equal powers to all traditional authorities who identified under the British colonial policy of indirect rule, without necessarily empowering one fon as the Germans did against the others (Nkwi 1967). Although the Bali control over the neighbouring communities continuously waned (Fowler 1996), the British colonial officers in the Grassfield were ready to restore as far as the principles of native administration permitted the position of the Bali Fon as the most influential Fon within the region (Fowler 1996). The British did this to enable the Bali Fon to regain in moral prestige that he had lost in the form of territory and man power. The British established cordial relations with Bali partly because of their help in defeating the Germans in the area, but also because of their relative dominance in the Grassfield. The pioneer Divisional Officer (D.O.) for the British administration in the Grassfield described Bali as 'the most advanced of the various tribal divisions in the Grassfield' (Hunt 1925) His successor, N.C Duncan later described Fonyonga II of Bali as the 'most intelligent native gentleman whom I have encountered for eighteen years spent in West and South Africa (Fowler 1996). Soon after the British had taken over, they instituted a new form of local government by creating administrative-Native Authorities. Bali, like Kom, became an important Native Authority. Bali was rewarded with the first Native school in the Grassfield, which was followed by the creation of Native Court in 1925.

The former German Cameroon was split disproportionately between Britain (20%) and France (80%) (Ndi 2013). For purposes of administration Britain further divided her territory into

British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons and both sections were administered as part of her Nigeria colony, though it did not constitute part of Nigeria. The adjacent territories of British and French Cameroon began their political evolution under different political traditions which inevitably affected differently chieftaincy structures differently, a transformation which had already begun under the German era (Kaberry 1969; Nkwi 1979; Chilver 1993). Indirect rule became the colonial policy in British Southern Cameroon. As a colonial policy, it concentrated on the adaptation of traditional political institutions for local government and the integration of traditional authorities into the colonial systems of administration with minimal colonial interference (Jua 1995; Nkwi 1979; Chilver 1963). Nkwi (1979) notes that under indirect rule, indigenous systems were to be maintained for resolving local conflicts such as theft, divorce, and witchcraft related crimes. These indigenous techniques of resolving local conflicts are discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

In British Southern Cameroons, such clearly defined leadership structures were not easily identified in the South-Western region of the country. This region just like the Maka community in the South-Eastern region, was also made up of many decentralised communities and leadership was often entrusted to family heads (Geschiere 1993; Bonchuck 1997 cited in Pemunta 2011). Against this backdrop, the British were still very determined to legitimise chieftaincy structures which could constitute the Native Administration. One thing that should be noted (as does Geschiere 1993) is that while this region—like the Maka in the East Cameroon—was largely decentralised, unlike the Maka community, chieftaincy was able to easily gain grounds here and was perceived legitimate by the indigenous population. The reason for this, Geschiere explains, is that the British allowed the chiefs in the South-Western region with more scope in handling local disputes (local land disputes, divorce, witchcraft, theft and minor criminal charges). Hence, those chiefs with more scope could consolidate their position much easier.

As the British empowered the chiefs, they were also able to dismiss customs, such as the death sentence, which they found to be against human rights, and added their own laws. Traditional authorities found themselves struggling between indigenous, colonial and common law, administrative regulations and Christian injunctions (De Vries 1998). Nkwi (2011) argues that chiefs were now taking a little from every aspect of what was soon to

comprise the customary law which was neither Western nor traditional. What this meant was that culture was evolving (cf. Terence 1993). This was not unique to Cameroon. Elsewhere in Africa, Mamdani (1996) also captures this point when he argues that through indirect rule, the British were able to rely on what he calls decentralised despotism as the carefully juxtaposed authoritarian rule with native customs. Colonial rule empowered chiefs and more so against other subsidiary traditional pre-colonial authorities (Nkwi 1979). However, this authority and power conferred on chiefs was soon to be challenged by the new Cameroonian elite class, religious bodies and women's groups who were against some of the issues that traditional law allowed like polygamy.

4.3.1 Traditional authority, colonial encounters and social changes.

One of the early challenges to traditional authority in the British era was the rise of women's revolutions in the Grassfield focussed on redressing female marginalisation. This female marginalisation came from both indigenous traditional systems and practices and colonial hegemonies. One of the issues of the women's revolt was the new farming rules that were introduced. The 1955 farming rules and regulations prohibited slope wise crop cultivation in favour of horizontal cropping or cultivation across contours. The Kom women rose up to challenge this decision. The administration argued against slope wise cultivation on the basis that it led to erosion of the cultivated beds which affected crops. This, according to the administration, led to poor harvests, hunger and disease within these communities. Kah (2009) states that 'horizontal ridging was advantageous because running water and other nutrients were trapped within the furrows of cultivated crop beds for plant nourishment' (p.86). This new farming method was strange to the women who preferred the old method.

Another reason for the revolution was the migration of young men to the coastal plantations. Movement to these plantations throughout the colonial period was sex-selective. Only men could move while their women stayed behind. While in the plantations some of the young men got married to coastal women to the disappointment and frustration of their former wives (Kah 2009). The 1955 uprising was partly a result of women's discontent with such discriminatory colonial policies that prohibited them from moving with their husbands. Many

women wanted plantation workers who were already married to migrate to these plantations with their wives.

The women's uprisings were also challenging indigenous traditional systems and practices. For example, while colonialism was repressive towards women, at the same time Christian missionaries (themselves agents of colonialism) were seriously criticising indigenous practices such as polygamy, and the exclusion of women from land ownership. In 1955, this inspired women such as anlu (a Kom women's group that oversees that women's rights are protected) to revolt against such ills. Women were able to take advantage of some of the gaps between the new customary laws to challenge both the traditional structures and colonial administration. Kah (2009; 2011), Nkwi (2003) and Adams (2006) all refer to the 1955 female uprising in the Grassfield as a challenge by women to the status quo. The implication of all these female uprisings (the anlu women in Kom, the Kelu women and the Laimbwe women) all of which were centred around the same grievances and lasted between 1955- 1959 –was that chiefs were fast losing absolute power. According to Kah (2009;2011), the impact of these uprising was that women could own not only land, but also houses of their own.

In Kom, missionaries came into the region in 1928. The missionaries created new social hierarchies (who were mostly the new Christian converts) bent on challenging the authority of the Fon in Kom (Nkwi 2011). This had implications for the Fon not only by the way his wives deserted him to the mission compound but by the birth of new social hierarchies. Some of the Fon's wives who had become new converts embraced the Christian doctrine against polygamy. These new converts were those who moved away to seek refuge in mission compounds (Nkwi 2011). By legitimising the church and the school which were the ancillaries of colonisation, there was an unintended creation of new social hierarchies in the Kom fonom. These hierarchies included the catechists, pupils, teachers and workers who saw themselves as subject to the colonial regime, and the majority failed to see any meaning in traditional roles and hierarchies (Nkwi 2015). The League of Nations Report for 1937 was unequivocal in portraying the decline of traditional authority in Kom and the Bamenda Grassfield.

They [people of Grassfield] are not prepared to give unquestioning obedience to one man, and the autocrat must seek advice and get the weight of the public opinion on his side if his orders are

to be enforced. Other factors are the spread of Christianity with its demand for loyalty that may clash with customs of paganism and education; the detribalisation of those who leave their homes for long periods of time in search of work and knowledge and the gradual abolition of rights and services once accorded by customs to the chiefs but now exacted only with difficulty or else forbidden...¹⁵

This was a clear indication that fons' power in the Grassfield was being challenged; and not only by Christians. Those who now voluntarily migrated to the plantations to acquire jobs or for schooling purposes became a serious threat to the status quo. Therefore, besides Christianity which influenced local perceptions, encouraging new converts and women to challenge traditional authority, there was also the rise of the new elite class in British Southern Cameroon. Nkwi (2015) writes about one of these new men, Mr. Anyway Ndichia Timti, who sued the Fon of Kom in court, an experience that was totally new to the people at the time. Born in 1912, Mr. Anyway, had served the palace as a retainer (palace service men) and in frustration that he had served the Fon without compensation, left for the coastal plantations. In the coast, he amassed wealth through cash crops like cocoa and coffee. In 1948, he returned to Kom and sued the Fon claiming he served him for 18 years without any compensation. In his defence the Fon claimed he was never compensated because he was stubborn. The chief colonial judge had to rule in favour of the Fon fearing that if Mr. Anyway won, most of the Native Authority and the colonial idea of indirect rule would soon lose credibility (Nkwi 2015). This indicates that new stake-holders were on the rise, especially the new elite class who had literally pushed Britain to revisit their position within the construct of local governance (Nkwi 1979; Jua 1995; Fisiy 1995).

4.3.2 The emergence of new political elite class versus traditional authority under British administration.

The British in their early colonial days in Cameroon between 1920 and the 1930s were actively against the idea of encouraging local elites trained in western education to participate in the colonial administration. The British colonial administrator saw colonial structures of governance as alien superstructures (Crowther 1964). The idea was to encourage local political elites to work with local (indigenous) administration. Geschiere (1993) notes that while the

¹⁵ File Cb (1937) 1 Bermuda Division: Annual League of Nations Report, 1937 (NAB).

French administration in the region just adjacent to Southern Cameroon actively encouraged local elites to participate in the colonial administration, this was not the case in British southern Cameroon. This attitude of the French towards the educated natives aroused bitter envy among those in the British Southern Cameroon who were ready to challenge the British authority with all their might (Geschiere 1993).

The British colonial authorities wanted local elites to join native courts; since it was their belief that indigenous institutions were the most appropriate to govern the local people; as long as they avoided certain features like arbitrary death sentences that did not conform to the Western concept of justice (Crowther 1964). Secondly, not only did the British believe that traditional institutions were the best to anchor their administration, they also felt less threatened by local chiefs who could easily be manipulated to fit colonial interests where and when the need arose. This feeling was not reciprocated for newly trained indigenous elites with Western values (Jua 1995). Britain allowed indigenous peoples to reign according to the customs, traditions and political institutions. However, they were required to assume an inferior position to the colonial regime, something the local elites were not comfortable with (Jua 1995). What seems true for the British policy of indirect rule is that it treated traditional authorities as the authentic representative of the people against the Westernised native elites.

As a result, this new elite class became very critical of the indirect rule of the British administration and their over reliance on Native Authorities. The colonial administration was heavily criticised for retarding development in Southern Cameroons by using illiterates in the name of chiefs to govern the region (Nkwi 1979). In a petition addressed to the United Nations visiting team in 1949 presented by the new elite class in Kom, the colonial regime was described in the following way:

The worst neglect of all is the absence of training for self-government whereby the people might hope to do these things for themselves. Instead, by the damnable Native Administration system, there is the role of things remaining where they were. This is done by excluding the literate and enlightened from the administrative councils. Most members are there by right of birth, no matter whether they can serve the people or not, whether the people supposed to be represented like it or not. When will, these illiterate old men being trained for self-government rule? In their graves?

Of course, it does not matter with the government; the longer they [Fons] are unable to rule the better for the British government (Nkwi 1979 p.102).

Though the British had preferred the indirect rule, traditional authorities were now perceived as a major hindrance to the colonial idea of broadening the base of political power and participation (De Vries 1998). This attitude could be seen in the context of a changing colonial philosophy and pressure from the literate elite who were agitating to be co-opted within the administrative ranks. In Cameroon, the British administrators noted that Native Administration was a confused body incapable of executive actions. (De Vries 1998). Colonial administrators however had their fear, which concerns how best to make use of the new elite class within the ranks of the colonial administration. According to the D.O., at the time, the question was 'how to make use of the energy and enthusiasm of the younger men without losing the steadying influence of age and customary authority'.¹⁶ The educated men could be recognized as legitimate authority only if they became associated with traditional authority.

Soon after the Second World War in 1945, the British began making significant changes to include the African educated elites within local structures of administration. In Kom, a clan council was created of 16 elected representatives and 29 traditional rulers in 1949.¹⁷ Fons gave up their positions as presidents of these councils, however they were retained as ex officio members. The absolute authority of chiefs began to be eroded and they were forced to compromise some of their traditional rights of leadership and decision making to local elites or lose legitimacy before their subjects (Nkwi 1979; De Vries 1998).

While Southern Cameroonians participated in the active political life in Nigeria as far back as 1932, it was not until the early 1953 that Southern Cameroon obtained an autonomous status from Nigerian politics (Awasum 1998). The experience gained through the democratic culture in Nigeria stimulated an unprecedented political awakening in Southern Cameroons and the emergence of party politics that was not associated with Nigerian politics. It enabled the crystallisation and formation of political parties. By 1950, the British became focussed on

¹⁶ Ja/b 1954/1. DO (Wum) to resident, 15.11.1951, NAB.

¹⁷ Ba 1949/13, Excerpts from Annual Report Bamenda Division 1946, NAB.

preparing her former colonies for independence. In Southern Cameroons, Kamerun National Congress (KNC) under Dr. Endeley and the Kamerun People's Party (KPP) led by Paul M. Kale negotiated Southern Cameroons into an autonomous state (Ngoh 1987). By 1953, the British secretary of State for colonies granted Southern Cameroons' status as a separate region on the KNC's victory in the 1953 general elections (Nkwi 1979). Chiefs were now gradually being pushed to the background, even though they remained key stake-holders in national politics. Nkwi (1979) and Jua (1995) both contend that the need to fine-tune new ways to accommodate the old structures of governance was established, and a proposal to create a new House of Chiefs was unanimously acclaimed across party lines.

The Fon of Bali, Fon Galega II, is said to have initiated the idea of the House of Chiefs to be created, an idea he had learned while representing Southern Cameroons in the House of Assembly at Enugu- Nigeria (Fowler 1996). The proposed House of Chiefs was created in 1957 to accommodate chiefs formally within the new state structures of governance. This body was however limited in scope and not endowed with any legislative powers (Chem-Langhee 1983). Chem-Langhee asserts that the new House of Chiefs was limited to legislative proposals of policies, and an advisory role. This was because the House of Assembly under the tutelage of new Western elites was to have the final say on issues of governance within the Southern Cameroons. Chem-Langhee (1983) further notes that the newly created House of Chiefs was placed under the supervision of the British commissioner of Southern Cameroons, J.O Field, who was concomitantly the speaker of the House of the Assembly. The rationale for placing the House of Chiefs under non-traditional authority was because powerful traditional rulers like the Fon of Nso, Kom and Bafut were not ready succumb to the authority of any fellow traditional leader whether he was Western-educated or not.

While many African countries (including French Cameroun and Nigeria) were granted independence in 1960, the fate of Southern Cameroons was to be decided through a plebiscite organised by the United Nations on the 11th of February 1961. The fact that political leaders had different opinions on how Southern Cameroons was to acquire independence justified the conduct of the plebiscite to sanction the will of the majority (Nkwi 1979). Nkwi further contends that the KNC of Endeley, who had won the 1953 election, wanted the territory to gain independence by joining Nigeria. This position made them unpopular among the

electorates and by 1959 they were voted out of government by the newly created Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) headed by John Ngu Foncha and Augustine Ngum Jua.

The KNDP campaigned on gaining independence by reuniting with French Cameroon, in a bid to reunite with their brothers as they once were during the German era while the KNC campaigned for a reunion with Nigeria (Ngoh 1987). The third option of gaining absolute independence, was however discarded at the United Nation Summit of 1959. This was based on the economic report that was submitted by the colonial office in Southern Cameroons that the territory lacked resources that could sustain an independent state (Nkwi 1979). The plebiscite was therefore anchored on two questions: whether British Southern and Northern Cameroon wanted to gain independence by integrating with Nigeria or reunifying La Republique du Cameroun, both of which had gained independence in 1960. At the end of the votes, while British Southern Cameroons voted for reunification, British Northern Cameroons voted to integrate with Nigeria. The result of the plebiscite led to the establishment of federal constitution which gave birth to the federal Republic of Cameroon (Ngoh 1987). By 1961, the House of Chiefs was renamed as West Cameroon House of Chiefs in reflection of the name change from South to West Cameroons (Nyamnjoh 2002). Their existence however was short lived. In 1972, then president Ahmadou Ahidjo unilaterally dissolved the House of Chiefs and traditional authorities were in search of a new political identity (Jua 1995; Nkwi 1995; Arrey 2013).

The relation between traditional rulers and the new elite, as Nkwi (1979) puts it, was not a smooth one. Elites, through the acquisition of Western education, could position and transform themselves as power brokers at the expense of chiefs. Nkwi (1979) however makes the important argument that even though power was now within the ranks of western elites, they were keen on preserving the traditional institutions that gave them a sense of identity.

4.3.3 The Impact of British colonial administration in Kom and Bali

With respect to Kom and Bali, the British colonial administration tried to build their administration on the structure that the Germans had left behind. The Kom relationship with the British colonial administration was not much different with that which they had with the Germans. The British, like the Germans, appointed the Fon of Kom as the official tax collector (De Vries 1998). His authority and position were recognised and upheld. The Fon was also empowered in accordance with the Native Authority Ordinance as the only native authority in Kom. The traditional political setup was maintained. While the vassal villages retained their autonomy, the sub-fons were to assist the paramount Fon in the collection of taxes. A key challenge to Kom traditional polity under the British colonial administration was the opening of schools and the spread of Christianity (De Vries 1998). The church preached against polygamy and converted many royal wives who escaped to the mission. While this act strained the relation between the British missionaries and the Fon, women felt liberated from bondage since the Christian doctrine on polygamy ran counter to pre-colonial practices (De Vries 1998)

The British colonial administration had a more challenging task in Bali as they attempted to resolve the problems posed by small vassal villages who wanted to be liberated from the Bali fondom. The Bali received the British colonial administration in the same spirit they had welcomed the Germans when they first arrived (Nyamndi 1988). The Bali provided the British colonial administration with food, services and information that the British needed in their offensives to bring the Grassfield under their control. In return, the Bali expected the British colonial administration to protect the unity of Bali from small vassal villages like the Bawock and other communities that were intensifying their quest for autonomy (Chilver 1963).

It was not long before the British colonial administration was confronted with the question of Bali paramountcy within the region. The mere fact that the British had replaced the Germans in the region encouraged smaller village groups to rekindle their efforts to forcefully break away from the Bali fondom (Fowler 1996). This was because these smaller communities had always believed that the Germans, and not even the superior Bali warriors kept them in union with Bali. When the Germans eventually left, they were resolved to regain their autonomy. One of the early British investigations found that the Germans at the eve of their departure from

the region had even distributed rifles to these smaller communities (which the Germans themselves placed forcefully under the Bali Fon) to rebel against Bali hegemony (Nyamndi 1988). This, according to Nyamndi (1988), was a German resolve to punish the disloyalty of the Bali to the Germans during the war.

Both the Fon of Bali and the British colonial administrators were not willing to see the further disintegration of Bali. For the British, the protection of the integrity of the Bali fondom was out of gratitude to the Fon for his willing assistance during the war. In addition, the need to protect Bali was also aggravated by the prospects of widespread destabilisation of traditional polities that was inherent in freeing the vassal groups that resisted the Bali authority (Nyamndi 1988). In the British colonial report of 1921, administrators noted this challenge that they were encountering in the following words. 'It is more probable that other villages will break away from Bali if these villages are not compelled to acknowledge its suzerainty and it is also possible that the general movement by certain sub-chiefs to disown the overlordship of the proper head chief will receive such encouragement'.

However, the tenacity of the resistance from the vassal groups (such as Meta groups) forced the British colonial administration to reconsider their position. The British, for the purposes of justice and fairness (given that the British found that these communities were truly independent before they were brought together under Bali rulership by the Germans) advised the Fon of Bali to give up his quest to maintain control over the runaway sub groups (Nyamndi 1988; Ndi 2013). This included any other sub group which had been forced into Bali by the Germans but now wished to regain their original settlement. The British, according to a report by Hunt (1921), also made it clear that groups which desired to gain their autonomy from Bali could not make any future claim to land in Bali on which they lived and farmed during their compulsory stay in Bali which they had vacated or were now agitating to vacate. While some groups accepted this condition, other groups such as Bossa decided to stay in Bali given that access to their old settlement and farm lands was not guaranteed (Nyamndi 1988). Even groups that accepted the condition found it difficult to get their old farm land after having abandoned them for so long (Nyamndi 1988).

The implication of the conditional clause meant that groups like Bossa only remained in Bali because of the desperation to retain their farm land. They still had resentment against the

union. The conditional clause, though it attempted to resolve the issue of autonomy among these vassal villages, left the issue of access to land and land ownership unresolved even at the time when the British colonial administration was preparing to grant independence to British Southern Cameroons. The tensions with the Bawock and the quest for their autonomy from the Bali community continued even at independence (see Chapters Six and Seven). At independence, the new government, constituted mostly by the new elite class were faced with the task of addressing these land disputes in Bali which were brought forward from colonial rule. The post-colonial Cameroon was also faced with the task of accommodating traditional authorities in the new state structures. The new elites were still aware of the fact that chiefs had not completely lost control of their subjects and that any meaningful progress could not be achieved without co-opting them. As he puts it: 'to excite the people against the chiefs through political demagoguery and intrigue could be considered a sacrilege. These were the facts no politician could ignore without ending up in political bankruptcy' (Nkwi 1979 p.103). However, Chiefs had lost control of the people and their fate was left to the new elite class. These new elites were drawing up new laws that spelled out the modalities with which the country was to be governed. The next section explores the extent to which traditional authorities were accommodated in the post-colonial era.

4.4 Traditional authorities and the search for a new identity in post independent Cameroon.

This section examines the decentralisation laws in Cameroon. It examines the degree to which traditional authority is accommodated within the current local governance structures in Cameroon. Summarily, it reviews the position of traditional authority vis-à-vis the constitutional framework in Cameroon and the limitation to their powers. This is done by examining the degree to which traditional authorities are part of the decentralised units and

stake-holders in local governance within the constitutional provisions. The focus is a brief review of the decree No 77/245 of July 1977 which ambiguously defines the status of traditional authority in Cameroon.

4.4.1 Traditional authorities within the decentralisation framework in Cameroon

In Cameroon, the constitutional provision on decentralisation is silent on how chiefs fit into state governance structures. Constitutional authority for decentralised governance in Cameroon can be traced back to 1974, when Law No. 74/23 of 5 December 1974 devolved some administrative functions to existing municipal councils within the country (see Yanou 2013). Section (46) of the law significantly empowered elected municipal councils as the decentralised administrative body charged with the management of the affairs of people at the grassroots. The 1974 constitution was further elaborated by law No.96/06 of January 1996 which established a new constitutional framework in Cameroon.

The 1996 law, (section 55), states that decentralised authorities would be regions and councils. Their principal duties will mainly be the task of local development in conformity with section 2 (2) of law No. 2004 /17 of July, on the orientation of decentralisation. The 1996 constitution – like that of 1974 – is also silent on any consideration of traditional authorities within its provision as a decentralised body. The law also does not classify traditional authority as part of the deconcentrated administrative units of the state which is made of regions, divisions and sub divisions. They are simply considered as traditional authorities in governance (Cheka 2008) or at best auxiliaries of the state administration (Nkwi 1979).

In this way, they are not identified as a modern institution of governance, which as Cheka (2008) argues, ‘neither kills nor reforms their authority’ (Cheka 2008 p. 21). The apparent inconsistency within the provision of section (4) of the 1996 constitution which underpins that the President and his representatives (at the local level) are the permanent expression of the collective will, exposes the overwhelming constitutional powers that are placed within the central governing bodies in Cameroon (Yanou 2013). While the above laws on decentralisation do not feature traditional authority, its status is ambiguously defined within the 1977 law, which was drawn up shortly after reunification.

4.4.2 Traditional authorities and the issuance of decree No 77/245 of July 1977

At independence, the government began searching for appropriate mechanisms to enhance state governance and how best to accommodate traditional authorities, who throughout the colonial period had played the role of intermediaries between the colonial rulers and their subjects (Cheka 2008). The result was the issuance of decree No 77/245 of July 1977, organising chiefdoms in Cameroon (Fisiy 1995). The 1977 law defines traditional authorities as auxiliaries of the state at the local levels. This decree was aimed at integrating chiefs within the newly established political structures in Cameroon. The decree recognises the traditional limits of chiefdoms and classifies them into first, second and third classes (Cheka 2008).

The law outlines certain conditions that the government considers important in the selection of chiefs. These include moral and physical abilities of the individual in question. They also emphasise that potential chiefs must be able to read and write. The argument is that for chiefs to be able to better partner with the government in enhancing rural development, they should be able to read and interpret government actions and policies. While these may be important criteria for chiefs as stake holders in governance, they were certainly not preconditions for nominees during the pre-colonial era (Cheka 2008; Nkwi 1979).

Within the framework of the 1977 law, chiefs no longer assumed their positions strictly on the norms set aside by the custodians of such cultures. The emphasis on chiefs to understand government directives highlights the government's concern on who eventually can be crowned a chief in the case of a vacancy. By the provisions of the 1977 law, in case of such vacancy, the administrative authorities in consultation with elders within the given community determine who succeeds a deceased chief. The administration is required by the law to work closely with the provisions of the customary laws of the region, and all stake holders are required by law to participate in the process of selection. Based on the classification of the chieftaincy, the nominated and approved candidate is presented to the administrative hierarchies; the Prime minister's office, the minister of territorial administration and decentralisation, and the Senior Divisional officers (SDOs), who are charged with the responsibility to officially recognise first, second and third-class chiefs respectively.

The decree 1977 (20-21) further empowers traditional authorities with judicial powers and

responsibilities in conflict management. The law, by this provision implicitly delegates some ambiguous governance role to traditional authorities in Cameroon. However, while the law seems to make constitutional provisions for traditional authorities to adjudicate conflicts among their subjects in conformity with the customary laws, the reduction of their powers especially as they do not fall within the decentralised structures of governance in Cameroon – seriously impedes their ability to fulfil this obligation. In some enclave areas, this could easily lead to the deterioration of social peace, as it creates a void which the state cannot immediately fill (Jua 1995).

It is a common position among scholars of Cameroon politics like Jua (1995), Cheka (2008), Nkwi, (1979), Fisiy, (1995) and Nymanjoh (2002) that traditional authorities have been pushed to the periphery of state politics compared to the colonial era, with a very negligible task set of legal authority assigned to them by the administration within the constitutional framework. Their role in the community however goes deeper. The role of chiefs, to check or mitigate the constitutional excesses of the state legislators through the House of chiefs – as was obtained in British Southern Cameroon from 1957 to 1966 – has been repealed by the government. Kamto (1999 p.201) contends that chiefs are nothing than a cultural anachronism and a symbol of ethnic identity in Cameroon. The relevance of traditional authority within the formal governance framework in Cameroon is greatly compromised by the lack of any constitutional clarity of their role (Cheka 2008).

According to the provisions of the 1977 ordinance, the first-class chiefdom is one whose area of jurisdiction covers at least two second class chiefdoms. The second-class chiefdoms should have a geographical region which covers at least two third class chiefdoms, and lastly the third-class chiefdom refers to tribal authority in villages, suburbs; rural or urban areas. Furthermore, section (4) of the 1977 decree also gives the state discretionary powers to categorise traditional institutions based on very ambiguous concepts of demographic or economic importance in terms of natural resources (see also Jua 1995).

Thus, traditional authorities are neither decentralised institutions of local governance nor are they regarded as part of the deconcentrated administrative units. The most recent constitutional amendment of 1996 did not change anything about the statutory position of traditional powers and functions as provided for by the 1977 law. While the country is

administered as a unitary decentralised state through regions, divisions, subdivisions, districts and councils, traditional authority is not considered within the provisions of the law. Regarding Kom and Bali, as with everywhere in Cameroon, the 1977 law links traditional authority to defined 'territory' in the way they are classified, assigning them the responsibility as auxiliaries of the administration.

The decentralisation law which links traditional authority to a defined territory has broader implication in the relationship between the Bali and Bawock communities. It also has implications between traditional authorities and the government official in Kom. In Bali, the Bawock group have used such links to territory (as a second class fondom within the region) to claim their autonomy from the Bali fondom. The Bali have denied such a claim, arguing that Bawock has no such right to land in the region given that they only settled there through the hospitality of the paramount Fon of Bali. This subjective interpretation of the decentralisation laws has led to conflicts between the two communities, which is explored in detail in chapters six and seven of this thesis. In Kom, the decentralisation law which defines traditional authorities in relation to a fix territory obscures and limits the meaning of traditional authority within the Kom culture. Village heads in Kom, considered within the decentralization laws as traditional authorities, are not sacrosanct. They do not possess the royalty that is implied in the meaning of chiefs within the context of the modern state in Cameroon. Royalty in Kom is not perceived to be defined to territory. The power of the Fon and royal heirs is exercised throughout the Kom land irrespective of their status. However, the decentralization law, which requires the state to co-decide with the king makers who is eligible as a traditional leader in the context of the law, has enabled the installations of some people into royal compounds in Kom by the SDO that the Fon describes as ineligible (ordinary Kom people not belonging to the royal lineage). This has also led to conflicts between the Fon of Kom and the local state administration which is covered in detail in chapter seven.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that colonial regimes privileged certain fons like those of Bali against others which affected their relations with their neighbours, resulting partly in the type of conflicts they face today. The chapter also demonstrated the extent to which colonialism generally affected traditional authority and what these authorities were able to

retain for themselves in terms of power at independence. This chapter has demonstrated that the persistent land disputes between Bali and her neighbours can partly be traced from historical relationships forged during colonisation. Under colonial rule, the course was set in 1896 when the Fon of Bali, Galega I signed an agreement of protection and supply of labour to the German plantations.

The deployment of the German-supported Bali raiders turned the region against Bali. Communities were depleted of both their economic and human resources. Through their raids, Bali exhausted village manpower and critically undermined the political and economic authority of these village leaderships. While most of these villages were later restored to independence, boundaries were already distorted, and these would later be a source of protracted conflicts that are still ongoing today. In Kom, we notice that they had a strained relationship with the Germans. Although Kom tradition of taxation and labour recruitment from vassal states would not have been completely free of coercion It would appear they mostly supplied labour to the Germans only as long as it was necessary. Most vassal states that supplied labour through the Fon of Kom only did so within the confines of the law; which was a form of taxation. This chapter has shown that colonial rule, especially during the British era led to unexpected changes in the structures of society. These changes relate to introduction of new status positions which hitherto were unheard of. People started questioning fons' power and gender relations. This was the rise of new men and women who became exposed to new ways of thinking. One of these new ways of thinking was the Christian doctrine of one man one wife.

By exploring the evolution of traditional authorities in Kom and Bali under colonial administration (colonial policies), this chapter has demonstrated that the relationship between indigenous leaders and the colonialists was determined by the extent to which any given community collaborated with or resisted colonial authority. This chapter showed that the two communities related differently with colonial administrations in Cameroon. Bali established stronger relations with colonial regimes against her rival neighbours which ruined her external relations with these communities.

These protracted animosities held against Bali in the region indicates that the types of

relationships traditional leaders established with colonial regimes affected the ways in which their legitimacy could be build and sustained, even in the post-colonial era. This partly accounts for the difference in the authority and the type of legitimacy that fons in Bali and Kom can exert on their 'subjects', discussed in Chapters Seven and Nine. By exploring colonial dynamics in Kom and Bali, I have shown the different ways in which traditional institutions in Kom and Bali had been weakened or strengthened by colonial exigencies. This chapter sets the precedents through which we can understand the subsequent chapters in this thesis, focusing on how traditional authorities have been able to build their legitimacies in the post-colonial era and the reasons that guide the choices that they make.

CHAPTER 5: THE BASES OF TRADITIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AMONG KOM AND BALI: TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

5.0 Introduction

In almost every society there exist multiplicities of legal orders, which are noticeable from the lowest local level to the most expansive global level. These legal orders exist in the form of community-based laws, national laws, and district or regional laws of various types in every society (Tamanaha 2008). Despite these multiple legal orders, state fragility discourses and state building policies are often oriented towards the Western-style (Weberian/Westphalian) state which often assumes legal centralism. Yet this form of statehood hardly exists in other parts of the world beyond the western states (Parmar 2015). Boege *et al* (2008) contend that multiple forms of authority in a society should not necessarily make the state a fragile one. Rather than thinking of them as fragile or weak states, it might be theoretically and practically more fruitful to think of them in terms of hybrid political orders with multiple legal registers.

These hybrid political orders relate to the idea of legal pluralism. Hooker (1975) defines legal pluralism as 'the existence of multiple systems of legal obligations within the confines of the state' (Hooker 1975 p.2). The political landscapes of many African states consist of state and non-state institutions that exercise public authority, and these institutions sometimes defy clear-cut distinctions in terms of local governance (Jua 1995; Fisiy 1995). This is because their borders and responsibilities are hardly neatly defined. Traditional institutions straddle modern laws and tradition and are defined as opposite to the state but still function with the state as hybrid political orders in some contexts. While traditional institutions remain crucial, the nature of these institutions changes due to practices and leadership, especially where traditional authority combines force/coercion with public legitimacy, social norms and surveillance (Griffith 1986; Hooker 1975).

In this chapter, I explore indigenous conflict management approaches. I do this within the specific context of Kom and Bali, two sites within the North-West Region (where this research is focussed) which have had rather different experiences with regards to ethnic conflict. This

chapter examines the basis and types of traditional conflict management practices among these communities. The chapter argues that the histories through which divergent communities were incorporated into Kom and Bali is reflected in the institutional architecture and the level of (de)centralisation. These divergent histories of incorporation determine significantly the extent to which larger communities have been able to establish their authority over the smaller ones. It also influences the methods through which local conflicts are managed. Kom and Bali had rather different experiences and encounters during their pre-colonial and colonial ethnic formation. One of these differences regards how smaller groups were co-opted into these communities during pre-colonial wars of expansion.

The chapter argues that in Bali, the co-option of smaller groups who sought refuge from Bali was vaguely defined. When Bali finally settled in their present location, clans and lineages occupied distinct geographical spaces and maintained their cultural practices. These smaller groups were however not perceived fully as tributary (vassal) chiefdoms, neither were they fully incorporated into one Bali community. This chapter contends that these differences had and continue to have significant impact on the way these communities are structured and governed by the traditional authorities. These smaller groups challenge the legitimacy with which the Fon of Bali exerts his authority (see Chapter Six) over their communities. This seemingly over-concentration of power in Bali will be contrasted with the relative devolution of power in Kom (although both communities are centralised chieftaincies). This has significantly determined the way local conflicts are interpreted and understood in Bali and how they are channelled for resolution.

The first section of this chapter looks at the nature and sources of conflict in Kom and Bali. The second section then looks at conflict management practices in Kom at both the palace and village levels. It focuses on the mediating role of the Fon and etwi, ntul and Kwifoyn (traditional courts in Kom charged with handling conflicts at the palace level) as sites of conflict management. The role of Kwifoyn in law enforcement is also examined here. The third section is focussed on the second case study of Bali, and it looks at the conflict management practices and law enforcement mechanisms both at the palace and the village levels. The fourth section takes a comparative perspective of these practices in Kom and Bali under three main themes: the exercise of power, conflict management practices and the

enforcement of the law, before concluding the chapter.

5.1 Nature and sources of conflict in Kom and Bali

Although local customs in Kom and Bali emphasise social harmony as a common ideology that drives these communities, the members and groups of these communities like everywhere else have violated public order in some instances. Like every community, these communities at one point or another have experienced conflicts within lineages and between members of different lineages. In other instances, they have experienced conflicts between sections of the community against the status-quo (political order). The common causes of conflict can be many but usually include issues of anger, breach of contracts, slander, witchcraft and sorcery.¹⁸ Conflicts also occur because of marital issues,¹⁹ injuries against members of the community and destruction of public property.²⁰ Other conflicts result from disagreement over issues of succession, land boundaries and rights of access and control over land.²¹ Inter/intra-community conflicts have occurred largely as result of land disputes within their borders.²² To build the argument that I make in this chapter, I have grouped the above-mentioned conflicts into two categories to make a distinction about the nature of conflicts that are predominantly registered within Kom and Bali. The first category includes conflicts within these communities that often do not necessarily challenge the political order while the second category distinguishes conflicts between communities or systems that challenge the political order.

Kom has largely experienced intra-community conflicts. These are internal conflicts between persons and/or groups and often do not challenge the *status quo*. According to Zartman (1995), conflict management under such a scenario takes advantage of referents in values, myths, respect for the sovereign and community solidarity. Bali faces more conflict on issues that affect public order. These categories of internal conflicts explicitly challenge the internal political order and usually have its grievances against the system and not between members

¹⁸ Interviewed with a Kom notable, 17th June 2015 at Laikom.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Interview with Bali elite, 7th July 2015 Bamenda.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Interview with a Bali informant, 4th July 2015, Bali.

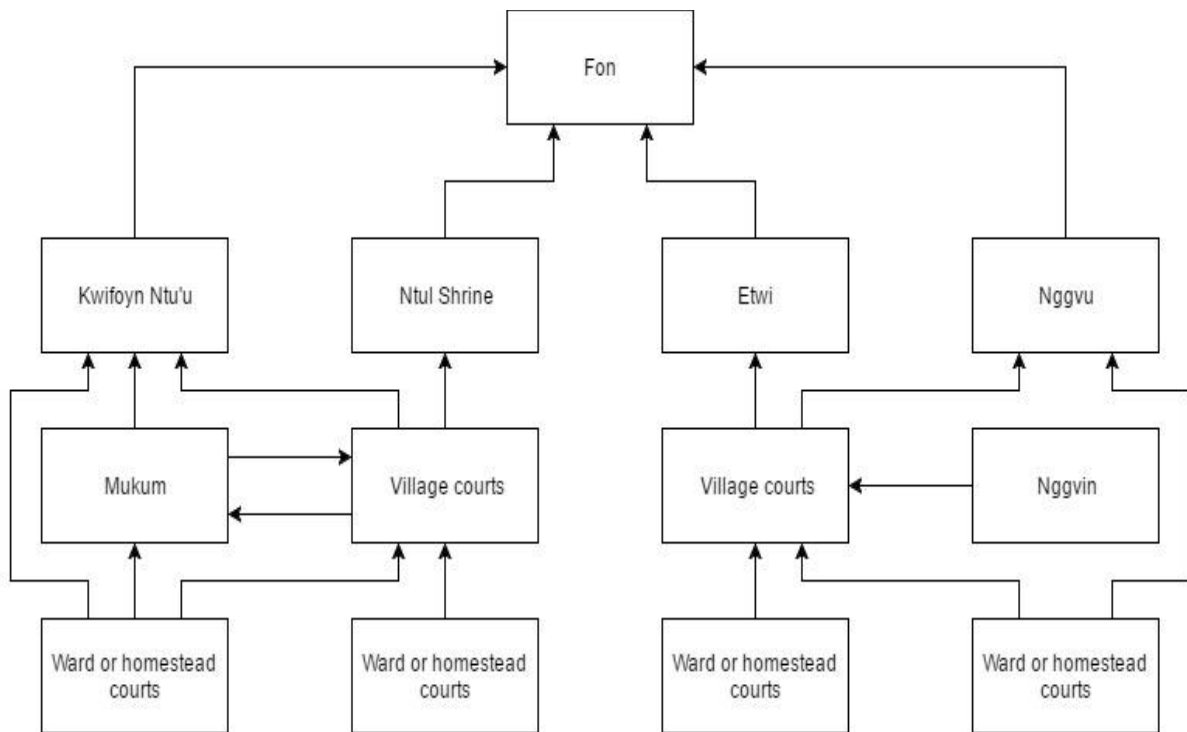
of the community. Such conflicts often question the authority and the legitimacy of the political order in place (Zartman 1995). Such conflicts are difficult to manage since neither condition of equality favouring negotiations nor those of hierarchy and community favouring arbitration exist (Zartman 1995).

CASE ONE: KOM

5.2 Conflict management practices in Kom

The study of traditional authorities in Kom requires an explicit understanding of the specific systems of indigenous political organisations which deal with the maintenance of social order within a territorial framework by organised units of coercive authority. According to Fortes and Prichard (1940), this coercive authority has to do with the use of threats of sanctions where and when it was necessary. The power structures in Kom are made up of territorial rulers (the fons, village and ward leaders) and non-territorial officials. The non-territorial officials are known as the Nchindo (people the Fon sends on missions), Nchintoh (the Fon's Kinsman to take good care of the Fon and give advice), Wayndatoh (errand boys in the palace), priest and leaders of prestigious socio-political groups such as the Kwifoyn and the 'mukum' (the mukum are juju groups that represent the Kwifoyn at the village level) society. These groups are answerable to the Fon whose office is the highest in the in the entire community. With respect to conflict management, the Fon and courts like etwi, ntul and Kwifoyn have a quintessential role in overseeing peace and enforcing Kom culture. The bontes (village heads), mukum and nggvin (nggvin is the village parallel of ntul which reconciles disputant parties) offer parallel roles at the level of the village in Kom.

Figure 6: Conflict management and law enforcement institutions in Kom



Source: By author

5.2.1 Conflict management by mediation: from palace to village courts

Kingship, politics and conflict management are inextricably intertwined in the ways in which power is exercised. The Fon in Kom is head of the traditional administration and the highest authority in the entire fondom. As a sovereign authority in Kom, nothing is imagined within the community to be beyond his competence. The Fon of Kom listens to cases that are presented to him on designated days of the week and passes his judgement as he deems fit.²³ These cases could be either between individuals or collective conflict between groups that threaten the internal peace/communal solidarity of the fondom. Issues usually vary between land disputes between communities or individuals, succession and inheritance disputes.²⁴ Other cases could simply be the disruption of public order within the community. Cases that are often referred directly to the fon are usually meant to seek solutions through

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Interview with a Kom notable, 4th of May 2015 Belo-Kom.

mediation without necessarily establishing a sense of guilt among the disputants.²⁵ The overarching concern of the Fon is often to sustain social harmony within the fondom.²⁶ In a case of land dispute between two individuals, the Fon, after listening to litigants normally would ask the one who controls the land at the time of the dispute to ‘fou waiyna va- na-abuna’ (give a piece of land to your brother/sister to also cultivate and feed the family). This is followed by the two of them drinking from the Fon’s cup which in Kom culture is a blessing and a sign of being in the good records of the Fon.²⁷

Although tributary chiefdoms in Kom (Ake, Ajung, Achain, Mbesaku, Bacham, Mejung, Mbueni, Baiso, and Benkas) retain considerable autonomy, they still acknowledge the supremacy and paramountcy of the Fon at Laikom (the capital of Kom).²⁸ At the village levels, the Fon is represented by the bonte (plural ‘bontes’). The bontes are limited to try only cases that fall within their competence. They maintain law and order, resolve disputes over land and could also adjudicate over matrimonial cases as well as theft and assaults. They are not allowed to try cases of treason, murder and to an extent the spilling of blood, as these are capital and criminal offences and are supposed to be reported directly to the appropriate court in Laikom. Bontes are the intermediaries between the Fon and the villagers. They are expected upon their installation to visit the Fon with gifts accompanied by some village elders as recognition of the Fon’s territorial authority. It should be noted that all cases that cannot be resolved at the village courts are referred to the courts at Laikom. Similarly, litigants who are dissatisfied with the ruling of the village court could take the case to etwi or Kwifoyn depending on the issue at-stake.

5.2.2 Etwi court and Ntul court at the palace level as sites of conflict management.

The etwi court and ntul-court represent sites of conflict management in Kom. While the etwi court exclusively try cases that have no witchcraft implications, the ntul-shrine/court acts like a centre for reconciliation in Kom. The principal methods of conflict management at etwi

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Interview with a senior palace official and a judge in etwi court, 6th June 2015, Fundong.

²⁸ Ibid.

are adjudication and arbitration, although some form of mediation is always used to reconcile the disputing parties between themselves.²⁹ This is often an effort to facilitate their reintegration³⁰ within their respective communities. The etwi constitutionally is the supreme court of the land where cases above tributary chiefs or village courts are referred to for settlement.

The judges of the etwi court are mostly village heads and some carefully selected elders who have proven their worth in the craft of conflict management and who are well versed with Kom laws on issues such as inheritance marriage rites and land disputes. Membership is exclusively men, given that the court is constituted by village heads, a position exclusively reserved for men within the Kom culture.³¹ The Fon is the president and though he is not required to attend every session, judges are expected to debrief him on cases and their rulings. This court has the competence of trying all land-related cases (which could either be inter- or intra-community disputes) that are reported to it from village courts where disputants were not satisfied with the verdict. In the past, before the advent of the modern state, serious cases of theft, adultery, incest that affected the fundamental values of the society were also tried at etwi. This court is also allowed to try accusations of murder and successions disputes throughout Kom. It should be noted that etwi only has jurisdiction over these kinds of disputes if they are not connected to witchcraft; as such, cases which have witchcraft implications are referred to Kwifoyn court³² (as we shall see further in this chapter). This is because Kwifoyn-court, unlike etwi court, is ostensibly believed to be able to use spiritual means through its medicines to ascertain the guilt of an accused person. On the other hand, etwi only rely on the merits of the cases presented to it and testimonies from witnesses to pass a judgement.³³

Etwi does not only limit its competence to cases between individuals. It listens to communal disputes between villages or even within lineages. Common issues of disputes include

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

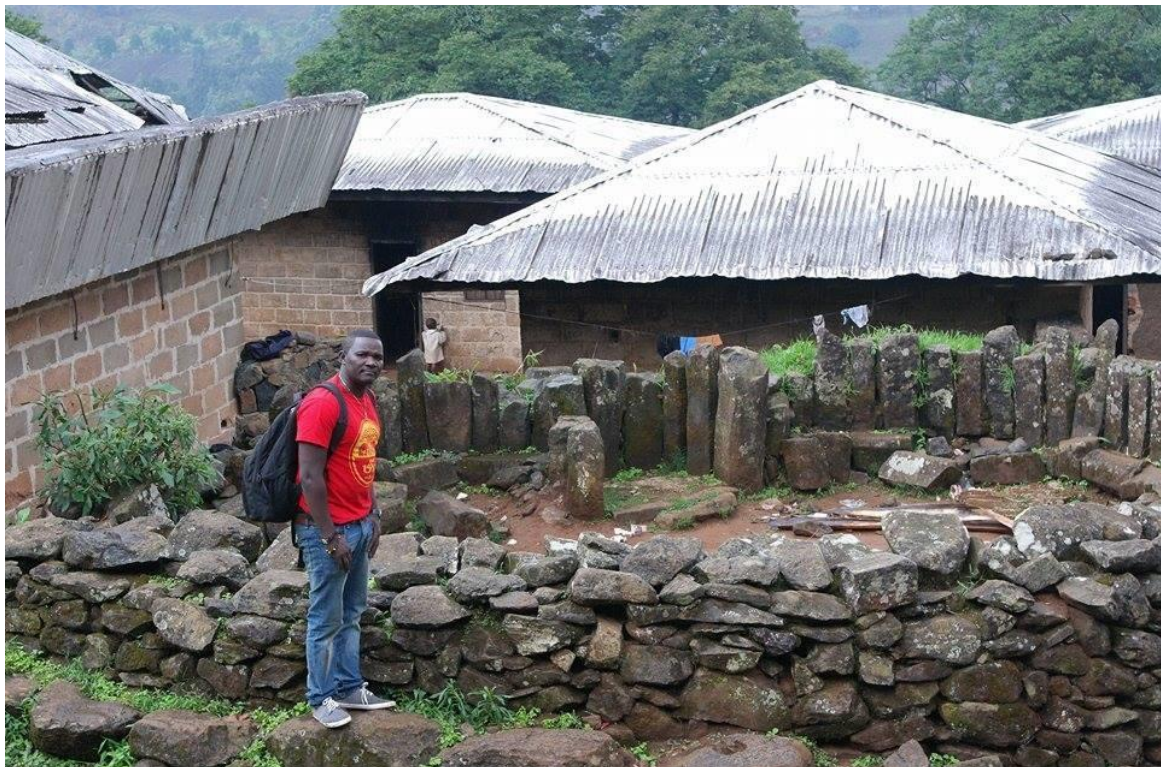
³¹ Interview with the Queen Mother of Kom, 23th April 2015, Sho-Kom.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

succession claims between lineages and land disputes that may involve multiple villages or lineages within the community who have done things which opponents find extremely hurtful.³⁴ As one interviewee in Kom recounted, in such cases, etwi apply an integrative approach which emphasis the acknowledgment of past guilt, the payment of appropriate compensation, and the granting of forgiveness. By so doing, etwi helps the parties strengthen their relationship through the integrative approach by eliciting apologies and forgiveness.³⁵ The etwi in Kom can provide a formal mechanism for disputants to publicly account for what happened, apologize and forgive. Such an approach helps in the overall peacebuilding process, helping to reconcile disputants and or warring groups.

Figure 7: Etwi Court at Laikom



Source: Photo by the Author

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Interview with the Queen Mother of Kom, 23th April 2015, Sho-Kom.

The ntul court/shrine, unlike etwi which is made of stones, is constructed with bamboo and thatched with grass and mud in typical Kom style. Its membership is all male and the act of admission is known as 'su gvuf ntul'³⁶ (initiation into ntul). The ntul court in Kom governance is typically a centre for reconciliation, mediation and appeasement which offers some element of arbitration. If one is threatened by a friend neighbour or a relative or in a situation where someone is wounded, those involved are brought to the shrine. The first attempt towards a solution is always to reconcile the parties before any legal sanctions could be imposed. Where one of the parties is wounded, he/she is treated with medicine procured from the ntul shrine. According to one interviewee, the ntul court was very significant during warfare in pre-colonial days and the Fon was required to offer sacrifices to avert any misfortune that could befall the community as result of the war.³⁷ The interviewee noted that the medicine of ntul when eaten is believed to have a forgetting and forgiving effect. The ntul shrine is primarily structured to unite people or groups for a common interest.

Villages also have what is known as 'nggvin' which is the village parallel of the ntul shrine. One of its main functions is to punish people who maliciously uproot crops and trees that may lead to famine. nggvin also facilitates reconciliation where and when necessary.³⁸ The ability to reconcile people in Kom was captured by one interviewee who recounted his experience with his village which required appeasement for his redemption. According to the interviewee, he had lied about eating a roasted chicken prepared by some native doctors which traditionally he was not supposed to eat. A fine of 40.00frs was asked to redeem his life which he denied paying. Although he had not eaten the chicken, he still suffered some ailments until he had confessed and produced the chicken and was given some concoction to drink from the ntul shrine. He concluded that: *I had been bewitched by a member of the community or the herbalist who wanted to associate my demise to my actions.*³⁹

³⁶ Interview with a Kom notable, 4th of May 2015 Belo-Kom.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

The narrative above shows how the native doctors through their actions enforce Kom beliefs that surround such practices. Nkwi (1976) and Chilver (1967) assert that the absence of such myths creates the quest for alternatives that could have adverse effects on tradition and its relevance. Putting together a common system of beliefs within the fondom from the palace (ntul) is paramount in holding the Kom society together and influencing their behavioural patterns. Across all the communities in Kom, traditional authorities and elders are empowered to oversee that such belief systems are kept intact. In this way, Kom cultural laws are not found in central authority, codes, courts as such, but more in social relations. As we see from the informant above, the binding forces of Kom's unwritten laws are found in the combination of beliefs that obliges people to respect societal norms. Law in this context takes the form of what Tamanaha (2008) calls a 'folk concept', that is, law becomes what people within social groups or a community have come to see and label as law (Tamanaha 2008 p.396).

5.2.3 Conflict management and law enforcement: The role of Kwifoyn in witchcraft related conflicts

The role of Kwifoyn in traditional conflict resolution is noticed very clearly in arbitration, reconciliation and judicial matters over witchcraft accusations and land disputes that are related to witchcraft. In pre-colonial days, Kwifoyn had competence over murder cases and reported cases of adultery involving royal wives and princesses.⁴⁰ With respect to collective conflict management, Kwifoyn is instrumentally vital for the repression of rebellion or any attempt to split the fondom from any village or tributary chief who decides otherwise to challenge the paramountcy of the Fon.

The Kwifoyn is also regarded as a special criminal court that handles cases that are referred to it from the village courts or other courts at Laikom like the etwi and ntul. Within the ranks of Kwifoyn, if there is a deadlock to bring disputing parties to order, a ban is issued on disputing parties or occasionally on the party that refuses to accept the verdict. This ban is

⁴⁰ Interview with female elite 5th May 2015 Fujua- Kom.

referred to as a-langha-Kwifoyn⁴¹ (the ban of the Kwifoyn). On witchcraft related issues, those who are considered guilty of practicing it and have refused to repent are banished as a last resort by simply placing a bamboo at their door steps. According one interviewee in Kom, this prohibits such persons to interact with the public and nobody within the community can visit him/her. In this case, the Kwifoyn will tell the victim to 'Yuin agvil akiah'⁴² (buy your lighter). This means that he/she is forbidden to beg either salt, fire or any other item, depicting the communal lives of these communities that such communities usually get from neighbours in times of scarcity.

The Kwifoyn in Kom, far from being strictly an organ within the traditional system that is charged with the responsibility of conflict management, is more broadly concerned with defining and preserving the political community of the Kom people. One of the overarching functions of the Kwifoyn is the enforcement of law and ensuring that decisions arrived at by other courts like etwi and ntul or the tributary courts are effectively enforced. The Kwifoyn produces the types of discourses in Kom which it accepts and make function as true or false, good or bad etc. It permeates all levels of the social existence of the Kom people and therefore manifests itself at every site of the social life in Kom—public or private, and by so doing instils awe and legitimacy for the throne.

In Kom, interviewees understood Kwifoyn to mean the whole of Kom of which everybody is a member: 'Kwifoyn is Kom'.⁴³ What this means is that every Kom man is charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the customs and traditions of the community which is usually entrusted in the hands of palace retainers (Nchindo). The retainers constitute the active membership of Kwifoyn, selected from the ordinary members of the community given that one cannot be recruited as Nchindo if that person is a Prince or even a son to a village head.⁴⁴ The authority of Kwifoyn in the entire Kom fondom is unquestionable.⁴⁵ This holds true even among the tributary fons who enjoy some degree of autonomy within their territorial

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Interview with a Kom informant, the 16th of June 2015-Fundong.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

spheres of influence. The most important units of the Kwifoyn are Kwifoyn ntu'u (Kwifoyn of the night) and the Ndo-nggvu (the ordeal unit). These two units are charged with the enforcement of verdicts made by the Kwifoyn and every other conflict management organ in the fondom.

The task of Ndo-nggvu, for example, was to administer sasswood poison to individual or groups who were accused of treason or witchcraft. Although a poison, the idea was that if one was innocent, he/she was expected to vomit the substance as a proof of innocence. Those who were caught-red handed were executed. However, if their guilt was questionable or in doubt, they were administered sasswood poison by the Ngangsu nggvu as its leaders were called. If the individual was guilty he was going to die and was pushed down the cliffs not far away from the palace.⁴⁶ If one was innocent, he/she vomited back the poison and the victim was either free to return to the community or if safety could not be guaranteed he/she remained in the palace and rendered services to the Fon. Lainsah, an informant in the field, captures in his narrative the joy that characterised victims who were vindicated by the nggvu unit after being accused of wrong doing and subjected to punishment by death:

My name 'Lainsah' (set free) came about because my father emerged clean and innocent from nggvu. My father owned a 'Njang' (dance group) known as 'njang fallamayn', fallamayn being the name of my father. The rhythm was so good and enticing that it attracted envy. The conclusion from jealous minds was that the good music from the njang came from a supernatural source which gave it the popularity it enjoyed. The njang members often met at the premises of members sometimes twice a month to celebrate and it so happened that an elderly person who hosted the njang died after hosting. This came to confirm the conspiracy by jealous minds that the njang was killing people to attract its popularity. This was in Atoini village. My father in his defense said a person could die of any illness living in him/her undiagnosed. He said he did not mind being handed over even to the 'nggvu in order to prove his innocence and that of the njang dance group. He

⁴⁶ Ibid.

*was effectively handed over to the nggvu which he drank and emerged alive. At the time this was going on, my mother was pregnant with me and when my father was freed from the accusations, he decided to name me Lainsah to show his gratitude and to immortalize his victory over death by nggvu and to tell his story to other generations through me.*⁴⁷

While the use of 'nggvu' as a way of proving innocence in Kom might have diminished in relevance over time, the Kwifoyn continues the use of other methods such as the 'ngoh-Ntuin' (the stone of denial), which is assumed to have mystical powers to prove the guilt of those who refuse to confess wrong doings.⁴⁸ Other members of the Kwifoyn that do not fall within Kwifoyn ntu'u and the Ndo-nggvu categories are often enlisted as 'nikangsu' (the traditional police force at Laikom). In providing the police force for palace administration, some retainers of the Kwifoyn act as police in restoring law and order. Their authority is impersonal. Disguised in masks and communicating in falsified voices, they enforce the law without people knowing which retainer is policing. The collective responsibility is directed to Kwifoyn as institutions within the Kom traditional political order.

Again, we see that power is exercised not solely by official traditional authorities (the Fon), but also through institutions that assume an impersonal character like the Kwifoyn. According to Bierschenk and Sardan (2003), if the powers of sanction and exaction are the two features in the exercise of power, they note that within rural settings, these powers are neither centralised within a single institution nor organised in a strictly hierarchical order of systematically distinct institutions which would facilitate a clear perception of subordination and precedence between them. Power takes implicit forms as any attempt at developing strong local capacities for political regulation would also conflict with certain basic principles of village social structure (Richards 1961). This is because of the small size of the population in the villages, wherein almost all inhabitants know each other personally; what Bierschenk and Sardan (2003) call the 'face-to-face societies' marked by 'multiplex' social relations.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

In Kom, the masking of 'nikangsu' and their speaking in falsified voices is a conscious attempt to de-personalise power within a culture which also has strong local capacities of conflict resolution. Some of the face-to face approaches such as arbitration could be counter-productive at times to the social existence of the community. The retainers in the masks are usually also members of these communities entangled in the high degree of multiplex relations. To take on such a role of enforcing the law comes with the risk of destroying the various social relations that an individual may also happen to share with his adversary at the moment, whose help he may need in the future (Bierschenk & Sardans2003). Although such an adversary may not physically confront the retainers if identified, it leads to conflicts continuing to fester underground. This promotes an atmosphere conducive to the spread of rumour, suspicion and accusations such as witchcraft as counter reactions from such victims, which is rampant within Kom communities.

Just as the Fon is being represented by the bontes, the Kwifoyn is represented by the mukum society at the village level and contribute in conflict management and or enforcement of the law. As an auxiliary of the Kwifoyn, all cases that are referred to the village courts for investigations that have witchcraft implications are handled by the mukum society.⁴⁹ The bonte in such cases assembles all the village mukum and the issue is discussed. The mukum are tasked with the responsibility of tracking down evil doers and bringing them to justice. It is common belief that the mukum just like the Kwifoyn can foretell any malicious intentions to harm the village. Kwifoyn can only intervene in most cases at the village level to restore order if attempts by the village mukums have proven abortive. Some, if not all the mukums also have a parallel of the Kwifoyn injunction which is known as the alang-a mukum⁵⁰ (the injunction of the mukum). They are seen as the eyes of the Kwifoyn within their respective communities. They are expected to contribute in information gathering and in decisions that call for ostracism, which is a public manifestation that requires the endorsement of Kwifoyn or the akum.

⁴⁹ A village head in Kom (FGD) 22nd May 2015 Fundong.

⁵⁰ Interview with Kom business elite 3rd July 2015 Fundong.

Figure 8: Picture of an ostracised person in 2015 Fundong town: Kom



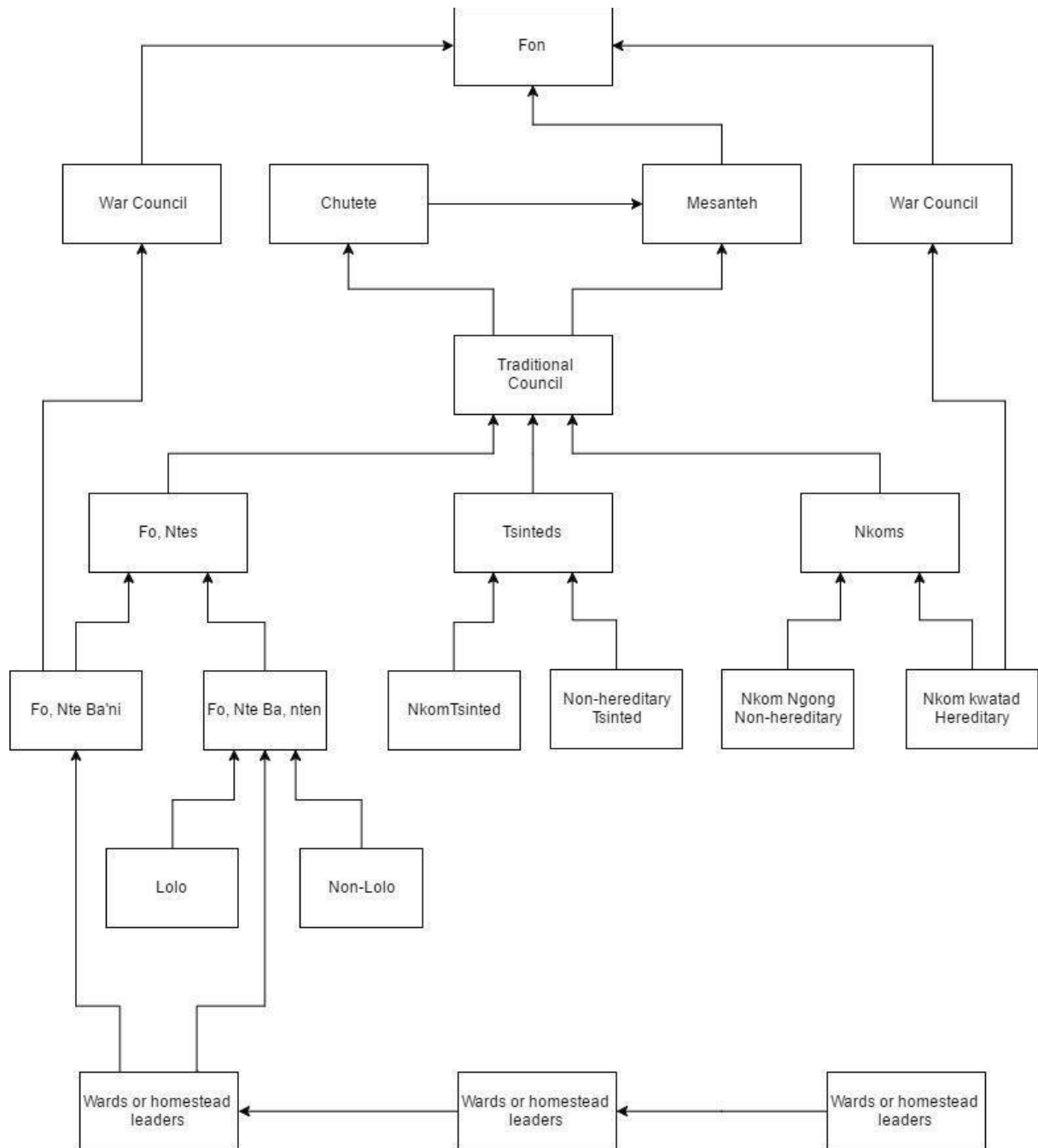
Source: Photo by author

CASE TWO: BALI

5.3 Conflict management practices in Bali

The power structures in Bali are made up of territorial rulers (the fons, Village and ward heads) and non-territorial authorities such the Nkoms who deal with the maintenance of social order within a territorial framework by organised units of coercive authority. In Bali, this category of non-territorial authorities consists of the chief priest, the 'nkoms', who are subdivided into two; the hereditary nkoms (nkom Ba, ni) and the non- hereditary nkoms (nkom- ngong). It also includes the 'ngumba' cult and the 'nda-akum'. The ngumba and the nda-akum are primarily responsible for reinforcing the laws of the land and ensuring that defaulters are punished. All these groups are answerable to the Fon whose office is the highest in the fondom and is the embodiment of the law. These groups handle conflicts within the communities but beyond that, they ensure that the communal solidarity is kept intact through the enforcement of the law.

Figure 9: Conflict management and law enforcement institutions in Bali (Fo-Ntes are territorial sub-fons and Nkoms are non-territorial authorities)



Source: By author

5.3.1 The Fo-Ntes, Chutete, Mansenteh and the Fon as sites of conflict management in Bali

Conflict management in Bali normally goes through four different levels of courts from the village to the palace level. These different courts include, in order of hierarchy: the Fo-Nte's court (courts at village levels); the Chutete (High court at the palace level); the Mansenteh (High court of appeal at the palace level); and the Fon himself as the paramount judge. The principal methods of conflict management in these courts are mediation, adjudication and arbitration. The primary approach is mediation which is always used to reconcile the disputing parties between themselves. The goal is always to facilitate the reintegration of disputants within their respective communities.

Every Fo-Nte in Bali has authority within his specified area of jurisdiction and is answerable to the paramount Fon of Bali in the service of law and order within the ward, quarter or village. Within the jurisdiction of sub-fons they can handle petty conflicts. These conflicts could be breaches of contract, slanders, and witchcraft and sorcery accusations. They are also allowed to try land disputes if it is limited to lineage members within their community. Other social disputes within their competence are marital misunderstanding, injuries against persons, damage against property and disparaging statements particularly against public authorities or against another lineage.⁵¹ Given the fear of internal rebellion that could arise from within the disjointed Bali communities, cases like murder, treason or any form of disrespect to the sovereign authority of the Bali fondom are reported directly at the Fon's palace.⁵² The palace is equipped with men and courts that can better investigate such crimes or insubordination. Cases directed to the palace stop first at the high court that is at the entrance of the palace, which is known as the 'Chutete'

The Chutete is a well-constituted council selected from among title holders from the traditional sub-fons, (hereditary and non-hereditary), non-territorial authorities, (hereditary and non-hereditary), like the nkoms and other protocols of the palace administration (the Tsinteds). The Fo-Nte and the nkomfon could as well sit in this court but it is not exclusive to

⁵¹ Interview with a Bali notable, 24th July 2015, Bamenda.

⁵² Interview with Bali female elite 25th July 2015, Bali.

them, as other respected community members may be invited by the Fon to join the court. This court meets regularly at the palace to assist in settling conflicts and important decision making. The Chutete court is the third highest court in Bali and as every other court, has the competence of trying every case that is reported to it except that the gravity determines the hierarchical competence of the judges that can sit in this court. The cases reported here range from land disputes, family disputes, succession issues, witchcraft related trials and in pre-colonial days, they also tried cases of murder.⁵³ As a centralised political system, the Fon, Ntes, nkoms and Tsinteds are collectively called 'ran-ngon' (owners of the kingdom) when they sit in the traditional Council (Chutete).⁵⁴

At Chutete, complainants bring a container (20 litres) of raffia wine and thereafter present their complaint. If the case is about land, such details would include the location of the land, parties involved and witnesses. The judges at Chutete who are reputed in traditional norms, after listening to the parties will pass judgement. A complainant who is dissatisfied with such a verdict can appeal the case in the 'mansenteh' (the High court of appeal in Bali) which is a dispute commission that is directly linked with the Fon but that can make independent decisions without necessarily having the consent of the Fon. In the absence of a satisfactory ruling at the Mansenteh, the disputants can take forward the case to the Supreme Court where the Fon is the judge. This process is known as 'ma yo mi mfon' (to drink from the Fon's cup – which obliges one to speak the truth or face serious repercussions).⁵⁵

The Fon is always expected to review the merits of the case and in a situation where justice was tempered; the Fon could reverse the ruling of the Chutete or the mansenteh court. As supreme head of the judiciary, the Fon of Bali constitutes the highest court in the fondom from which there is no appeal. At the Fon's court, any refusal by disputants to adhere to the ruling is followed by banishment or a traditional injunction (fouwah-ah, a kind of leaf). Fouwah-ah is commonly used in land related disputes. Bali has a culture which insists that any witchcraft accusation needs to be substantiated with proven facts. In an interview with

⁵³ Interview with a Bali elite, 7th July 2015, Bamenda.

⁵⁴ Interview with a Bali notable, on the 24th July 2015, Bamenda.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

a senior member of the Bali traditional council, he placed the emphasis on the evidence of facts in conflict management (both witchcraft and civil related cases) in Bali:

When a witchcraft case is reported we need proof from the base (family, quarter head) since we need substantial evidence before judgment is handed down. In Bali we do not act on rumour. Let me narrate to you a case of witchcraft that happened 5 years ago. A man was suspected to have planted medicine in another person's compound. It was difficult to prove. Even though pictures were taken, it wasn't still easy to prove, so I asked the man; did you go to that man's compound at night? He said yes. Why did you go there? He said he went to inform the compound owner about community labour, and did you pass behind the house he said yes but replied that he passed behind the house to throw a bone of meat that he ate which he bought for 200 FRS 5 kilometres away. I asked why did you have to buy meat at 200 FRS, moved 5 kilometres to your compound where you packed your bicycle, only to return to another person's compound to throw that small bone of meat?

I told him that by Bali traditional law, throwing a bone behind someone's house has a belief attached to it that it meant harm. We fined him 5 rams, some people told him not to pay but to take the matter to a court of law. While in court the state counsel requested for our findings and he was still asked to pay what the traditional council had asked him to. There are things the courts may not prove like witchcraft and we may be unable to prove too, but if our traditions subject us not to do certain things and you go against that, it is enough to show that the person concerned is guilty or had a secondary aim. We don't have any laid down way for proving witchcraft per se in Bali, there is no particular way, but Bali Nyonga is unique in its ways. We say in Bali that Bali is slippery during the dry season meaning that if you get to Bali with evil intention something awful will happen to you. Also, we have strong beliefs that our ancestors deal with evil

*intention appropriately. Even with modernity, Bali people belief that if you carry “bad” medicine into our palace ill luck will befall you.*⁵⁶

The above excerpt shows that the exercise of public authority in such communities is largely determined by the extent to which any authority may have an impact on any group of people. This in turn is determined by the propositional content; that is, the extent to which local beliefs are perceived as true or false and how they appeal and make meaning to those who are involved (Lubkemann 2008 p.316). While there is no specific way in Bali of proving witchcraft practices, local myths and cultural beliefs provide a template through which acts of ill intentions can be deciphered and punished. This is enabled by the ability of the leaders to draw from the epistemic power (that is, the constraints of beliefs that support one’s form of knowledge and shapes behaviour) to enforce their judgements within the polity.

5.3.2 Conflict management and law enforcement in Bali: The role of Ngumba and Nda-akum

The ngumba in Bali as a corporate body has very limited role in conflict management, except when it comes to enforcing decisions that are taken by other courts at the palace. In the past, the ngumba society took the people who were condemned for committing a crime to the borders and sent them off never to set their feet in Bali fondom again.⁵⁷ At the Fon’s court, any refusal by disputants to adhere to the ruling is followed by banishment or a traditional injunction. One informant recounted the role of ngumba stating that:

Ngumba, using the traditional injunction called fouwah-ah, stopped every activity on the piece of land. This was not meant to seize your land but to notify you that there is a dispute on the piece of land that needs to be solved before any activity can be carried out on it. Once ngumba has been placed on land no one can use it or even touch the ngumba. If anyone interfered with ngumba or removed it, he/she was fined according to ngumba rules. After ngumba had been displayed on land in dispute, no one could remove it unless the land lord brought goats, fowls

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Interview with Bali notable, 7th July 2015 Bamenda.

*and palm oil. These items are meant to offer sacrifice to purify the land where ngumba had been placed*⁵⁸.

‘Ngumba’ in Bali ensures that the decisions made by all the courts of the land are strictly enforced by the parties involved. One interviewee noted: *Failure to respect the decision of a court is to invite the wrath of ngumba on your family.*⁵⁹ One of the reasons therefore, why the decisions of the Fon’s court are highly respected is the fear of the aftermath that could befall victims. One of the organs of Ngumba is the ‘Voma’, a religious body whose functions are three-fold; protection, productivity and initiation rites which are highly respected within the Bali-Nyonga or Ba’ni (there is a distinction between Bali and Bali Nyonga or Ba’ni. Bali includes all the communities in Bali administrative sub division such as Bawock area while Bali Nyonga is referred to as mainstream Bali and are those who are believed to have migrated from Nigeria before other groups were incorporated as they migrated to their present location). Voma in its protective role is reputed to possess the capabilities of destroying the powers of all dangerous medicines buried anywhere in the community with evil intentions (Titanji et al.1988). Voma is also said to possess the power of fighting evil spirits and any destructive forces of the underworld pitted against innocent victims.⁶⁰ In this way, the protective role of voma widens from guarding the Fon to include the entire community. More importantly, it enforces cultural myths that help to deter members of the community from evil for fear of punishment.⁶¹

The services of ‘ngumba’ are supported by the ‘nka-kum’ at the village level and the manjong club which operate both at the village and palace levels. The nda-kum in Bali only resolves conflicts that emanate among its members. It does not have the mandate of trying cases of victims outside its membership, neither do they enforce decisions of the other courts of the village. Law enforcement at the village is complemented by the military clubs (manjong), which are placed directly under the leadership of the sub-fon with the paramount Fon

⁵⁸ Interview with Bali opposition member, 7th July 2015 Bali.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Interview with Bali Notable, 6th July 2015 Bamenda.

⁶¹ Ibid.

himself as the supreme commander. Manjong is guided by a war council which assists the Fon in defining the military policies of all manjong groups within the different villages. The military prowess of the manjong clubs in the past resulted in what today in Bali is referred to as the 'Lela' annual festival. Lela came into being because of a battle in which the Chamba⁶² people were victorious and spontaneously burst into celebrations to thank their gods and ancestors for the defeat of their enemies and embarked on acts of gratitude by offering sacrifices which later became an annual festival (Richard 2006). Most villages in Bali take part in this event which has come to define them culturally as a people.

The religious rites that are performed during the annual Lela festival have specific significance for conflict management within the Bali. It is through these rites that Bali tries to create an ideology for social harmony across its different villages which involves the manipulation of social relationships by the strengthening of myths, beliefs and values. It is common belief in Bali that effort to the strengthen a common sense of belonging through the Lela festival helps, people, irrespective of their villages to easily believe common myths and supernatural sanctions, which is a way of enforcing judicial decisions. Within the different villages in Bali, if a person was hesitant to abide by a specific ruling of the village court, the chief and his elders with the help of the manjong club could use the threats of curses to compel a guilty person, irrespective of his village, to accept punishment and repentance as a prerequisite for reintegration. Such village courts and manjong clubs are therefore perceived within Bali cosmology as channels through which the gods influence the behaviour of a guilty person. Palm-wine and or water in a calabash are often used to signify acceptance of amends and reconciliation.

⁶²According to Richard (2006), the Chamba is a clan of semi-Bantu origin who are said to have migrated from around River Faro in the Nigeria- Cameroon border and settled in the Benue plain sometime around 17th century before moving to the present location in the North-West Region around 19th century.

5.4 Conflict management institutions in Bali and Kom compared

This section compares the indigenous political order in Kom and Bali. It explains why both communities, although centralised chieftaincies, still have major differences with regards to the devolution of power between the palace structure and the villages. As I have argued, there is relatively greater decentralisation in Kom than in Bali. The section makes this comparison in three different dimensions: The power of the Fon, conflict management practices and lastly on the enforcement of the law within these communities.

5.4.1 The exercise of power by the fons

Although the concept of power sharing between the Fon and his sub-Fons in Bali is broadly similar to what is found in Kom, the two systems are significantly different in terms of the potential and actual power that a Fo-Nte could wield. Their mode of appointment is also different. In Bali, the categorisation of sub-Fons (territorial authorities) and nkoms (non-territorial authorities) depends largely on whether one is considered to belong to the mainstream Bali, that is, Ba'ni or among other groups that surrendered themselves under the Bali hegemony in the quest for protection against rival groups. The implication of this in the Bali polity is that two categories of territorial sub-Fons who exercise public authority can be found. These are sub-Fons of proper Bali (Ba'ni) or 'the other Bali' (Ba Nten or Lolo). This also holds true for the nkoms (the non-territorial authorities).

The case of Bali is contrasted with that of Kom where the first settlement was in Laikom, and the title of bonte only came into being as the population expanded to the peripheries where the first settlers of such communities became bonte. In Bali (Ba'ni), allied groups under their first leader (Gawolbe) did not have sub-fons. Chilver and Kaberry (1966) assert that one of the reasons why the allied groups under Gawolbe did not have sub-fons is that they came from different villages of their original clans. Local accounts hold that after the death of Gawolbe, the later groups (Ba'Nten or Lolo) who joined Bali under the new leadership of Nyongpasi each had their own chief. Each of the Lolo groups who joined the Bali alliance in fleeing hostility and harassment from stronger groups had their fons pledge loyalty to the

Fon of Bali (Nyongpasi).⁶³ After the incorporation of the Lolos coming with their chiefs, Nyongpasi found that the institution of sub-fons served a useful political purpose and decided to adopt and adapt the title of Fo-Nte in view of setting up the territorial structure of Bali at the final settlement (Chilver& Kaberry 1966). These details are important because it provides for a better understanding why there are more conflicts in Bali that often challenge the status-quo and the legitimacy of the Bali Fon like the Bali-Bawock conflict in 2005, where Bawock resisted the authority of Bali over its territory. In describing the office of the Fo-Nte in Bali one interviewee said:

*Fo-Ntes were appointed within groups where their actual chief had been overthrown in war or as the rightful chiefs themselves installed in office after having surrendered to Bali. In the process, they were stripped of their power, administrative and otherwise, but maintained as symbol of their respective groups. The Fon in Bali therefore had to concentrate much power into his hands because he was not always sure of the loyalty of his subordinates. Unpopular appointees, even those who willingly surrendered could also be overthrown in preference for a popular candidate. The lack of trust for a Fo-Nte no matter how popular he was constituted a threat to the entire fondom because the loyalty of his group could not be guaranteed.*⁶⁴

The above quote substantiates the fact that the welding of Bali together into one self-reliant community was a challenge. Most of the groups had only come together in the transient adversity of warfare. The result was that the tradition of the new Bali was but a blend of the traditions of the component parts and needed a strong and centralised power figure to ensure that these traditions could take any shape at all. Devolving greater powers to sub-fons was also very risky in that most of these groups in Bali were settled within defined geographical spaces and it was easier for them to revolt against the paramount Fon of Bali for their own sovereignty. 'Subject' villages in Bali were liaised with central power structures

⁶³ Interview with a Kom political elite, 3rd July 2015, Fundong.

⁶⁴ Interview with a Bali notable, 68 years, on the 24th July 2015, Bamenda.

at the palace as a strategy to monitor the activities of sub fons who potentially challenge the authority of the Paramount Fon of Bali. This was the case, irrespective of whether a sub-fon belonged to the proper Bali (Ba'ni) or to the 'other' Bali, that is, the allied group (the Lolos).

The ways in which Kom and Bali choose their close collaborators and advisers and how they delegate power to them differ significantly. This has to do with how fons are succeeded in these two communities. In Bali, the Fon has little collaboration with his biological sons given that in Bali, patrilineal succession hands over succession rights to sons of royal wives. To avoid any mutiny from his sons who are heir-apparent to the throne, the Fon of Bali relies on two consultative and advisory bodies which assist in the administration of Bali. These two advisory bodies are the office of sub-Fons called Fo-Nte and the Privy Council called 'Nkomfon'. In terms of the exercise of power, the Fon of Bali wields absolute powers and can in principle, appoint and dismiss people from offices. The Fon however delegates power to appointed ward heads who settle local problems on his behalf. In this way, the Fon ensures those appointed into the advisory bodies are loyal to him and do not challenge his authority.

In Kom, the Fon delegates power to the bontes in villages without fear that they could challenge the status quo, or his paramountcy given that these bontes in Kom are not necessarily considered part of the royal lineage. The Fon relies largely on the advice he receives from those he trusts within the ranks of the Kwifoyn, especially his sons whom he can rely on based on trust, their intelligence and familiarity with palace politics. Like the bontes, the biological sons of fons in Kom are considered royal ineligible and do not pose any threat to the throne. Although the Fon enjoys a similar amount of power as the Fon of Bali, his activities are scrutinised by the Kwifoyn. The Kwifoyn has the power in Kom to imprison the Fon for transgression against the culture of the people.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Interview with a kom elite 4th of May 2015 Belo Kom.

5.4.2 Conflict management practices

The underlying motive of conflict management in Kom and Bali is to maintain community solidarity, and the first attempt of conflict management is to reconcile the disputants. Kom and Bali however have different interpretations to how they understand conflicts and how they could be resolved. In Kom, witchcraft related cases are handled by specialised courts believed to possess mystical powers to prove witchcraft accusations. The conflict management role of the Kwifoyn has to do largely with conflicts related to witchcraft. Given such beliefs, the Kom political system, unlike that of Bali, attempts to distinguish between conflicts and the competence of every court in the land. Courts like etwi or the ntul in Kom have well-defined expertise in the subject matter that they can listen to and pass judgement. As mentioned above, In Bali, the criteria for selecting a court to try local conflicts are determined by the gravity of the conflict. There are no specialised courts charged with the responsibilities of handling different types of cases like witchcraft, theft, adultery and soon. What this means is that while every court (from the village to the palace level) can try every case irrespective of its subject, the severity and/or the level of damage can help determine whether such a case is reported at the village directly at palace level. The implication of this is that the palace can closely monitor tensions at the village level that challenge the cohesion and sovereignty of his fondom.

The more evidence-based approach to judgements on witchcraft in Bali aligns with the traditionally weaker belief in witchcraft and witchcraft-related practices there in comparison to Kom. This is partly because the diverse cultural groups in Bali limit the extent to which the authorities can use cultural myths to enforce local beliefs on witchcraft practices. In Kom, the Kwifoyn as a conflict management organ specialises in witchcraft related conflicts, a function that is replicated at the village level by the mukum society. The etwi court and ntul shrine handle conflicts that can be substantiated with facts that are verifiable. At the village levels, these courts are represented by the village-head courts and the nggvu. In Bali, the 'ngumba', which is the equivalent of the Kwifoyn, plays a very limited role in conflict management. Similarly, the 'nda-kum', the equivalence of 'mukum' in Kom, also has very

limited role in conflict management within the Bali polity. Rather, it is the manjong that plays a bigger role in conflict management at the village and palace level through the war council in charge of manjong.

5.4.3 The enforcement of the law

Both the Kom and Bali rely on the production of local myths and discourses that promote their belief systems. In Kom, the Kwifoyn and the Mukum are principally charged with the responsibility of enforcing decisions that are taken in the etwi court or ntul shrine while mukum does the same for the village courts. Those who violate decisions are either banished from the land or, in case such as land disputes, the Kwifoyn uses the a-langha-Kwifoyn (traditional injunction) to place an injunction order in the disputed territory. Nikangsu in Kom provide the police force for palace administration. Some retainers of the Kwifoyn act as police in restoring law and order wherein, their authority impersonal. Like Kom, the ngumba in Bali and the manjong through the Lela festivals promote local discourses that determine what they see as right or wrong. These groups promote the fear within the society of what could happen to a person who went against the tradition of the Bali people.

Decisions in Kom and Bali are enforced through the fortification of cultural myths which internalise fear within the communities but more importantly, within individuals in the community. By so doing, the power of the sovereign is enabled by the invisible punishment that the gods could inflict on defaulters, which leads to compliance. In cases where a person is considered guilty, he or she is expected to repent or face banishment. The challenge in Bali however is the difficulty of establishing a common Bali culture and mythology across all the other migrant groups that could induce fear of the oracle. Because of this, some groups like the Bawock do not respect the cultural values (that reflect in their disrespect of the voma rituals), which provoke local tensions. The enforcement of local myths in both Kom and Bali play a central role in the enforcement of decisions and the maintenance of social order. This implies that the way in which a given discourse or knowledge is framed has a bearing on how such a community regulates, controls and punishes criminals

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that in Kom and Bali, the Fon's authority to make decisions is almost unlimited, although it is a little more devolved in Kom. The chapter has shown that these Fons also delegate some powers to their subordinates. However, according to one interviewee, *the Fon holds the final authority in such a way that he can expect his orders or decisions to be executed throughout the territory which falls under his jurisdiction*.⁶⁶ In Bali-Nyonga, the Fon not only claims supreme authority but exercises it through the way he appoints people into most political offices. This chapter also shows that the Kwifoyn in Kom and the ngumba in Bali are agencies composed of the palace's functionaries, selected and trained for the execution of the affairs of the fondoms.

Furthermore, this chapter highlights the fact that in both Kom and Bali, we cannot talk of ethnically homogenous communities, and that Bali is more ethnically diverse than Kom. This is in part the result of the histories of these communities which have witnessed massive amounts of ethnic mingling and redefinition of ethnic membership and meaning. We also see that conflict management techniques are not lacking among these communities; rather, a plethora of conflict management practices exist, which are sometimes informal, or internal to groups or networks defined by kinship, affinity or ethnicity. In Kom for instance, we notice that the type conflict is critical in selecting the mechanism for its resolution and there exist specialised courts at all levels that are considered competent in trying different categories of conflicts. This also means a greater devolution of power to the lower courts of the land without a greater risk that such power could be abused. What possibly explains this trust in Kom is that within the Kom proper, the histories through which divergent communities were amalgamated is reflected in the institutional architecture and the level of decentralisation.

In Bali, the villages were neither perceived as fully tributary chiefdoms nor were they fully incorporated into one Bali community. In contrast to the Kom people, this chapter demonstrates that the Bali migratory narratives were characterised by tensions and wars. In the process they formed several alliances with different groups with whom they fought.

⁶⁶ Interview with a Bali informant, 4th July 2015, Bali.

These sub groups were often vulnerable and needed the protection of the Bali people who were known for their military prowess. In the case of a military defeat, these groups were forced to migrate alongside Bali in their search for peace until they got to their present location and were given specific locations where each sub-fon settled with his people. The Bawock, which today stands out as independent of the other Bali villages, once fell within this category. As soon as Bali and all the incorporated communities arrived at their present location, Bali took the challenge of nation building and the task of welding all the different groups with distinct cultural backgrounds into one self-reliant community.

This task of welding and building a common Bali identity has proven a challenging one because these groups had only come together in the transient adversity of warfare. The result is that the tradition of the new Bali is a blend of traditions of its component parts and needs a strong statesman and centralised power structures to ensure that these traditions blend. Devolving greater powers to all the sub-fons is also very risky in that most of these groups in Bali are settled within defined geographical spaces and it is easier for them to revolt against the legitimacy of the paramount Fon. This chapter has thus argued that this pattern of settlement in Bali, where different ethnic factions were able to consolidate their cultural identities, constitutes the challenge and partly the cause of the tensions and conflict in Bali today. These ideas of exclusive territoriality in Bali are less evident in Kom. Claims of distinct territoriality are used by political elites and even ordinary citizens in contexts of heightened competition, increased attention to local and uneven development. This chapter has thus demonstrated that the histories through which divergent communities were incorporated into Bali has hampered the development of unifying cultural myths capable of binding all the different groups together. This has affected the ways that conflicts are managed and how decisions are enforced across Bali. These challenges are less evident in the case of Kom where sub-group crystallisation was weaker, resulting in the development of relative homogeneity in its ethnic composition.

CHAPTER 6: THE UTILITY OF IDENTITY, POWER DYNAMICS AND BOUNDARY CLAIMS IN ETHNIC CONFLICTS: THE BALI BAWOCK CONFLICT 2006-2007

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a narrative of the conflict between the people of Bali and Bawock. It captures the dynamics of group making as a socio-cultural and a political project that is often designed during conflicts to transform categories to increased levels of what Brubaker (2002) calls 'groupness'. To write about a conflict such as the one between the Bali and the Bawock, depends on how such a conflict is understood. Any attempt to define identity, boundaries and questions of belonging is itself intertwined with what the conflict is. The chapter parses the influence of political elites in reconfiguring local identities by drawing on the conceptual proposition of Lubkemann (2008). He theorises how conflict both defines and reproduces identity. Such dynamics, according to Brubaker (2002) and Brass (1997), can also make particular aspects of identity more salient. This chapter demonstrates that the mechanisms by which this takes place in Cameroon involves redefining local territorial boundaries and creating new identities. This chapter focuses mainly on the Bali and Bawock communities. Kom is not analysed in this chapter, as it has not experienced widespread conflict. Instead the chapter explains how claims of identity and power resulted in the conflict in 2006-2007 between the Bali-Bawock communities. Chapter Seven will build on this chapter to compare the actions of elites and the underlying politics in Kom and Bali to demonstrate the political nature of the Bali conflict.

Furthermore, this chapter also examines the extent to which the Bali-Bawock conflict is embroiled in the discursive politics of the Anglophone and Francophone dichotomy in Cameroon. This resonates with the views of Tambiah (1996) who use the concepts of 'focalization' and 'transvaluation' to describe the dynamics of ethnic conflict. To Tambiah, these are linked processes through which local tensions and minor disputes involving locals in a physical confrontation with one another are magnified into larger conflicts involving issues or people who normally were not directly connected with the issues under contestation (p.81). By examining the discursive politics of the Anglophone and Francophone

dichotomy, I argue that the stigma attached to the Anglophone identity in Cameroon has compelled the Bawock Fon and political elites to maintain their connection to their ancestral home in Bangangte (Francophone Region) partly to identify with the superior status associated with being Francophone in Cameroon. Thus, the Bawock perceive themselves as a Francophone community while simultaneously claiming indigeneity in the North-West Region. This has led to contestations of land ownership between the Bali and Bawock communities which partly accounted for the conflict in 2006. An understanding of the ways in which this broader linguistic politics in Cameroon impacts local dynamics in Bali and Bawock helps to highlight how the struggle for power between the two communities is embedded in the discursive national politics of the Anglophone and Francophone divide.

The first part of this chapter situates the union between Bali and Bawock in historical context, identifying how this shaped the basis of the conflict that broke out in 2006. The second part of the chapter emphasises the centrality of Mantum village in the conflict and presents a sequence of events in the Bali-Bawock conflict that lasted from 2006-2007. This part further examines how issues of identity and power became critical in the conflict. The third section situates the Bali-Bawock conflict in the broader Anglophone-Francophone landscape of Cameroon, while the fourth section captures the different attempts that were made to resolve the conflict.

6.1 Historical origins and evolution of the Bali-Bawock union

Bali Nyonga is a first-class fondom founded before colonial rule while Bawock was made a second-class chiefdom in 1975. The Bali Nyonga subdivisions constitutes a wide range of ethnic communities with Bali as the dominant centralised ethnic unit. Some of the smaller ethnic communities within this centralised fondom of Bali Nyonga include: the Mbelluh, Mudum, Mbufung, Bossa, and Bawock, among others. Most of these communities were either conquered or amalgamated by Bali Nyonga, or they sought protection and settlement within the land that Bali Nyonga conquered and ruled before European conquest (Kaberry and Chilver 1961).

The Bali Nyonga are one of the Bali Chamba ethnic groups of the North-West Region. The Chamba groups migrated from the North of Cameroon at the beginning of the 19th century (Fardon 1988). Fardon (1988) further states that Chamba comprised four groups that took off from Chamba land (the Den Bakwa, Daka, Peli and Ba'ni). While some of these groups settled in present day Nigeria, the Ba'ni group of Gawolbe and his descendants founded the five Bali fondoms in the present day North-West Region of Cameroon (Ndangam 2014).

The Ba'ni group under the leadership of Gawolbe, travelled South-Westward amalgamating followers from other communities like the Kufad, Tikali, Nabuli, Babele, Sungneba, Buti, Kontcha and Ti (Fardon 1988). While searching for a permanent settlement area, the Gawolbe-led Chambas (Ba'ni) fought and lost the battle of Bafu-Fondong around Njuitisa Tea estate in Dschang (Western region of former French Cameroon) in 1830 (Titanji *et al.* 1988). According to Titanji *et al.* (1988) Gawolbe died, which led to a succession dispute that resulted to the split of the Ba'ni group and the formation of new fondoms which included: the Bali Gham, Bali Kumbat, Bali Gansin, Bali Gaso, Bali Muti, Bali Kontan, and Bali Nyonga. The Bali Nyonga was led by Princess Nahnyonga, who after unifying her own followers, handed the newly founded fondom to her son Nyongpasi, a dynamic and valiant soldier who picked up the name of Fonyonga I (Titanji *et al.* 1988).

From the Bafu-Fondong plains, the new Chamba confederates migrated towards the present day North-West of Cameroon (Chilver 1964). The Bali Nyonga, still around the mid-19th century, moved further into the Bamileke land (ethnic community in the Western region) and settled with the Bati people around the fertile Noun plain belonging to the Bamum people of the West. They camped at a place called Tsen which the Bamum called Kutu, today known as Koutie or the land of the Ti people. The Bamum also refer to this place as Kubale which means the land of the Bali people.⁶⁷

Enmity against the Bamum caused the Bati people to ally with Bali Nyonga (who had just arrived the region) around the 1850s to attack Bamum. Both the Bali and Bati communities wanted to establish joint ownership over Bamum land but they were overpowered by the

⁶⁷ Interview with a Bali elder, 4th July 2015 Bamenda.

Bamum.⁶⁸ As a result, the Bali and Bati decided to leave the place and go further North-West into the Bamenda region (Titanji *et al.*1988). On leaving, Fonyonga took some of the Bati people along to the Bamenda area. They moved South-Westward and subjugated the Bali Kontan, chasing them further inland in the Bamenda area to occupy the land which they are settled on today (Titanji *et al.*1988).

Not long after the Bali and the Bati groups had settled in their new site in the Bamenda area, Bali interviewees for this research contend the Bati people sought permission from the Bali Fon to invite the Bawock community to settle in the area (this invitation was based on the marital connections between Bati and Bawock) in 1906. Bali Nyonga accepted this invitation with the belief that the Bawock people were to be absorbed to enable the fondom to grow.⁶⁹ The Bati people would later quit the union with Bali in 1911 to return to their original settlement in the West, abducting with them Nana, the leader of the Bawock people. The Bati people left because their Fon sought in vain to establish equal authority and sovereignty with the Fon of Bali and even attempted to make the Bawock Fon-Nana his sub chief. This contradicted the terms of settlement which they had with Fonyonga and, from the perspective of the Bali, manifested a clear disrespect to the supremacy of the Bali people.⁷⁰

During one of the ritual observations of the Bati people in 1911, the Bati requested that every Bali person should stay indoors throughout the whole night and morning. While the Bali people remained indoors, the Bati people escaped through Santa to their original land in the West where they are resettled today (Chilver 1964). Bali interviewees for this research further hold that Bawock Fon-Nana who escaped with the Bati people later found that he could not enjoy the same liberty living with the Bati where they were settled in the West. He reached out to Bali through a Basel Missionary (Basel Missionaries were a European protestant Christian group) living in Bali, the Reverend pastor, whose cook was a Bawock man, to plead with the Fon of Bali to permit him to resettle in Bali.⁷¹ After assuring his loyalty,

⁶⁸ Interview with a Bali elder, 5th July 2015 Bali town.

⁶⁹ Interview with a Bali elder, 4th July 2015 Bamenda.

⁷⁰ Interview with a Bali elder, 4th July 2015 Bamenda.

⁷¹ Interview with a Bali elder, 5th July 2015 Bali Town.

the Bawock Fon-Nana was brought back to Bali in 1912 to resettle in the empty land that the Bati had abandoned in 1911 as they relocated to the West (Nyamndi 1988). The Bawock presently occupy the land which the Bati abandoned in Bali as they relocated to the West. From then, the Bawock lived as a semi-autonomous people keeping their language and culture but speaking and respecting the culture of Bali and paying tributes to the Fon of Bali (Chilver 1964; Nyamndi 1988).

6.1.1 Strangers in their own land: the origin and arrival of Bawock community in Bali

The Bawock people commonly refer to themselves as the 'Mfe-Ngamfais' and trace their roots back to the Bawock village in Bangante in the Western Region of Cameroon.⁷² Their relationship with their counterparts in the West is said to have deteriorated because the Fon of Bawock, Nana Ntukam challenged the Chief of Bangante in the Western Region. The Bawock Fon-Nana Ntukam refused to host the Bangante ethnic cultural festival (Kam) within his territory. These actions created a lot of animosity against him from other Fons in the region. These tensions caused the Bawock Fon-Nana to leave the region with some of his people who were loyal to him. After temporary settlements in the West, the Bawock appealed to the Bati leaders in Bali to host them.⁷³

It is important to emphasize that the resettlement of Bawock in their present location has many different interpretations. These varying interpretations reflect multiple claims of belonging and ownership of land among the different groups in Bali today. Whereas Bali hold the view that they invited the Bawock to live with them, the Bawock assert that their settlement in the region had nothing to do with Bali. The Fon of Bawock attributes their invitation to the Bati claiming that they only became neighbours with the Bali once the Bati decided to resettle in the West in 1911.⁷⁴ According to Bali interviewees, although the first group of the Bawock arrived Bali in 1904, some, together with their Fon left with the Bati in 1911. The Bawock on the other hand, challenge the Bali submission and claim to have arrived in Bali around 1860 and lived in peace with the Bati community until they left. Most of t h e

⁷² Interview with a Bawock notable, 23rd of June 2015, Bawock.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Interview with the Fon of Bawock ,7th June 2015, Bawock.

Bawock informants (including the Fon) contend that it was not until they settled on the old Bati land; they did not have any interaction with Bali.⁷⁵

In either case, when Fon Nana Ntukam (who had return to Bali) died in 1912, V.H Wanda became the new Fon of Bawock. However, in 1938, the British administration discovered that as a designated tax collector for the Bawock, Fon Wanda could not account for money collected (NAB 59). He was replaced by his brother Ntanke the First (1938-57). National archives records (NAB 159) entitled 'Wanda V.H. of Bawock' of 26th November 1937 show that a meeting convened by Fonyonga II of Bali on 26th July 1938 discussed the way forward with Bawock leaders, following the imprisonment of Wanda for extortion and embezzlement of taxes. The Fon of Bawock again, like most of the Bawock interviewees in this research contest this claim. The Fon of Bawock argues that the imprisonment of V.H Wanda was a ploy by the Fon of Bali because Wanda resisted the subordination of the Bawock by the Bali Fon.⁷⁶

A descendant of the late Fon Nana's lineage presented Ntake I as a replacement to Wanda. Fonyonga of Bali then sent his king makers to install him as Chief of Bawock. Supporters of Wanda who were not happy with what they saw as a coup against him left Bali to return to their original settlement in Bangante in the West.⁷⁷ Those Bawock who remained behind continued to pay loyalty to the Fon of Bali and maintained harmonious relations with the Bali, as a recognised sub group within the Bali local government and customary court under the British colonial administration.⁷⁸ They inter-married with the Bali people though they maintained their traditions and language (Ndangam 2014).

British rule in Southern Cameroon ended in 1961 when the region through plebiscite voted to join the Republic of Cameroon, which had already gained independence in 1960. In 1975, Bawock began agitating for autonomy, demanding a distinct territorial area from the Bali, which led to a state of anxiety within the community. The government intervened to calm the tensions (Nyamndi 1988). An Administrative decision of 29th October 1975 emphatically

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ NAB, File No 159, Wanda V.H of Bawock, 26th November 1937.

stated that the Fon of Bali was the paramount ruler and that the Bawock Chief fell under his authority (Nyamndi 1988). In 1982, Government order No.36/A/MINAT/DOT of 19th January 1982 then made Bawock a second class fondom attached to the first class fondom of the Bali Nyonga. It had a population of 1,880 people.

The tensions between the Bali and Bawock resurfaced when the current Fon of Bawock Nana Theodore III was enthroned on the 19th of June 1999. Soon after his enthronement Fon Theodore decided to challenge the Fon of Bali over his claim to land in Mantum-village, which has become the source of conflict between the two communities today. The Bawock contend that Mantum village was a Bawock territory before the imprisonment of Fon V.H Wanda in 1938. They argue that most Bawock people abandoned the land in 1938 to resettle in the West. Most of those who left were sympathizers of Fon V.H Wanda whom they believed was replaced in a coup masterminded by Bali to bring in one of their loyalists Ntanke to the throne.⁷⁹

6.1.2 The centrality of Mantum-village in the Bali- Bawock conflict

Conflict broke out in Bali in December 2006 between the Bawock and the Bali Nyonga communities over the disputed farmlands in Mantum which both groups claim. Though generally described as the Bali-Bawock conflict, it is in its strict sense between the Bawock and Mantum villages, presently located in Bali. Some of the incorporated villages in Bali like Mbelluh, Mudum, Mbufung, and Bossa who constitute distinct clans were only passively involved in the conflict because of their allegiance to the crown Fon of Bali. Although these groups constitute the Bali Nyonga fondom, they each have their territories (some, like Bossa have also in the past requested to be independent from Bali) and felt it was largely the responsibility of Mantum-village to protect itself.⁸⁰

Mantum village in the Bali subdivision shares borders with Pinyin and Mbu villages in the Santa subdivision. With a relatively flat topography, fertile soils and available grazing land, both the Bawock and the Bali lay claims to its lands. The people of Mantum identify

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Interview with Bali informant from Bossa, 22nd of July 2015, Bamenda.

themselves as Bali indigenes. From the Bawock perspective, the Bali appellation of the region as Mantum is just an imaginary village created by Bali to undermine the Bawock territorial frontiers with their neighbours (Pinyin and Barfochu in Santa subdivision). When I asked one of the Bawock interviewees (an elder in the Bawock traditional council) why they claim Mantum is theirs although the inhabitants identify with Bali, he responded:

We left this land when the then Fon of Bawock Wanda refused to disclose the exact number of adult men in his community who qualified to pay colonial taxes under the British colonial regime. He was punished for tax evasion and acting on the instructions of his brother who was supported by the Bali. He opted to go to jail rather than paying the fine. Coming back from jail he discovered his brother, with the blessing of the Bali, had taken his throne. He decided to leave the place with those who were loyal to him... It was then that the Bali people invaded the deserted land which they have now constructed an imaginary village called Mantum which never existed in colonial days. This place they now call Mantum was called Ntoh Manyi in Bawock.⁸¹

The above quote presents another possible interpretation why the Bawock exited Bali. It suggests that such an exit could have been a colonial tax evasion strategy. In either case, while Mantum has economic relevance for both Bali and Bawock due its fertile soils, it continues to serve a strategic security role for Bali against dissident sub-chiefs who may want to challenge the authority of the Fon of Bali. The settlement of a core Bali Nyonga clan in Mantum like all other villages around Bali borders was a deliberate and strategic act by the early Bali Fons who settled in the region in the 19th century.⁸² The idea was to place Bawock and other incorporated clans in the centre of Bali territory to ensure submission to the paramount Fon.

Ceding Mantum-village to Bawock gives them some significant grounds for claiming autonomy as the Bawock would then share a common boundary with Santa subdivision to

⁸¹ Interview with a Bawock traditional councillor, 24th August, Bawock.

⁸² Interview with Bali traditional councillor, 25th August, Bali.

enable them to leave Bali and join the Santa subdivision. The borders with Mbu and Pinyin in Santa sub division also gives Bawock the opportunity to travel in and out without having to pass through Bali with the feeling of being monitored.⁸³ Bawock has a more conciliatory relationship with the neighbouring Pinyin and Mbu villages that led to the creation of the inter-community alliance between Mbu, Pinyin and Bawock known by its acronym as Mbu-Pin-Wock. This alliance has a political undertone (which is examined in detail in the next chapter).

Mantum village also hosts the Bali shrine at a stream called Ntsi Su'Fu. It is at the stream where Voma (a religious body whose functions are three-fold; protection, productivity and initiation rites) conducts ceremonies to cleanse the whole community to improve agricultural yields. It is believed in Bali historiography that the first settlers of Bali drank from that stream and the spot became transformed into a holy shrine (Fardon 2006). Thus, for the Bali, Mantum village has emotional and historical significance. The shrine is also believed to have been fortified with human sacrifice and since this is no longer the practice in this era, the Bali people resist any peace deal with Bawock that will require them to relocate the Ntsi Su'Fu shrine to another place where they could not undertake such a practice. The centrality of Mantum accounts for why Bali and Bawock elites and regional elites have sought to strengthen narratives of oral history which supports each other's claims to the region. The next part focuses on the sequence of events in the 2006-2007 Bali-Bawock conflict and examines how issues of identity and power became critical in the conflict.

⁸³Interview with Bawock traditional councillor, 24th August, Bali.

6.2 The Bali Bawock conflict

*'When there is fire in the palace it can only be caused by a bird but if a person does it then he or she has declared war on the entire Fondom'*⁸⁴

The quote above is a Bali proverb which highlights the importance of the palace as the centre of culture and customs of the people. Bali people agree that the Fon can be criticized or even dethroned in situations where he publicly desecrates the throne. However, it is a taboo among the clans for whom Bali customs and tradition exist for any human to question the institution itself. Traditional institutions in Bali are symbolised by the palace, which is the main repository of the people's customs, culture and traditional valuables. An attack of any kind aimed at destroying the palace is interpreted by the indigenes of Bali as an attack on their existence and calls for retaliation. It is an alleged attack on the Bali Palace that is at the centre of the conflict that erupted in Bali between Bali and Bawock communities. The Bawock, which in 2006 remained a second class fondom attached to the paramount fondom of Bali, allegedly set the Bali Palace ablaze and blamed the Bali. This section attempts to capture the events that led to the tragedy in Bawock community and to show how the events relate to a broader discourse of belonging in Cameroon.

6.2.1 The December 2006 boundary demarcation incident (the Mbu-Pin-Wockalliance)

In December 2006 and at the request of the second class Fons of Bawock, Mbu and Pinyin, state surveyors from the city of Bamenda began mapping out the borders between the Bali and Santa sub divisions within Mezam division. They were working in four villages: Mantum and Bawock (in the Bali sub division) and Mbu and Pinyin (in the Santa sub division).⁸⁵ These negotiations, according to a Bali notable, were done without the knowledge of the Bali Fon.⁸⁶ Per another Bali interviewee, this was partly explained by the fact that any signpost showing the boundary between Bawock, Mbu and Pinyin would have been indirectly recognising Mantum as part of Bawock.⁸⁷ Disappointed by such moves and their lack of voice in the whole

⁸⁴ Interview with Bali traditional councillor, 25th August, Bali.

⁸⁵ Interview with the Divisional Officer for Bali, 26th May 2015, Bali.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Interview with a Bali elder, 4th July 2015 Bamenda.

negotiation (for example through representation by the Bali Fon), Bali people in Mantum attacked the government officials who led the surveyors group, destroying the new signpost and burning down two cars.

The Bawock claim that the Bali Fon was served an official invitation to attend the boundary demarcation, which he refused to honour arguing that the invitation never reached him.⁸⁸ The D.O for Bali acknowledges the fact that while an invitation was addressed to the Fon of Bali, it was deliberately only sent to him on the same day that the boundary demarcation was scheduled to take place.⁸⁹ The D.O also notes that he had warned his superior, the Senior Divisional Officer for Mezam in Bamenda, of the risk when the Bawock, Pinyin and Mbu first expressed the idea of mapping the boundaries between them.

This boundary demarcation took place during the countdown to the Bali Lela annual festival (where Bali celebrate their existence and culture), which restricts the paramount Fon from leaving the palace for some days prior to the event. The Fon was compelled prematurely to end his retreat, breaking with tradition after some members of his cabinet told him his presence at the scene was indispensable. This was due to the gravity of tension and also the fact that the Fons of Mbu and Pinyin were present, which the Bali Fon saw as a conspiracy against his fondom.⁹⁰ It is alleged that when the Fon arrived at the scene, he had expressed his disappointment with the Fon of Pinyin, with whom his people shared a pact of Non-Aggression, stating:

*My brother you have been coming to Bali through the front door, what happened today that you are coming through the back door, do you want to stab me on my back?*⁹¹

The neighbouring Fons of Mbu and Pinyin support the Bawock in their claim that their present settlement was given to them by the Bati who migrated with Bali but had decided to leave in 1911 due to perceived Bali suppression. The Bawock Fon opines that the villages of

⁸⁸ Interview with a Bawock notable, 7th August 2015, Bawock

⁸⁹ Interview with the D.O for Bali, 26th May 2015, Bali.

⁹⁰ Interview with a Bali notable, 5th of July 2015, Bali.

⁹¹ Interview with Bali notable, 28th of May 2015, Bali.

Mbu and Pinyin had always been their immediate neighbours.⁹² All the elites of Mantum-village that participated in this research counter these claims arguing that Mantum is a Bali village that lay between Bawock and Mbu. To them, putting Bali villages at the borders with their neighbours was a deliberate effort by the early settlers of Bali who wanted to prevent settler groups like Bawock from having direct boundaries with Bali neighbours. The Bali feared that such direct boundary access could facilitate settler groups to easily switch allegiance to neighbouring groups. The Bali therefore use this argument, with the support of Mantum village to support their claim of Mantum land. In a letter addressed to the administration on 11/01/2007 before the burning down of Bawock, the elites of Mantum reiterated their claims:

*We are ready to reimburse all Bawock people who bought land in Mantum since we now know their intentions...They buy our land and divide it to their family members and then turnaround to claim they are the original inhabitants of Mantum. We are from today more determined than ever to all die or be in prison if the administration continues(s) to force on us any issue about the exploitation of the Mantum land especially by the Bawock people.*⁹³

The December incident in part highlights the underlying drivers of the Bali-Bawock conflict, such as the scarcity of land. It shows how much the attempt to demarcate the borders between these communities had provoked tensions in the region. The Bali people felt they had been deliberately excluded from the demarcation exercise through the machinations of the Bawock and Santa elites in collaboration with the Senior Divisional administrator in Bamenda. One of the informants in Bali was certain in his claim that:

*The SDO [Njanga Macerlin, the SDO at the time] fuelled the fight between Bawock and Bali. The SDO himself from the Western region was resolved to sympathise with Bawock whom he saw as his brothers from the West*⁹⁴

⁹² Interview with the Fon of Bawock, 7th June 2015, Bawock.

⁹³ Mantum petition to the D.O for Bali against Bawock over land disputes, 11/01/2007.

⁹⁴ Interview with Bali elder, 5th of July 2015.

To Bali people, the pace with which the state responded to the planting of pillars in their land indicated that their actions were premeditated. The depth of the conflict between Bali and Bawock seems to lie in the subjective nature of land claims perpetuated through the tradition of oral history. This connects with my argument that conflicts like the Bali Bawock cannot and should not be understood based only on boundaries and identities, as there are always competing discursive positions among conflicting parties. After the December abortive pillar incident, an uneasy calm is said to have returned in Bali. However, both communities continued to argue their case as the rightful owners of the disputed Mantum land. Those who claim to have settled in the land first require respect from outsiders and Bali have in their claims constantly reminded other groups that 'we were the first here'.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Figure 10: Map of Mezam Division, North-West Region, showing the location of Bawock

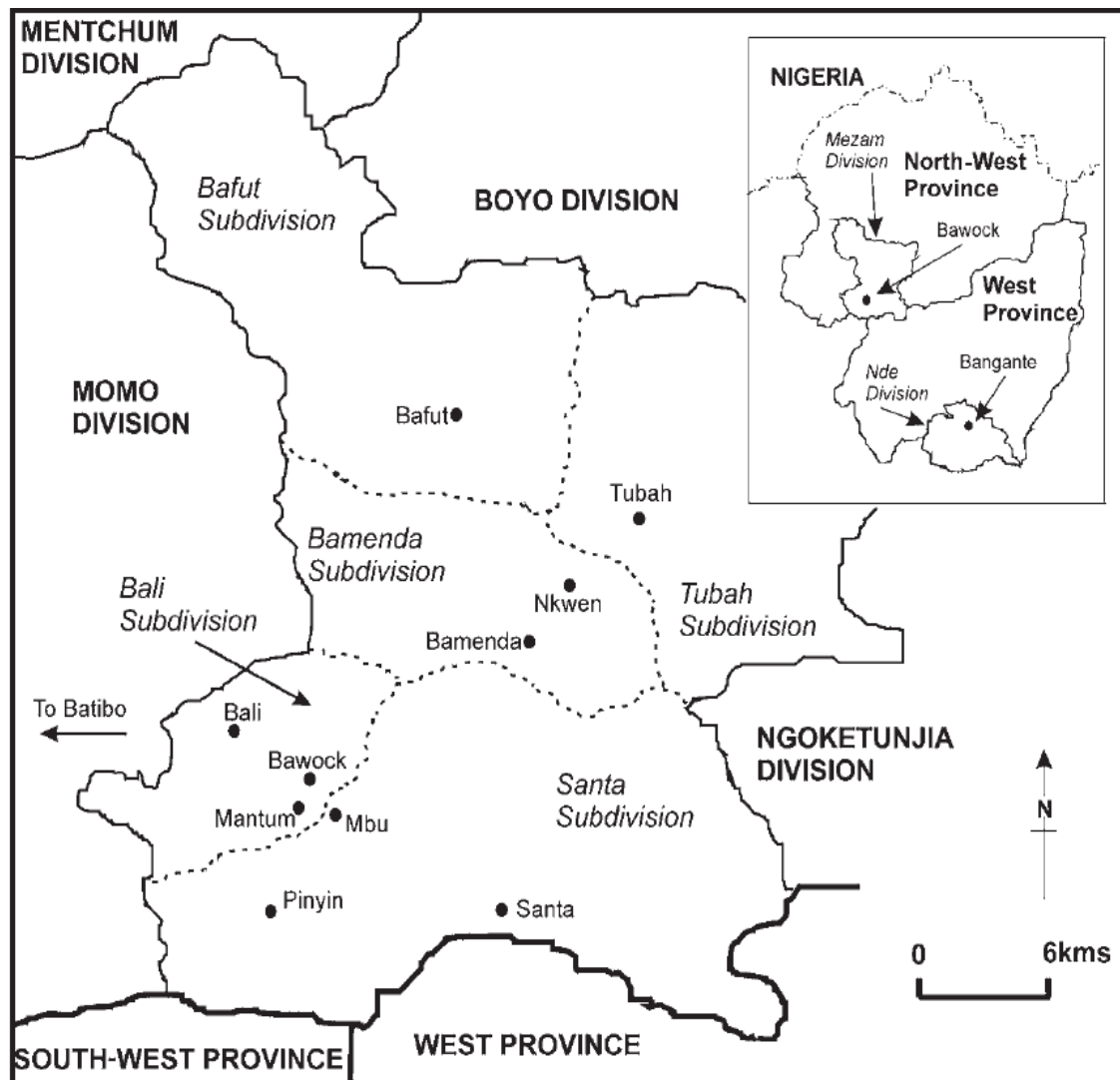


FIGURE 1 Mezam Division, North-West Province

Sources: Ben, Evans .and Mercer, (2010)

6.2.2 The Voma Incident, March 2007

A second flashpoint of the conflict between Bawock and Bali was the confiscation of the Voma sacred objects by the Bawock people on the 3rd of March 2007. Accounts of the events that led to the seizure of the Voma are contested by both the Bali and Bawock communities. The Bawock people contend that on the 3rd of March a Voma group entered Bawock land. It is alleged that the Voma group was heading towards the Bawock Palace before a Bawock elite, Mr. Limen Peter and some youths interrupted them.

Mr Limen Peter is said to have mobilised the Bawock youths that clashed with the Bali Voma group. This clash resulted in the destruction of the Bawock Palace and the burning down of Mr. Limen Peter's residence. According to the Fon of Bawock, the Voma incident was an attempt by the Bali to assimilate them in a bid to confirm their claims of ownership of the Bawock land. To the Fon of Bawock 'it was nothing short of an open declaration of war'.⁹⁶ The non-respect of their 'country Sunday' where everyone was supposed to be silent and reverent was seen as a lack of respect by Bali people for the Bawock's jurisdictional autonomy and culture.

The Bali people on the other hand claim the Voma has existed just as long as their existence in the land and that every year Voma performed the same rituals where they blessed farm land across Bali to avoid famine. On this occasion, the Voma was on its way back from Mantum and was passing through Bawock when Voma juju and its entourage were attacked. They opine that Bawock youths, guided by Mr. Limen, seized the Voma juju and burnt it. This was interpreted to mean the capture of Bali. This incident further ruined the relationship between the two communities which was only beginning to recover from the December tensions during the boundary demarcation.

Brass (1996) uses the incident of the theft of an idol in the context of Northern India to argue that while a violent event is open to many interpretations, those which define such conflicts to the outside world are not the views of the local people involved in it but those of political

⁹⁶ Interview with the Fon of Bawock, 7th of June 2015, Bawock.

elites and others for whom the violence provides opportunities and symbols which they exploit to their advantage. Like the theft of an idol, the attack on Voma and the events surrounding the attack (such as the boundary demarcation between the Bawock, Mbu and Pinyin to the exclusion of Bali) tells us how local issues are magnified in the same way that Brass talks about in Northern India. The boundary demarcation and the Voma incidents capture the various uses of rhetoric and competing frameworks of meaning to explain, throw accusations or avoid blame. If at the end of the conflict there was a communal conspiracy to the events that led to the attack on Voma, the attack itself was perpetuated by individuals or groups of individuals who were acting from different motivations and with different goals within the context of the ongoing struggle for power, and the settler-indigene divide in Cameroon.

6.2.3 The burning of the Bali Palace shrine on the 6th of March 2007

For two days, tensions mounted in Bali after the Voma incident, and in the early hours of the morning (about 4 30am) on the 6th of March, the Bali palace was discovered on fire. A thatch hut which serves as a holy shrine (the Chum) where several sacred and secular treasures of the fondom were stored was found to be in flames. This hut was built in 1889 and constituted the main shrine of the palace.⁹⁷ Every attempt that morning to rescue the shrine was unsuccessful and the building with all its content was burned to ashes. To the Bali people, a group of Bawock youth had masterminded the burning down of their palace. What followed the next morning was catastrophic, as the entire Bawock village was razed to the ground; livestock and food crops were also destroyed. Government attempts to remedy the situation came too late.

According to the Bawock people, the few houses that were left were marked with signs of the peace plant on them.⁹⁸ This was to indicate that it was either owned by a Bali man or that one of their daughters or sons was married to that family. This, per a Bawock interviewee indicates that the attack on Bawock was premeditated as signs were given to Bali residents

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Peace plants in Bali and the North-West Region in general symbolise peace. In war, it could mean conceding defeat and call for peace.

in Bawock to avoid destruction.⁹⁹ However, to-date the Bali Fon insists that while tempers were high after the fire incident at his palace, he appealed to Bali people to restrain from seeking revenge for the fire incident, and that they obeyed his advice. The Bali people contend that the Bawock burnt their own homes and voluntarily made themselves refugees to gain empathy from the government and the region vis a vis the Bali. The burning and destruction of properties was said to be a replication of what the Bati People had done in 1911 before they left. Relating the burning of Bawock homes to the case of the Bati suggest a continuity between the past and present in the mounting and staging of violence.

Figure 11: A destroyed Bawock resident



Source: Christopher Nyamsikwen's Library

⁹⁹ Interview with a Bawock notable, 7th August 2015, Bawock.

Bawock people however are of the view that an angry mob of Bali Nyonga youth had decided to avenge the fire incident in the Bali palace with an attack on Bawock village. They destroyed property, looted food items, livestock and other valuable commodities and forced the people to flee. Over 3,500-5,000 people from Bawock left on the eve of the attack, for the congress hall in Bamenda, which had become the centre where they received official and charitable aid. Some stayed in nearby bushes and observed as their homes were set ablaze.¹⁰⁰ The multiple accounts in the field hold that there was no human casualty in the conflict, except for properties and farmlands that were destroyed. According to the Bawock, they had been informed of the planned invasion by their relatives and friends who are settled and married in Bali. Aware of the numerical and military strength of Bali, they decided to evacuate their homes before the attack was launched.¹⁰¹ According to one of the Bali notables I talked to:

[Some] of the Bawock people kept their properties in our homes in Bali before they left for Bamenda... If we planned the attack, how come no causality was registered, not even a single death. They all had with them their important documents like Identification, school certificates and sales agreement for properties they own in the area... They [Bawock] had planned this very well.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Figure 12: Bawock refugees in Bamenda



Source: Christopher Nyamsikwen's Library

The Bali–Bawock conflict in a broader context reflects the pressure on resources in the North-West of Cameroon. There is limited arable land for communities that depend largely on agriculture for a living, which results in tensions over land claims. To establish ownership over such lands, each community creates contested narratives of their oral histories to justify their ownership of disputed territories.

6.2.4 The power dynamics of the Bali- Bawock conflict

The conflict between Bali and Bawock has largely been fuelled by the struggle for power between the Fons of Bali and Bawock. Both Fons contend that their authority is greatly undermined by the other. The Bali Fon is one of only five paramount Fons in the North-West Region of Cameroon. He feels his authority is despised by the Bawock Fon who is only a second class Fon and whose second class fondom is attached to the first-class fondom of Bali.

In one of the letters addressed to the state in 2007, the Bali Fon emphasised the decree of 1977 that created Bawock as second class fondom. According to this decree, the Bawock Fon owes loyalty, gratitude, respect and allegiance to the Fon of Bali. Whereas the issue of respect between the two Fons is connected to the status of each fondom in terms of classification, the Bawock argue that as a second class fondom they are entitled to an autonomous status.

After the transfer of the SDO (Mr. Marcelin) who mediated the Bali-Bawock conflict, his immediate successor is said to have reminded the two Fons: *'As auxiliaries of the administration, there is also hierarchy... It is a reality that the Fon of Bali is a first class Fon and the Fon of Bawock a second class Fon attached to the Fon of Bali and it is important that the principles of seniority are respected.'*¹⁰² Such a statement from the SDO is indicative of the state's desire to apply a framework that hierarchically distinguishes chieftaincies into first, second and third classes. It is also indicative of the state's recognition of the paramountcy of the Bali fondom. However, the application of the text is also open to multiple interpretations which lie at the discretion of the administration. As I will argue in chapter nine, traditional leaders and also state bureaucrats often act outside the limits of the law in situations where their individual or community /state interests (which they represent) conflict. Previous SDO's like Njanga Marcelin, applying the same law gave Bawock its authority independent from Bali. In either case, even some Bawock interviewees were critical of their Fon for equating himself with the Fon of Bali. Commenting on the power dynamics of the Fons, one of the Bawock elites remarked:

*For our Fon to have equated himself to a paramount Fon in Bali sub division was provocative. Though he earns the status when he meets with the other two Bawock clans [in the Western Region], to assume that very capacity within Bali is erroneous*¹⁰³

¹⁰² The post newspaper NO 01098 of 2nd November 2009.

¹⁰³ Interview with a Bawock notable, 25th July, Bawock.

The assertion by the Bawock Fon to be accorded the status of a paramount Fon as shown in some of his letters (where he calls himself the paramount Fon of Bawock) and the quest for autonomy has met strong resistance from Bali who believe it is an act of ungratefulness. The Bali people made constant reference to instances where the Fon of Bawock in official communiques has addressed himself as the paramount Fon of Bawock. Similarly, Bali people mentioned the several attempts of the Fon of Bawock to come to public events like national days or youth days much later after the Fon of Bali was already seated as way of claiming equality or even seniority. One Bali interviewee stated: *'Only the most senior state man in any given event in Bali should arrive after the Bali Fon'*.¹⁰⁴ Such acts though small, when interpreted in the broader context of power between the two Fons account for the deteriorated relation between the two Fons and their communities, with each community wanting to maintain the image and pride of their Fon as superior. Such petty acts of coming late to a public event as a form of covertly expressing power differentiation between the two Fons highlight very subtle ways in which power could be resisted by the less powerful in a society (Weber 1978).

Amid the power struggle between the Fons of Bawock and Bali, Fon Nana of Bawock has preferred to build a very strong working alliance with Bali neighbours such as Pinyin and Mbu. Unlike his predecessors who often worked with the Fon of Bali and would even sit in for the Fon of Bali while he was away, Fon Nana has no working relation with Bali. His choice to establish friendly ties with Mbu and Pinyin is perceived in Bali as colluding with such villages against Bali. The Bali-Bawock conflict therefore not only feeds on the feeling of discontentment about how both communities treat each other, but also on the disrespect shown to the Fons and to each other's culture with the backing of internal and external elites.

Whereas the relationship between the Fon of Bali and Bawock has deteriorated over the years, the Fon of Bawock has maintained close ties with fons and elites from the West region of Cameroon where they trace their roots. These close ties with a Francophone community in the West while still claiming to be indigenes in the North-West has offended some elites

¹⁰⁴ Interview with a Bali informant, 4th July Bali.

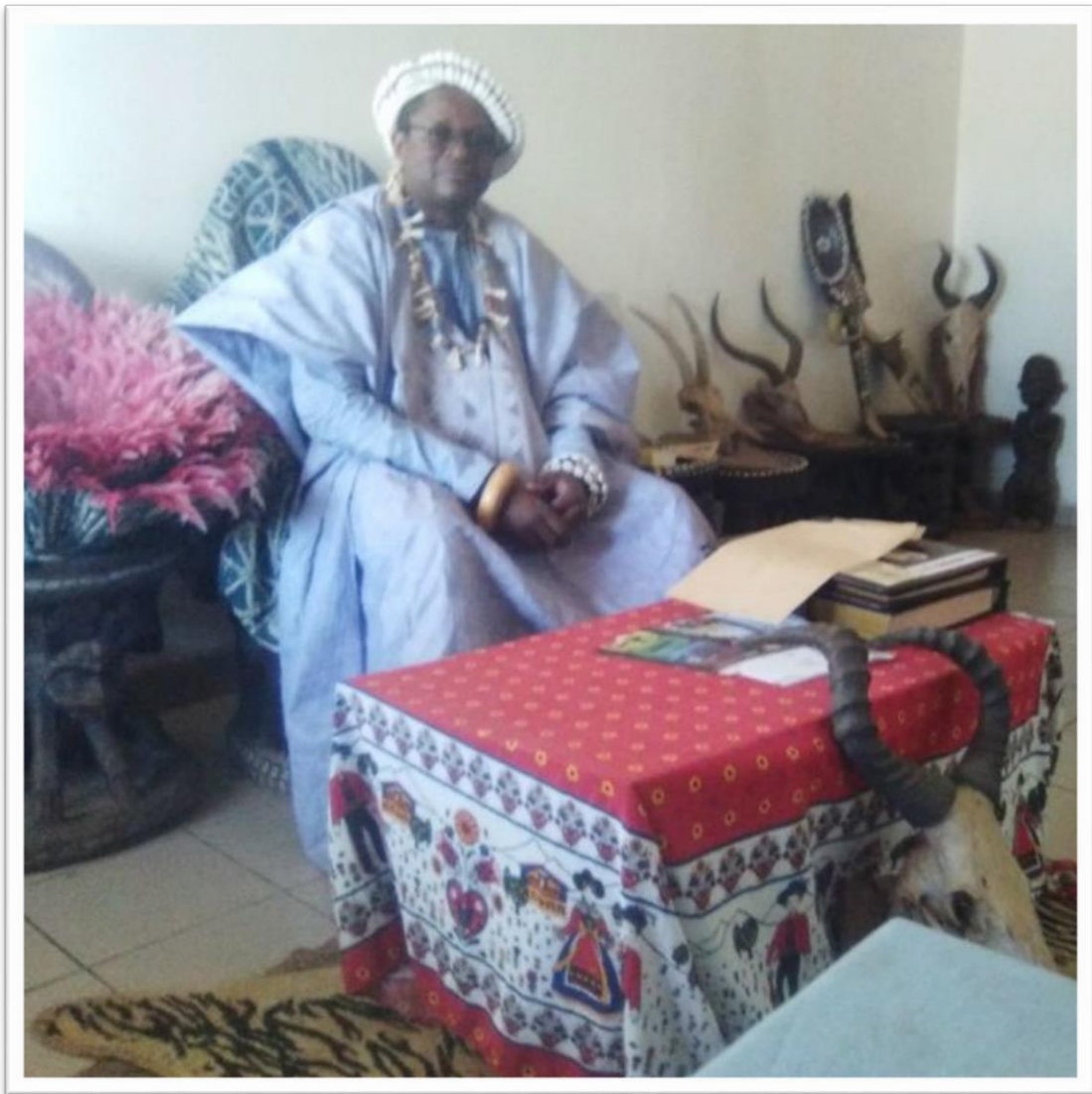
in Bali. There is therefore a linguistic dimension to the Bali–Bawock conflict which feeds on the discursive politics of the Francophone and Anglophone divide in Cameroon.

Figure 13: Fon Ganyonga III in a public function in Bali



Source: <http://www.cameroonpostline.com/traditional-rulers-playing-increasing-role-in-conservation/>

Figure 14: Fon Nana Theodore II of Bawock



Source: <http://www.cameroonvoice.com/news/article-news-21226.html>

6.3 The linguistic character of the Bali-Bawock conflict and the politics of belonging in Cameroon

The Bali-Bawock conflict is entangled in the discursive national politics of the Anglophone and Francophone dichotomy in Cameroon. This resonates with the work of Tambiah (1996), where he discusses the processes of mobilisation and examines how micro-level politics at local levels connects to national politics and how this sometimes results in conflict. The stigmatisation that comes with bearing an Anglophone identity in Cameroon has compelled

the Bawock Fon and other elites to maintain their connection with their ancestral home in Bangangte (Francophone Region) partly to identify with the superior status associated with being Francophone in Cameroon. Thus, the Bawock perceive themselves as a Francophone community while simultaneously claiming indigeneity in the North-West Region. This has led to contestations of land ownership between Bali and Bawock communities which partly accounts for the conflict in 2006. Nyamnjoh (2002) has noted that French in Cameroon is used as a language of Anglophone oppression and domination. The system has conditioned Francophones to feel superior to Anglophones who are treated as inferiors.

Nyamnjoh (2002) further notes that French has become the administrative language irrespective of the fact that English and French are supposed to be the official languages. Francophones are proud and boastful of their status and the binary opposition between the two continuously generate tensions among citizens. Nyamnjoh (2002) notes that the marginalisation and near exclusion of Anglophones from top public services puts Cameroonians of the English-speaking stock in a disadvantaged and an inferior position.

Perceived as superior, Francophones have tended to look at Anglophones as second-class citizens. Some examples of the national sentiment here is important for better understanding. During the launching of the Social Democratic Front in 1990 by some Anglophone elites, Krieger (2008) notes that it was embarrassing when the Minister of Territorial Administration referred to Anglophones as Biafras, which is part of Nigeria known for failed insurgencies against the Nigerian state (Krieger 2008 p. 28). The minister is quoted to have said '*S'il ne sentient pas Camerounais il peuvent aller ailleurs*' translated to mean if they do not feel like Cameroonians they should go elsewhere (Krieger 2008 p. 28). Eyoh (1998) also writes of an Anglophone Cameroonian whom he interviewed who expressed her frustration with the situation as follows:

... You know that stereotypes are a normal part of life in Cameroon and the world over. But the constant reminder that as an Anglophone you are different creates the impression that we are second-class citizens. That is what irritates Anglophone elites. You can imagine the frustration of older and less educated Anglophones who have to deal with a bureaucracy which operates mostly in French (Eyoh 1998 p. 263)

The Bawock, partly for wanting to avoid the Anglophone stigmatisation have sought to retain their Francophone origins in the West, while simultaneously claiming indigeneity in the North-West to the irritation of some elites in the region. As earlier indicated in this chapter, Bawock migrated from the West and (see Chilver 1964) and still have two other factions of Bawock clans today in the Western region of Cameroon. Successive Bawock Fons and their elites have kept a very vibrant connection with the Bangangte to avoid stigmatisation as Anglophone. One of the Bawock interviewees in this research state that:

Our neighbours have tried many times to subdue us, but it did not work because of the strong ties we have with our roots. When we have something like tradition at times we go back to our roots and perform the libation there. And, when we have an occasion like we were celebrating the death of our former Fon, all the Fons of the West region assembled together because we identify with them and the Fon of Bawock is a member of the association of the Fons of the West. 'COSUNDE' is the Association of all the villages of Nde-division in the West and Bawock is a member and its main objective is to promote the culture and solidarity of the Western Region. There is also the Association of all the villages of the West Region called BINAM, and Bawock is still a member and that's what makes us keep our ties.¹⁰⁵

Such claims by Bawock to be authentic indigenes in Bali sub division in their own right, while simultaneously reconstructing multiple identities with their brother in the West shows how claims of identity, belonging and need for security may trigger social conflicts. The Bali see the superior status associated with French language in Cameroon to be the main reason why Bawock has maintained strong ties with the West. The Bawock Fon, though fluent in English, prefers to grant his public interviews in French, and besides the local dialect, the medium of communication in Bawock is predominantly French.¹⁰⁶ Bawock are critical of this claim by Bali that they are not indigenes of the North-West on basis that they migrated from Bangante.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with a Bawock elite, 17th Of June, Bamenda.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

They challenge Bali to relocate to the Chamba region in Northern Nigeria from which they ostensibly migrated. Bali, however, are resolute that unlike Bawock, they fought expansionist wars to acquire the land. One Bali interviewee questioned Bawock's claim to land in the North-West and stated:

*We fought with almost all our neighbours and we know how other ethnic groups acquired their land through wars of conquest... Ask Bawock people who they fought with before they acquired this land. After independence, ethnic colonial boundaries were maintained which gives us legitimate right to this land.*¹⁰⁷

The increasing pressure on land in relation to population growth has put much pressure on limited arable land resulting to conflicts. A consequence of such claims to land is the emergence of the politics of belonging in Cameroon. To the Bali people, not only is the West truly where the Bawock belong, the Bali also feels such an alliance with the West is to canvas for elite support against Bali which they have decided to put a strong resistance. To the Bawock, such a union with the West brings them closer to the centre of power which also draws the support of Western region's elites in favour of their claim of autonomy in the North-West Region against a perceived Bali assimilation. The Bawock's relation with the president of the senate who is an elite of Bawock from the Western Region seems to support this assertion.

The Bawock claim of belonging to the West which seemingly puts them in a privileged position with the state have angered Bali elites who demand that Bawock people should recognise their status as outsiders or strangers and to give the Bali Nyonga Fon the respect he is due for his hospitality. The Bali-Bawock conflict thus exemplifies the connections between notions of belonging in Cameroon and what Nyamnjoh (2004) and Nyamnjoh and Rowland (1998) have referred to as claims to territoriality. Such claims become even more evident and severe in Bali, whose ethnic composition is very diverse, with each ethnic group claiming its own right of belonging to a territory over the other's.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with a Bali informant, 4th July Bali.

6.3.1 National politics of belonging in Cameroon

Claims to multiple identities and statuses became socially constructed in Cameroon, especially in the early 1990s with the rise of ethnic Associations like the COSUNDE where Bawock belongs. This was largely because the politics of belonging and home-based politics had taken a new significance as a source of political legitimacy for economic and political elites. Political legitimacy for party elites became increasingly linked to their places of origin. According Fisiy (1995) the idea of 'home' or 'place of origin' became centred on the assumption that only the sons and daughters of a given community can act in the perceived interest of their communities. This resulted in the distinction in Cameroon that is made between indigenes which Nkwi (2006) calls sons of the soils and settlers or outsiders, commonly referred to as 'come no go' (Nyamnjoh 2002), a pidgin-English expression for permanent immigrants. The tensions resulting from such categorisation of citizens as indigenes and settlers in Cameroon became rife in 1990 after the rebirth of multiparty politics.

In 1997 for example, a former Governor of the South West region requested all immigrants from other regions of Cameroon to present resident permits before they could vote during the legislative elections of May 17, 1997. Although the intended resident permits were never issued, many settlers in the South West were disenfranchised through purposive acts of discrimination in the registration of voters, which was designed to favour the political party in power (Nyamnjoh 2002). Other scholars like Fonchingong (2005), Nkwi (2006), Ben *et al.* (2012) and Yenshu (2006) note that the government institutionalised the idea of ethnic belonging in its own interest. The government did this by sponsoring political elites who championed the creation of ethnic groups that were critical of each other. The purpose of this was the desire by the government to use political elites who were connected to their place of origin to secure regional support which was a strategy to neutralise political rivals. In addition, the government wanted to use the rise of ethnic group consciousness to pre-empt the emergence of any ideologically coherent opposition (Geschiere 2004).

The climax of these tensions within the regime was the birth of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in 1990 (in the North-West Region), which became a real threat to the ruling Cameroon people Democratic Movement (CPDM). Immigrants from the West and North Western Regions who were settled in the South West as plantation labourers or cocoa farmers were perceived by the government as sympathisers of the opposition (SDF) party. The fear that these settlers could influence election outcome in South West pushed the government to sponsor elites to form ethnic associations in their effort to marginalise strangers (Nyamnjoh 2002). Given that there is hardly any clear distinction between the government and the party in power, it was relatively easier to bring pressure to bear on government employees to go back home on campaigns to mobilise votes in anticipation of promotion (Nyamnjoh 2002) in the public service or in simple fear of been sacked. The rise of ethnic Association in Cameroon reflected a national politics of self-serving political entrepreneurs and regional elites seeking personal platforms and approval of the ruling party bureaucracy (Bayart 1993; Nyamnjoh 2002). The Bali-Bawock conflict was heavily embedded in these identity claims. The resurgence of the contested accounts of the Bali-Bawock histories of origin and evolution reflects the context of contested forms of identity in Cameroon. The next section looks at the efforts that were made before and after the conflict by both the state and traditional leaders to mediate peace between Bali and Bawock.

6.4 Efforts at resolving the Bali-Bawock conflict

Efforts have been made by both the government and traditional authorities to repair the broken relationship between Bali and Bawock. Some of the efforts even predate the 2006-2007 conflict. The earliest attempt at this was initiated by the traditional leaders and was known as the Pact of Non-Aggression. Although without any written evidence, the treaty is said to have been initiated during the colonial days.

6.4.1 Pre-conflict peace initiatives

The Pact of Non-Aggression was symbolised by the digging of trenches. Both the Bali and Bawock respondents referred quite often to this treaty and each side has a different interpretation of the provisions of the peace accord. Bali people claim that their community

like every other group in the North-West acquired land through military conquest and in the process offended those they defeated. It was out of the desire to make peace with all her neighbours that Bali signed the Pact of Non-Aggression which was not exclusively with the Bawock. Secondly, the Bali also argues the digging of trenches was in protection against buffalos that invaded village communities in and around Bali when community members were away in the farms.¹⁰⁸

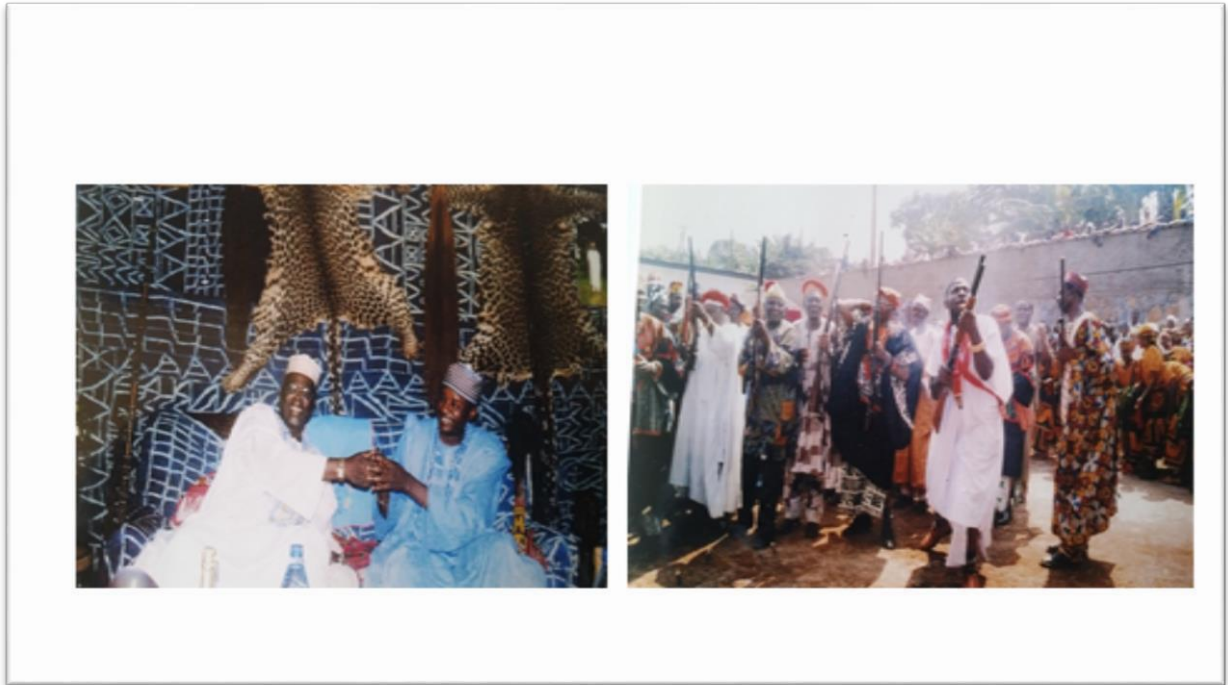
Bawock disputes this claim, contending that the Pack of Non-Aggression was a treaty that mapped out their boundaries with Bali. It is this Pact of Non-Aggression that the Bawock people argue gave them their claim of ownership over the Mantum territory. In 1975, the Bali and Bawock attempted again to strengthen their relationship by signing what was known as the 'Communique of peaceful co-existence between the Bali and Bawock communities'.¹⁰⁹ This treaty too was violated by the two communities for lack of trust among each other.

In 2005, the traditional leaders of Bali and Bawock, under the arbitration of the SDO for Mezam as an independent third party, met in what became known as the 'Gwan Summit Resolution'. At the end of the summit the two communities agreed on some resolutions to the issues they considered critical to the conflict. The SDO criticised the creation of new villages which was not approved by the state. This was largely applicable to the claims by Bawock that Mantum was a Bali name given to an ancient Bawock village. The Bali also accuses the Bawock of upgrading small quarters to village status and giving them fons, which disrupts the political order of Bali.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Bawock elite, 14th July 2005, Bawock.

Figure 15: Fon of Bali (in white) and the Fon of Bawock co-celebrating the memorial of the late Bawock Fon after the Gwan-Summit in 2005, indicative of the return of peace



Source: Nyamsikwen's archives.

With regards to the Bali shrine (the Nsi Su' Fu shrine), the two communities agreed that such sacred places were open to traditional rites. However, such rituals were contingent on an official invitation to the other party as was the practice in the past. During the agreement the two Fons agreed to respect each other's traditions. The Gwan Summit failed due to the lack of commitment to its provisions by both communities. A Bawock notable who was a signatory of the Gwan summit accused the elites directly, stating that:

The desire to have large area which might favour the creation of a subdivision and the quest to have votes by politicians helped to frustrate the agreement that was concluded at the Gwan summit.¹¹⁰

The Gwan Summit and its provisions was interpreted differently by the Bali and Bawock. For Bali, the clause that the shrine should be accessible for traditional rituals meant an open

¹¹⁰ Interview with Bawock elite, 14th July 2015, Bawock.

access to their ritual place. Bawock on the other hand, focussed more on the conditionality of the clause where the usage of the shrine was conditioned on their approval.

Figure 16: A traditional ritual (the sacrifice of a cock) between Bali and Bawock executed by the Fon of Bali after both decided to peacefully demarcate the area reserved for the shrine



Source: Nyamsikwen's archive

Figure 17: The Nsi Su' Fu: Bali Site of Worship



Source: By author

6.4.2 The 2007 post conflict peace initiatives

Other attempts after the 2006-2007 conflict by the two Fons to build peace include the reconciliation speech at the congress hall in 2007, the efforts of the Bali-Bawock land commission and the role of the Norbert-Peace Commission. After the 2006-2007 conflict both Fons put in some efforts for peace to reign. The return of Bawock refugees to Bali depended on the unconditional commitment to peace by the Fon of Bali.¹¹¹ The Fon of Bali addressed the Bawock community at the congress centre where they had taken refuge. By asking them to come home, the Fon committed himself to peace by assuring the security of the Bawock people that was witnessed by the government officials. One Bawock interviewee who was at the town hall stated:

¹¹¹ Interview with the Divisional Officer for Bali, 26th May 2015, Bali.

When we arrived the hall, the Fon of Bawock asked the people [of Bawock in refuge] to pay allegiance to the paramount Fon of Bali and they did so when he came. Fon Nyonga addressed the people calling for peace and they all were happy and clapped continuously.¹¹²

The return of Bawock to Bali was closely followed by a meeting which the Fon of Bali summoned in the presence of the government dignitaries, resident in Bali. The purpose was to resolve disputes over individual land claims especially in the disputed territory of Mantum. This land commission was set to address those differences and it was specifically for Bawock elites who had bought land in Mantum-village with sales certificates.¹¹³ Their ownership was to be reassured only on the condition that they accepted that the land they occupied is in Mantum-village and not Bawock territory as they had claimed before the conflict. Those who accepted this condition retained their plots of land and this was done by affixing the Bali traditional council's stamp on the sales certificate. Those who were not comfortable with the new terms or who simply wanted to evacuate the land for safety reasons were reimbursed upon presentation of original sales document.¹¹⁴

There was also the Norbert–Peace Commission which was constituted shortly after the Bawock returned from Bamenda where they had taken refuge during the conflict. This was an initiative from the Fon of Bali who wanted to rebuild the social relations between two communities. Even though the Bawock had returned to Bali, they still avoided public spaces such as markets, funerals, marriage ceremonies and their farm lands for fear of confronting angry Bali youths. The mandate of the Commission was two-fold; to re-establish the social relationships between members of the two communities and seek ways to amend the broken relationship between the two Fons. Its members were mainly Bawock and Bali elites who became peace brokers. Enlarged sessions of meetings (Bawock and Bali) that included politicians and traditional leaders were organised in venues such as police stations and Safari centre in Bali, and the Fons were always invited to attend. These efforts reinstated

¹¹² Interview with Bawock elite, 14th July 2015, Bawock.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

confidence in the community. The people started coming back together and attending their markets together without fear of attack.

Furthermore, the Fon of Bali also constituted what I have termed the Niat Njifenji-Peace Commission. The Fon of Bali and his traditional cabinet, in consultation with Bali elites, decided to make peace with Bawock senior political elites who were believed to have fuelled the conflict by supporting Bawock against Bali. Bali paid a courtesy visit to Mr. Marcel Niat Njifenji when he was appointed as the president of the Cameroonian senate. Njifenji, a son of Bawock himself, is said to have had a central role in the conflict which gave Bawock the courage to despise the military prowess of Bali since they had the support of elites who wield political power. The visit was led by the Fon of Bali, himself a senator, and was meant to present an image of Bali people who were willing to coexist with Bawock in peace. The opportunity was also used to give their version of the conflict to the state man, while stretching an olive branch for peace to reign knowing he had the power to initiate real peace to reign between the two communities.

Cautious peace has since returned to Bali and Bawock communities and the population goes about their daily activities undisturbed. However, I must note that what is common about the Bali-Bawock conflict is the way both communities frame it, simply as land disputes or power struggle between the two Fons which has also determined how it has been resolved. The account of the conflict, whether publicised or not, has failed to unravel the truth about it, which leaves room for such tensions to resurface in future. Though my research may not have captured the whole truth, I have demonstrated that there are hidden truths. The truths that are hidden in both communities relate to the everyday character of the events that led to the conflict and how such events connect with the Fons, the elites, the state and the local people themselves. These hidden truths have to do with the interests of those individuals or groups who declare their sympathy with the alleged victims of atrocities and their condemnation of those they perceive as the aggressors or at least those who allow such attacks to happen. That interest is basically that nothing be done to disturb the position of those who benefit from inciting such conflicts. These hidden truths have to do with

provocation by people with a stake in the conflict given that the conflict is embedded in unresolved and evolving power struggles between the institutions of the two Fons. The hidden truth also has to do with unresolved boundary issues in Bali sub division embedded in colonial legacies. There is also the linguistic community rivalry in Bali which plays into the Anglophone and Francophone divide in Cameroon. Beyond land claims, the conflict is also about electoral politics and the territorial turf wars within the Mezam division which includes Bali.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the socio-linguistic and cultural dimensions of the Bali Bawock conflict. The chapter captures the narrative of the Bali Bawock conflict and has demonstrated that the phenomenon of attempting to protect old cultural groups or create new identities and belonging has become very prominent in Mezam division. Fons and politicians have taken the initiative to create a pan-regional ethnic consciousness.

The alliance of Mbu-Pin-Wock, for example, attempted to carve out an ethno-regional power block out of neighbouring groups whose cultures are not necessarily similar, and which has no antecedent in pre-colonial history. This mapping out of ethnic groups into special constituencies or creating pan-ethnic associations remains largely a political agenda perpetuated by politicians and instrumentalised through complacent traditional leaders. It also highlights the convergence between traditional leaders and politicians, where the latter appropriate traditional spaces and how these traditional institutions become leverage for their political claims. Such claims breed contempt and generate ethnic conflicts as in the Bali-Bawock case.

I have also demonstrated that the Bawock alliance with the CONSUNDE and BINAM, or their interest to retain their Francophone identity, reflects their Bamileke consciousness. This consciousness is driven by a history of fear of the Bali military prowess but also that of increasing marginalisation, and off course, the threat of political alienation (of being an Anglophone) which resonates with the politics of belonging in Cameroon. This supports the claim by Lubkemann (2008) that political actors (in this case groups like the Bawock)

sometimes try to seize new opportunities for themselves under the pretext of socio-economic empowerment for marginalised ethnic categories. To give these claims enough grounds for justification, such identity awareness among the Bawock is premised on a history of dislocation and disintegration from their one-time brothers in the Western region.

This chapter also demonstrates that the Bali-Bawock conflict is driven by the scarcity of land among communities that rely largely on agriculture for a living. To establish ownership of such lands, each community creates contested oral narratives of their histories to justify their ownership of such disputed territories. Such contested histories constitute the processes of mobilisation that Brass (1997) and Tambiah (1996) have identified, where local issues are magnified beyond their local contexts. This chapter demonstrates how conflict deepens processes of othering, and histories get revisited and retold to suit contemporary purposes.

Furthermore, I have indicated that Bali Nyonga is largely a heterogeneous fondom with groups that have unique cultural attributes. What this means is that the persistent claims of Bali Nyonga hegemony over very ambitious groups like Bawock have affected the relationship between the groups and this partly contributed to the Bali-Bawock conflict. Even the efforts of the Bawock to break away from Bali has met strong resistance from other restricted local identities like the people of Mantum-village, who also have a conflicting interest that tends to undermine the quest by Mbu, Pinyin and Bawock to expand their ethno-political frontiers. Ethnic borders could expand or contract, groups may choose to belong or not belong depending on the interest at stake (Le Vine 1997; Brubaker 2002 p. 167). The cases of Bawock and Mantum in Bali and Mbu and Pinyin in Santa, reinforce these notions about ethnic belonging in Cameroon.

This chapter has also explored the intersection between traditional authorities and the state in post conflict peace building. The Bali-Bawock conflict had affected the social relations between the two communities and curtailed the power of women, children and the elderly to go about their daily economic activities in a community that heavily relies on subsistence farming. This also implies that the collectively held norms, rights and culture between Bali and Bawock that functioned before the conflict were interrupted because of the unfavourable environment caused by the conflict. Any effective peace building effort needed a

complementary approach between the state and the local initiatives. It was this collaborative approach that reassured the returnee's right to freedom of movement, right to live in peace and their right to education in schools that are mostly in Bali communities. A collaborative approach enabled the state to adopt indigenous ideas which are more inclined to utilize rituals that foster collective 'healing' than methods that emphasized confrontation and zero-sum/power bargaining which have become common in many peacebuilding activities (Burton, 1990). The next chapter looks at the political dimensions of the Bali-Bawock conflict in comparison to how elite politics works out in Kom and the kind of tensions that it produces.

CHAPTER 7: THE INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ETHNIC SENTIMENTS: THE DYNAMICS IN KOM AND BALI IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

7.0 Introduction

This Chapter is about how elites politicise traditional institutions in Bali and Kom. The previous chapter on the Bali-Bawock conflict showed how the dynamics of group making as a socio-cultural and a political project is often designed during conflicts to transform categories to increased levels of what Brubaker (2002) calls 'groupness'. Such dynamics according to Brubaker (2002) and Brass (1997) can also make particular aspects of identity more salient. This chapter builds on chapter six to examine the political aspects of the Bali-Bawock conflict. I argue that appreciating the underlying political dimensions of the conflict is essential for understanding it. The Bali-Bawock conflict lies in the appeal to, and use of, a contested, inherently exclusive and unstable discourse of culturally distinct communities with discrete territoriality. Claims by local communities of distinct territoriality are used by political elites and even ordinary citizens in contexts of heightened competition, increased attention to, and uneven local development.

Theoretically, this chapter draws partly from Brubaker (2002) to demonstrate how micro-level politics have helped to crystallise ethnic groups through deepening inter-ethnic divisions in the Bali-Bawock conflict. I use Brubaker's (2002) concept of 'groupism' to explain how elite politics have influenced group crystallisation in Bali and how there is the risk of having such groups emerge in Kom. The current levels of tension in Kom could be exploited by politicians, to mobilise them into violence for their own political interests. Drawing on the experience of Bali, this chapter illustrates that there are similar risks of future tensions considering the growing reification of groups (cf. Brubaker 2002), given the elite politics in Kom. Brubaker (2002) notes that to limit our understanding of conflict through the pre-established proposition groups that groups are the basic constituents or units of understanding ethnic conflicts, obscures our ability to understand how such groups themselves come to existence, that is, the *a priori* processes that lead to group crystallisation.

I also draw on Bayart (1993), Chabal and Daloz (1999) and Nyamnjoh (2002) to highlight how local issues are instrumentalised by political elites. It is important to note that the instrumentalisation of ethnic identities by what Brubaker (2002) calls 'ethno-political entrepreneurs' is what provides political elites with the means to mobilise support for political offices at the national level. To further emphasise the role of political entrepreneurs in local conflicts, I will draw on the theoretical perspectives of Tambiah (1997), Brass (1997), Eriksen (2002) and Lynch (2011) to show how issues such as electoral competition remain a strategy used and endorsed by political elites to secure their positions in national politics. The local people also benefit from such electoral competition through patrimonialism, to gain access to land and other resources.

The first part of this chapter shows how local ethnic politics in Bali are inherently intertwined with politics at the national level and efforts of groups to access state resources, but these are couched in local perceptions, memories and struggles. The second section of this chapter looks at the activities of politicians in Kom, which is compared with elite politics in Bali in the third section. I contend that Kom politicians have a weaker relationship with traditional leaders compared with those of Bali. The disconnection between Kom political elites and traditional institutions has affected the intermediary role that both politicians and traditional authorities could play between the state and local communities in Cameroon. In Kom, the chapter illustrates how politicians struggle to gain and exercise authority locally, and in collaboration with local state bureaucrats have generated local tensions. These tensions have so far, not escalated into a violent conflict due to the strong relationship that the Fon has with his subjects.

7.1 Elites and politicisation of traditional institutions in Bali

The Bali–Bawock conflict should be understood within the wider framework of political dynamics in Mezam Division in the North-West Region and the strong desire by political elites at the divisional level of the state to maintain influence over their local constituencies. This desire to control local constituencies and to use traditional leaders as the avenue to access blocks of votes – or what I call 'vote banks' – helps politicians to consolidate their positions

in the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) party. Bali people contend that one of the main causes of the Bali-Bawock conflict was the attempt by Santa politicians, to separate Bawock people from Bali. This was meant to reduce numerical strength of Bali subdivision as an electoral district, and to shift the advantage of Santa sub division.¹¹⁵ The micro dynamics of the conflict were explained in chapter six. These dynamics coincide with supra-local political change in the region and Cameroon at large.

The circumstances that led to the conflict in 2006-2007 and the role of politicians can be understood through the events that have defined the political climate in the North-West, particularly in Mezam Division where Bali and Santa sub divisions are situated. I will begin this section by reviewing the political dynamics underpinning the most recent tensions that engulfed the Bawock and Bali in 2013. I argue that the tensions were orchestrated by politicians in the very first senatorial elections that took place in Cameroon in 2013. These tensions almost triggered a fresh round of violence and reflect similar events that led to the 2006-2007 conflict.

A 1996 Constitutional amendment in Cameroon called for the establishment of a 100-seat upper house, the Senate. The creation of the Senate however was not constituted until the 14th of April 2013 when elections were conducted to establish the Senate for the very first time. According to the 1996 Constitutional amendment, senators were to be elected through an electoral college consisting of municipal councillors. Each administrative region was to be represented in the Senate by 10 Senators. Seventy of the Senators were to be indirectly elected by an electoral college consisting of municipal councillors while 30 were to be appointed by the president. This meant that 70 members of the 10 regions were to be chosen by electors from 360 local councils in Cameroon and the President was to appoint the 30 remaining Senators.

The political climate became tense in the North-West when CPDM political elites in the party's primaries began fighting over the candidate's list, that is, the people that were to

¹¹⁵ Santa is a neighbouring sub division and like Bali, Santa also aspires to be made a full Division. Both Bali and Santa are currently Sub Divisions within the Mezam division in the North-West Region of Cameroon.

compete against the opposition party, the SDF. These tensions generated a rift between two members of the CPDM party, the Fon of Bali and Mr. Achidi Achu, who both hold key positions in the CPDM central committee. Achidi Achu is a Santa politician who served as the Prime Minister of Cameroon from 1992 to 1996. He also served as Minister of Justice in Cameroon from 1972 to 1975. Though retired, he remains a leading member of CPDM and was appointed as Chairman of the National Investment Corporation in 2003. Within the CPDM party primaries, Mr. Achidi and Fon Gayongha each competed for their respective senate candidate lists to be approved by the party. Interviewees in Bali contend that through the influence of Mr. Achidi, the list put forward by the Bali Fon was rejected by the party hierarchy, while Mr. Achidi's list went through without opposition. As noted by one of the informants in Bali:

Pa Achidi is a big man in the CPDM, bigger than our Fon. Fon Gayongha's list could not be approved against that of Pa Achidi. We know as a fact that the list of the Fon was rejected even before it was submitted to the evaluation committee.¹¹⁶

In his list, Mr. Achidi appointed the Fon of Bawock as his running mate (Known as the alternate Senator). The CPDM emerged victorious in the polls, defeating the SDF to represent the North-West Region in the Senate. This sparked tension in Bali because Fon Gayongha was obliged by party ethics to campaign for the Senatorial list which had the Fon of Bawock as a candidate and not him. One Bali elite recounted the experience in the following words:

We saw our Fon in pains as he raised the hand of the Bawock Fon and asked his electorate to vote massively for the CPDM. He had no choice, he had to respect the party rules. To us Bali people that was humiliating and it showed us that Bali was standing all on their own in the North-West and we needed to fight if we aim at achieving anything. The region showed clearly that they were against us.¹¹⁷

The implication of this was that the Fon of Bawock became an alternate Senator within the Bali constituency, to the ridicule of the Bali Fon. Tensions heightened in Bali as many Bali

¹¹⁶ Interview with Bali elder, 5th of July 2015, Bali.

¹¹⁷ Interview with a Bali informant, 4th July 2015, Bali.

elites interpreted this act as a further attempt by Mr. Achidi – in collusion with other regional elites to further denigrate their Fon. This humiliation was further compounded when the Fon of Bawock was recognised as a deputy Senator¹¹⁸ in the North-West against the Bali Fon.¹¹⁹ The stalemate was only diffused when the President of Cameroon, in an effort to calm the tensions, appointed the Fon of Bali into the Senate. The Fon of Bawock commented on this saying:

When I was made alternate Senator to Mr. Achidi, people were grumbling everywhere in Bali. Today he [the Fon of Bali] is a Senator earning big money and I am just an alternate with no salary except the name. Nobody is saying anything... Well, thank God for the President of Cameroon because I envisaged real danger when the Fon's list was rejected while I was made alternate to Pa Achidi.¹²⁰

Such political manoeuvring in Mezam seriously affects the relationship between Bali and Bawock and threatens the fragile peace between the two communities. For Mr. Achidi to appoint the Fon of Bawock as a running mate rather than the Fon of Bali (in other words, a second class Fon against the Fon of Bali who is one of only five first class Fons in the North-West) only exacerbated the power struggle between the two Fons (see Chapter Six), which could easily have provoked new tensions between the two communities.

Chabal and Daloz (1999) have commented on this kind of political instrumentalisation of disorder in Africa. Although they contend that successful political elites in Africa are those who can offer sufficiently meaningful order by way of relating and responding to the expectations of their followers, they also note that where the political instrumentalisation of disorder remains a resource, it becomes almost inevitable that conflicts are liable to occur. Such politicisation of events in Bali and Bawock resonates with the above assertion by Chabal

¹¹⁸ The Fon of Bawock became deputy Senator when the CPDM won over the SDF in the senatorial elections in the North-West. Before then, he was the running mate or alternate Senator in the proposed CPDM list.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Interview with the Fon of Bawock, 7th of June 2015, Bawock.

and Daloz (1999), where political elite figures like Mr. Achidi through their actions promoted tensions rather than peaceful coexistence in a society already marred with ethnic cleavages.

Further, a common characteristic of multiparty politics in Cameroon (as with elsewhere in Africa) is the use of neo-traditional institutions like chieftaincies by elites as a means of mobilising political support and reasserting influence over local populations (Eyoh 1998). Multiparty politics in Cameroon has seen power struggles at all levels in society. For authoritarian regimes and elites accustomed to governing through administrative orders, threat of, and occasional use of violence to demonstrate their power and authority, multiparty politics has required new mechanisms to exercise political influence in local spaces. The political struggle between Mr. Achidi and the Fon of Bali demonstrates that the tendency of elites to use neo-traditional institutions and appeals to regionalist sentiments is driven by competitive pressures within the new political system (Eyoh 1998). Because success for elites in the struggle for political power depends on controlling the votes in local spaces, it drives intense rivalry amongst elites for local/ regional political leadership. I argue, the risk of conflict did not only arise from the rejection of the Fon of Bali's Senatorial list, rather through political elites exploiting existing local tensions (in this case between the Bali and Bawock Fons) to advance their own political aspirations.

Political elite figures like Mr. Achidi are what Tambiah (1996) refers to as political entrepreneurs who promote tensions, and sometimes violence between competing groups. Such acts, according to Tambiah (1996), are part of a routine politics in competitive political systems which are purposefully perpetuated in order to gain political advantage. Brass (1997) notes that even when such acts do not deliberately instigate violence, they still constitute part of the competitive political game to create and magnify local tensions, promote violent movements and incite rivals and their supporters to a point where violence becomes almost unavoidable. Mr. Achidi is accused by both a number of local state administrators who have worked in Bali and by Bali interviewees (even some Bawock elites), to have fuelled the Bali-Bawock conflict in 2006-2007.¹²¹ Many still hold the view that he

¹²¹ Interview with a local state administrator, 26th of May, 2015.

continues to do so through the patron client relationships that he has with the Bawock people and their Fon. Some interviewees in Bawock have even accused the elites and Mr. Achidi directly saying:

It is a shame in the North-West that instead of setting the pace, the region is unfortunately pushed to the back through the selfish ambitions of some elites like Pa Achidi... elites talk peace but fan the flames of conflict. The Bali Bawock-conflict is a symptom of a foul disease plaguing the region. The elites are those financing the conflicts then they turn around and provide aid pretending to be philanthropists... they manipulate the Fons and ridicule them¹²²

Such actions in Mezam are illustrative of how political elites maintain power by controlling (dis)order within local communities. Wolff (2006) and Nasong'o (2015) contend that the 'ethnicization of politics' (Wolf 2006) and the 'politicisation of ethnicity' (Nasong'o 2015) is the instrumentalist creation of political elites. Ethnicity in such cases is a tool to mobilise support vis-à-vis opponents and to create patronage and loyalty. Ethnicity is thus a tool in the hands of political elites who may choose to support the prevailing (dis)order at any given time depending on their interests at stake. Political elites do this in order to protect their wellbeing or position or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves (Bayart 1993). In the next sub-section, I look at the Bali-Bawock conflict as a reflection of the interest of political elites within Mezam division to carve out new administrative units that can guarantee them visibility in national politics.

¹²² Interview with a Bawock notable, 25th July 2015, Bawock.

7.1.1 Administrative Area Splitting: Territory and Rights

Bali and Santa subdivisions have advocated to the central state to be made full divisional administrative units in the North-West Region. Both communities anticipate that this would lead to greater resources and related improvements in social amenities like roads, hospitals, institutions of higher learning, and security services which currently are limited within these two subdivisions. However, both Bali and Santa do not meet the territorial and population requirements as set by the state of Cameroon to acquire the status of a full division. Santa and Bali would each need Bawock to sit within their territorial boundaries to reach the sufficient size. In an interview with one of the local newspapers, the Fon of Bawock did not conceal his wish of wanting to join Santa: 'I am more comfortable to be part of a division that wants me than one that sets my village ablaze'.¹²³

On the whole, the populace in Mezam division, of which both Bali and Santa are administrative sub-regions, has historically supported the SDF party. However, Santa subdivision has long attempted, without success, to turn the tide of events in favour of CPDM. The willingness of the Bawock Fon to join Santa appeals to the political elites in Santa because such a union could boost electoral support for the CPDM, which it needs to stay in power at the national level. Political elites from Santa are acutely aware of the risks to their influence in national politics given that the national chairman of the SDF, Ni John Fru Ndi, comes from the Santa subdivision. This is also the birth place of the influential Mr. Achidi mentioned earlier. Interviewees suggested that if Bawock was added to Santa, Bawock would provide the required votes to help the transition of Santa from SDF to CPDM. The Bali informants and some of local state administrators I talked to in the field contend that the desire to turn the tide of events in Mezam Division in favour of the CPDM, underlie the main cause of the conflict between Bali and Bawock.¹²⁴

In the views of most Bali interviewees, the attempt to map out land for Bawock in the presence of political elites from neighbouring communities (see Chapter Six) suggests that

¹²³ The Fon of Bawock in an Interview with the post newspaper no. 0683 of Monday, 11th July, 2005.

¹²⁴ Interview with a Bali informant, 4th July 2015, Bali.

these elites had a strong influence over the Bawock Fon in attempting to bring Bawock into the Santa subdivision. In so doing, political elites in Mezam attempted to create a new regional identity and new borders within the region that had no pre-colonial antecedents and arguably was simply for their political gain.

Lynch (2011) provides an insightful analysis of the dynamic and open-ended process of ethnic construction and politicisation that focuses on one of the communities (the Kalenjin) that featured prominently 2007 post-election violence in Kenya. She provides an analysis of the Kalenjin and their position in Kenya's contentious ethnic politics. Lynch shows how the constructive imagination of the Kalenjin depended not only on the manipulation of history, but also the importance of creative political intrigue. She contends that in a society where ethnic groups are often recent constructs, popular perceptions regarding their evolution, social justice, threat and opportunity and the ways in which these narratives are shaped and channelled by political elites become very important.

In line with Lynch's (2011) analysis of political opportunities, what we notice in Bali-Bawock conflict is that the Bawock people, for fear of marginalisation and exclusion (from Bali) and the assumed benefits of amalgamation (with the Santa people), initiated the construction of a new identity. The process was intensified by mass politicisation perpetuated by local political elites. This is because it is often the politicisation of these processes, rather than the inequalities per-se, that accounts for the origin and development of local categories of 'us' and 'other'. It also sets the precedence and emotive appeal of hate rhetoric and exclusive politics between communities which often results to violent confrontations (Lynch 2011 p. 52). Whereas the early signals of the of Bali-Bawock conflict could have been identified and the risk of violence mitigated, this was not the case. This was because political entrepreneurs (in this case, people like Achidi, the fons and other elites) see the political benefits from facilitating such conflicts to degenerate into violent conflicts (Brass 1997). One Bawock interviewee noted that:

Our properties and homes would not have been destroyed if only the big men of this region saw the early signs of the danger when our Fon [Bawock Fon] was

*almost killed during the land demarcation incident... People needed to talk some sense to the two Fons.*¹²⁵

The effort to link Bawock to Santa not only promoted violence, it also informed the articulation and positioning of a new ethnic cleavage (Bawock) which was supported by politicians like Mr. Achidi. Tambiah (1997), though writing within the context of South Asia, opines that acts like these are often efforts by political elites to mobilise local support bases. Such mobilisation helped to elect the CPDM in the North-West into the Senate, which enables the elected politicians to continuously influence national politics in their best interest. Certainly, the fear of continuous SDF political domination in Mezam pushed political elites to manipulate administrative boundaries between Bali and Bawock to acquire the votes that the CPDM would require to defeat the opposition.

In Bawock, amalgamation with Santa was perceived as a way to defend and promote their local interests against the economically and politically dominant Bali. The most important issues were the claims to political power and access to land, and associated control over resources and rights to political authority within ethnic spheres of influence. Such focalised claims (cf. Tambiah 1997) gave political elites the opportunity to magnify grievances and then mobilise the Bawock to demand a boundary demarcation with Bali, which in turn generated tensions and ultimately violence. In the light of such political processes Tambiah (1997) contends that processes of communication and mobilisation perpetuated by political elites play a critical role in escalating local tensions. As he notes, in competitive electoral politics the instrumentalisation of collective ethnic identity and entitlement, linguistic and territorial legacies drive people/groups to engage with heightened emotions in community conflicts with extreme violence (Tambiah 1997).

On the side of the fons, their ability to mobilise their communities to serve specific interests was captured in this quote by the Fon of Bawock who state stated:

¹²⁵ Interview with a Bawock notable, 25th July 2015, Bawock.

*Let me be honest with you, approximately 90 % of my community I guess is SDF, but given the present politics in the Bali and Santa subdivisions, we need to support our sons and daughters who can speak on our behalf in government. We can only do this by voting for the party that appointed them, which we also think would support us the most.*¹²⁶

The above quote connects traditional leaders in Bali with politicians as they position themselves within their constituencies as controllers of vote banks. Next, I examine how political elites in collaboration with the Fons of Bali and Bawock and the local state administration could work together despite their differences to ensure a CPDM victory in Bali against the SDF.

7.1.2 Political access and exclusion: Fons as controllers of vote banks

An elite strategy that helped to fuel the Bali-Bawock conflict was the ploy orchestrated by the traditional leaders and political elites, in collaboration with the local state administration, to defeat the SDF in 2007 in Bali. A senior state administrator in Bali recounted how the administration, in collaboration with the Fons of Bali, Bawock and the CPDM elites, connived to oust the SDF from the Bali Nyonga council which they had controlled since 1996. Christopher Nyamsikwen was the SDF mayor to the Bali Rural Council before the outbreak of the Bali-Bawock conflict on the 6th of March 2007. His administration had been accused by the Bawock people of masterminding the attack and excluding Bawock in local development projects.¹²⁷ These accusations were magnified by his political opponents in the CPDM. Some Bawock interviewees directly accused the mayor of leading the Bali youths who destroyed their homes and looted their properties.

One member of the Bawock traditional council noted: the mayor, the mayor, the mayor... How many times did I call his name? ... He led the attack and hated the

¹²⁶ Interview with the Fon of Bawock, 48, 7th of June 2015, Bawock.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

*Bawock with passion. This was regrettable because we voted him into that office.*¹²⁸

These accusations led to a profound hatred for the SDF in Bawock, which hitherto was an SDF stronghold that had assisted the previous SDF mayors in achieving victory in Bali. The accusations also led to an anti-Nyamsikwen sentiment in Bawock, who was seeking to be re-elected in the upcoming polls in July 2007. Although there was still very high animosity between the Fons of Bali and Bawock and the communities in general, the administration, together with CPDM elites, exploited the stalemate that had set in between the Bawock and the SDF leaders to their advantage.

The subsequent political strategy sought to oust the SDF from the Bali Nyonga Rural Council. The SDF council list that was put forward by Nyamsikwen was rejected by the administration for not conforming to the provisions of the law. The law requires that members of council lists from all political parties should consider the various demographic components of the district, including the representation of ethnic minorities and gender representation. Activating this clause marked the beginning of the end for the SDF dominating the Bali Rural Council. The administration, together with the political elites and the fons, ensured that no Bawock person accepted the offer, to be included in the council list that the SDF were constituting. This was to ensure that the SDF list did not meet the conditions to represent minorities as required by law. Challenged by this, the SDF submitted a council list in which the indigeneity of the Bawock representative in it was highly contested by CPDM elites.

Political elites from Bawock through their Fon contested the eligibility of the Bawock representative on the SDF list, first, on the grounds that one of his parents comes from Bali and second, that the said individual had spent all his life in Bali.¹²⁹ Most informants, both in Bali and Bawock confirmed that it was largely a political strategy by the CPDM elites to frustrate those proposing the SDF Council list. They argued that the Bawock representative in the SDF council list would have qualified as a Bawock person because his father is from

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Interview with the Divisional Officer for Bali, 26th May 2015, Bali.

Bawock, but that the two Fons of Bali and Bawock, together with local political elites and local administrators, collaborated with each other to disqualify the list.¹³⁰ They did this through claiming that Bawock as a minority group in Bali was not included in the SDF Council list. The result was that the SDF list was disqualified, while that of the CPDM was approved to run without any opposition.¹³¹

The role of Bawock in the defeat of the SDF in the Bali Rural Council elections underlies to the accusation that Nyamsikwen led the Bali youths that burnt down Bawock homes. The politicisation of the events that led to the conflict in 2006-2007, where Nyamsikwen and the SDF were accused of the invasion of Bawock, sharpened Bawock narratives of historical injustice. It also supported the use of an appealing but fraught politics of ethnic belonging that cast the mayor and the SDF as a party that discriminated against the Bawock ethnic minority. Bawock resentment, fears and opportunities became interwoven in a bigger political agenda perpetuated by political elites and local state bureaucrats for gaining political office. The perceived discrimination against Bawock by the SDF fuelled an anti-SDF stance which led to a collective rejection of the party in Bawock. In this context, the CPDM's promise of redistribution, their appeal to communal narrative of past wrongs by SDF against the Bawock, and their inclusion of key Bawock representatives in key council positions (such as the deputy mayor) effectively mobilised a strong Bawock support base for the CPDM.

From this understanding, it is clear that political elites fostered a sense of ethnic division between Bali and Bawock prior to the municipal elections in 2007. Such strategies for gaining power are not peculiar with the Bali-Bawock conflict. Lynch (2011) also observed similar dynamics in the post-electoral crisis in Kenya in 2007. Horowitz (1991) calls such strategies of gaining power as 'vote –pooling with profit' where the need to win an election is what obliges political elites to offer or ostensibly claim to offer protection to minorities (Horowitz 1991 p.177). Whereas the tensions between Bali and Bawock were largely fostered by those whose political interest it served, it is also true that the conflict reflected the desire by

¹³⁰ Interview with Bali elite, 7th July 2015 Bamenda.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Bawock people to liberate themselves from political exclusion and economic marginalisation, factors which helped to shape their collective history of injustice. As a result, the interest of the political elites and the grassroots in this way became aligned.

7.1.3 Struggle over parliamentary constituencies

The Bali-Bawock conflict, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Six, welds together issues of land ownership, ethnicity and history. Rival claims over scarce resources (land) are rationalized by traditional claims over disputed territories. However, the Bali-Bawock conflict goes beyond these claims. The conflict also reflects the struggle over parliamentary constituencies in the Mezam division. This struggle over representation has led to the splitting of the Bali-Santa constituency to give Santa its own seat in the national assembly while Bali has been added to the largely contested Bamenda parliamentary seat within the Mezam division. Parliamentary constituencies do not necessarily follow the boundaries of administrative divisions. While Santa has not been upgraded to a full administrative division, they have been given a special constituency. This, the Bali people argue, was unjust and the Fon of Bali expressed his dissatisfaction in the following words:

The separation between Bali and the Santa parliamentary constituency does not help the problem. The fact that Santa now has a special constituency within Mezam in the North-West Region, which we Bali people have also been vying for, goes a long way to prove that the big detractors are out to destroy everything that is good for Bali. The special constituency they have was meant for Bali...we have now been lumped [the rest of Mezam Division] with Bamenda central. Bamenda has several subdivisions and this puts Bali in a situation worse than a stalemate.¹³²

If one looks at the Bali-Bawock conflict as a struggle over parliamentary seats, one is most likely to say the competition over the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies helped to escalate the conflict in 2007. The politics of 'special constituency' stands in contrast to Bali

¹³² Interview with the Fon of Bali, 26 July 2015, Bali.

political philosophy (cf. Ndangam 2014).¹³³ Its political philosophy supports diversity, but the new boundaries create the opportunity to emphasise exclusive ethnic identities. These efforts have inadvertently generated competition between Bali and Bawock (where the Bawock people have sought to redefine their identity in the region in order to join the Santa special constituency) at the expense of cooperation and conviviality.

The rise of the politics of special constituencies at the sub-national level in Cameroon reflects a national politics of self-serving political entrepreneurs and regional political elites seeking personal platforms and the approval of the ruling party bureaucracy (Bayart 1993; Mbuagbo & Akoko 2004). In the context of the Bali-Bawock conflict, the phenomenon of the special constituency becomes a way by which political elites adapt their national cause to suit their local political contexts and contingencies. The reproduction of the national political agenda to their local spheres is what Tambiah (1996) calls 'parochialization'. To him, the concepts of 'nationalisation and parochialization' are interrelated through a combined top-down, centre-to-periphery process.

Tambiah (1996) contends that examining the way local micro-events become incorporated at the national level (focalisation and transvaluation) and the ways in which national events (like national parliamentary electoral politics in the case of Bali and Bawock) work themselves into local politics, networks and interests, helps provide an understanding of ethnic conflicts and how they tap directly into broader political dynamics and their path to collective violence. The progressive involvement of the whole community of Bali and Bawock resulted from the instrumentalisation of local issues like boundary disputes and contentious parliamentary constituencies by political entrepreneurs who use political rhetoric to appeal to people's emotions. They did this by emphasising the advantages that each community stood to benefit from such exclusive politics. According to Tambiah (1996) such political rhetoric often takes the issues of contestation beyond the limits of the local contest.

¹³³ Bali political values promoted diversity, the need for different groups to cooperate within the community, a will of peaceful internal co-existence.

The events in Bali and Bawock resonate with what Mbuagbo and Akoko (2004) contend reflects the broader state of affairs in Cameroon. They argue the state in Cameroon has been reduced to a theatre of political warfare among the politicians, as each struggle to obtain strategic resources for themselves and their ethnic groups. The state structures, especially at the grass roots, become instruments used by political elites to maintain monopoly of power as long as they can provide the regime with the relevant electoral support.

How much a region can receive from state funded projects depends on how close they are to the centre of power (Mbuagbo & Akoko 2004). In this case, we see how local political dynamics are linked to national politics as intimated by Tambiah (1996). In situations where political elites are unable to maintain influence and control over their local traditional institutions to enable them stay in power, new tensions have developed as political elites try to influence traditional authorities to serve as vote banks, which connect them with national politics. In the next section, I will discuss how elite politics have played out in Kom where politicians have been unable to control the traditional institutions.

7.2 Local elites and the politicisation of traditional institutions in Kom

Compared to Bali, Kom's political elites have weaker ties with traditional leaders. Through lack of cooperation with the traditional leaders in Kom, political elites have failed to obtain the kind of influence within their local communities that is needed by politicians in Cameroon to be appointed into key positions. What they lack is the influence and power that links elites to their home villages, but also with the state resources needed for redistribution in local communities. This disconnection between elites and traditional institutions in Kom has affected Kom politicians, in the intermediary role that elites are generally perceived to play between the state and local communities in Cameroon. Kom political elites thus have limited relevance within the Kom context in this regard. In their struggle to regain such local influence, most of the Kom politicians connive with the local administration to usurp traditional power in Kom.

The struggle between political elites and traditional authorities in Kom has given rise to local tensions. Although such tensions have so far remained latent (due to the relatively strong

relationships between the traditional leaders and local communities in Kom) politicians have inadvertently sown the seeds of discord between the traditional leaders and the administration on the one hand, and, on the other hand, between the Kom traditional administration in Laikom and some political elites who have continuously manipulated traditional institutions in Kom for selfish interest. I will use the case of the Kom Royal Supreme Council (KRSC) created in 2014 to illustrate the nature of elite politics in Kom and how these dynamics create challenges to the prevailing peace. I will then use the succession crisis in the royal compounds (royal compounds are homes owned by the royal family and serve as a nursery and a formation centre in Kom future Fons) in Kom to illustrate this point.

7.2.1 Administrative governance; rights and privileges: The birth of the Kom Royal Supreme Council

On the 24th of November 2014, a group of elites met at the Kom Palace in Laikom for a meeting which was presided by HRH the Fon of Kom, Fon Vincent Yuh II. The overall idea was to transform Ankia-a-Kom (the Kom think-tank) into a new regulatory organ which would be called *The Kom Royal Supreme Council*.¹³⁴ With an original objective of discussing the creation of a tourism board for the Kom fondom, the discussions evolved with great enthusiasm for creating an institution that could define the way forward for reforms in Kom.¹³⁵ Among the critical issues discussed were the refurbishing of the palace, a review of the behaviour of palace retainers (stewards who assist in the day to day running of the palace) who often accompany the Fon, and the need to redress misinterpretation of Kom tradition and culture both within and outside of Kom.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Interview with a Kom political elite, 3th July 2015, Fundong.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Interview with a Kom elite, 4th of May 2015 Belo-Kom.

7.2.2 Political Inclusion and Exclusion: The demise of the KRSC

The KRSC was barely seven months into its existence after its official launch on the 30th of May 2015, when the Fon placed a ban on its activities. All Kom sons and daughters, both at home and abroad, were forbidden to make any contributions that were intended for the KRSC. The banning of the KRSC was provoked by a speech that the SDO for Boyo Division presented at the Kom Palace. The SDO in his address on the 3rd of January 2016 at the annual dance festival of the Kom fondom (Ibyn festival) made provocative remarks, stirring tensions at the palace and casting doubts in the minds of the Laikom administration about the credibility of the KRSC. In his speech, the SDO referred to the Kom traditional cabinet as 'hooligans', who lacked the interest to safeguard the Kom culture, which he noted was also a part of national heritage. He argued that Kom traditional leaders had abandoned the community's tradition and culture, leaving it in the hands of unskilled persons who were only out to promote their personal gains.¹³⁷

Premised on this notion of Kom being ruled by 'hooligans', and to the astonishment of the Kom public, the SDO called on the KRSC to become fully operational. To further support his claim, the SDO posited that the paramount Fon of Kom was old. He needed to be guided in the execution of his duties as the sacred and secular ruler of the Kom people by other educated Kom elites. Whereas the above declaration by the SDO did not sit well with those in Kom who listened to him, a conspiracy became almost very imminent only when the SDO declared:

In the execution of their duties, the committee members are required to append their visas [signatures] in each correspondence that must be forwarded to the administration or any government official before the signature of the paramount Fon, which should be his Tom-print. Consequently, the committee [KRSC] must forward to the administration, copy of correspondence carrying their visas which would be forwarded to quarters that matter [forwarding of such correspondence

¹³⁷ SDO's address at Laikom 3rd January 2016 on the occasion of the Ibyn festival.

to higher offices from regional to national level]. The actions of this committee should not be tampered with by anybody whoseever, not even the nephew or niece of the Fon [who are by tradition those who succeed the Fon and the Queen mother respectively] ... Any correspondence addressed to the administration without the visas of the committee members and the Tom-print of the Paramount ruler of Kom will be rejected and considered null and void[sic].¹³⁸

The endorsement of the KRSC by the SDO led to the banning of the organisation in Kom. It was perceived by the Fon and majority of the community members who attended the event that some political elites had connived with the SDO to restrict the power of the Fon in Kom to the favour of those political elites. One interviewee, a Kom notable, said: *'Today's Kom political elites struggle to bury Kom to satisfy their selfish political gains'*.¹³⁹ The SDO in his speech had approved the supremacy of the KRSC over the Fon when he stated that every correspondence from the Fon needed the endorsement of the KRSC to be legitimate. The implication was that the Fon could not petition against anything that stood contrary to the interest of the political elites, given that the Fon needed their endorsement to forward such petitions to the appropriate quarters.

For the Kom traditional leadership and the Kom people who attended the Ibyn festival, it was inadmissible that it was the SDO and not the Fon who had the jurisdiction to authorise the KRSC to become fully operational, given that, in principle, the KRSC was created by the Fon. Although the Fon was not directly behind the creation of the KRSC, the elites needed his authority to enable the Kom people to embrace the KRSC idea. The Fon was also in his capacity as paramount ruler of Kom the chairperson of the KRSC, a position that he was meant to retain throughout his life time.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ SDO's address at Laikom 3rd January 2016 on the occasion of the Ibyn festival.

¹³⁹ Interview with a Kom political elite, 3th July 2015, Fundong.

¹⁴⁰ Article 29 of the KRSC reads 'The President shall (a) be the Fon of Kom; (b) convene and chair meetings of the General assembly and Council. (c) his term of Office shall be for life'.

Although the KRSC was created for the sole purpose of development, the SDO in his address insinuated that there were other implicit functions that were ascribed to the development organisation. The Fon's correspondence (without the signatures of KRSC members) to the administration were to be considered null and void. At the centre of the SDO's speech was the power struggle between the Fon and the elites who constituted the KRSC. The KRSC was to be more powerful than the Fon in Kom if they needed to append their signatures to make royal documents authentic. This appeared as a shift in Kom culture and tradition, where the Fon is the spiritual and secular ruler of the fondom. It is a taboo in Kom for the Fon to co-sign documents with anybody to make them authentic, irrespective of his/her status. Such an act would reduce the royal significance of his correspondence.¹⁴¹

The KRSC also assumed upon itself a constitutional role that is reserved only for the Kwifoyn in Kom. Besides the Fon, in Kom tradition the Kwifoyn is considered as the constitutional body that enacts Kom customary laws (see chapter five). However, the KRSC was presented by the SDO to assume this role, which was also supported by a clause in the minutes of the inaugural meeting of the KRSC:

*It was observed that the Kom Royal Supreme Council can be likened to the Kom Parliament. Based on this understanding and importance, all members in future should take part in meetings in person, and not send in representatives.*¹⁴²

The idea for the KRSC to usurp traditional powers became evident during the early meetings of the organization. This was despite the remarks of the Fon, who had urged that members should be fully committed to serve the KRSC and its vision of development and no longer their individual political interests. In one of the Fon's remarks on the SDO speech, he had asked:

Who told the SDO about the KRSC because it was certainly not me or any of my notables whom he insulted as hooligans. Whoever told him also told him of how

¹⁴¹ Follow up telephone interview with a Kom informant, 9th of February 2016.

¹⁴² Minutes of the KRSC on the 6th of December 2014.

*to render my authority useless in Kom... we know that whoever did this must be a friend of the government and not Kom tradition.*¹⁴³

After the ban on the KRSC, some elites who were in the Palace's good records, came up with the idea of the Kom Royal Development Council (KORODECO) to correct the weakness of the KRSC. Meanwhile some prominent members of the KRSC boycotted visiting the palace for some time after the banning of the KRSC. The fact that these political elites were uncritical of the SDO's speech, to some Kom interviewees, demonstrated their desire to limit the authority of the Fon.¹⁴⁴

The failed attempt to usurp traditional powers of the Fon and the Kwifoyn through KRSC has led some of the elites to seek other means through which to discredit the Kom political system. Some have deliberately frustrated development projects in the region (Nkwi 2007), seeking the worst outcomes in a short run to bolster their legitimacy or improve their political prospects in the long run. This is frustrating development projects in collaboration with the local state administration. Just like the failed KRSC attempt, another way that the elites have stirred up tensions in Kom is by manipulating the local state administration in Kom against traditional leaders. The next subsection examines how elites have politicised issues of succession within the Kom royal family.

7.2.3 Elites and the Politicization of Succession Right Within the Kom Royal Family.

The Kom royal family traces its origin back to 1730 (see Nkwi 2011) and has accumulated properties (Royal Compounds) over the years, some of which have become highly contested by people considered to be 'outsiders' or not belonging to the royal lineage. Whereas the palace remains one of the most important assets of the royal family, other properties are scattered across Kom, including: the Fuli Royal compound, the Anyajua royal compound, the Ajin royal compound, the Mbam royal compound, the Queen Mother's royal compound (at Sho), the Njinikejem royal compound, the Belo Royal compound and other informants added

¹⁴³ The Fon Kom reaction to the SDO's speech at Laikom, 4th of January 2016.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

the Ngwah royal compound.¹⁴⁵ These royal compounds were either built by members of the royal family or acquired through wars of conquest. The management of the royal compounds has always been the exclusive affair of the Fon.¹⁴⁶

Recent events in the Kom fondom have witnessed a shift from these Kom cultural realities. On the 12th of November 2015, the SDO for Boyo Division (Kom) organized a series of meetings to install village heads, including the village head of Anyajua village. Village heads in Kom are not sacrosanct: that is, they do not have the kind of royalty that is implied in the meaning of chiefs within the context of the modern state in Cameroon.¹⁴⁷

The process of installing (by the SDO) people deemed royal ineligible by the Fon into the royal compound was preceded by a series of consultative talks. According to the administration, these talks were aimed at determining the rightful successors of the compounds in question. The SDO set up a body that set out to play the role of 'king makers' in Kom. Their task was to approve the nominated candidates into royal compounds. The fact that SDO and some political elites were able to manoeuvre people into royal compounds whom the Fon of Kom considered impostors speaks to the tensions that the Fon had with some of his political elites. The problem being that these people, installed into these royal compounds could one day succeed the Fon even though the Fon argues they are not members of the royal family.

The debate between the Fon and some of the political elites, focussed on whether the SDO and his constituted body of king makers, were in a better position to know the nephews of the Fon who are eligible to succeed him better than the Fon himself. Working together with political elites, the administration ignored the Kom laws on succession. They also ignored the state law which requires the local administrator to consult the Fon and his king makers for such positions. The SDO refused to listen to the advice of the Fon on grounds that the Fon was old and surrounded by vandals and hooligans who, in his view, were not sufficiently

¹⁴⁵ Interview with a Kom elite, 4th of May 2015 Belo-Kom.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with the Queen Mother of Kom, 23th April 2015, Sho-Kom.

¹⁴⁷ For details on the difference between village heads in Kom (Bonte) and occupants of royal compounds (who are royal heir apparent to the Kom throne) see Chapter Five.

enlightened. As highlighted in the letter below, the SDO called on elites to take central stage in determining the royal succession in Kom traditional administration.

Letter 01

From: SENIOR DIVISIONAL OFFICE FUNDONG

To: PARAMOUNT FON OF KOM

On: 17 November 2015

Subject: Re-installation of the 2nd Class chief of Anyajua on the 12 November 2015

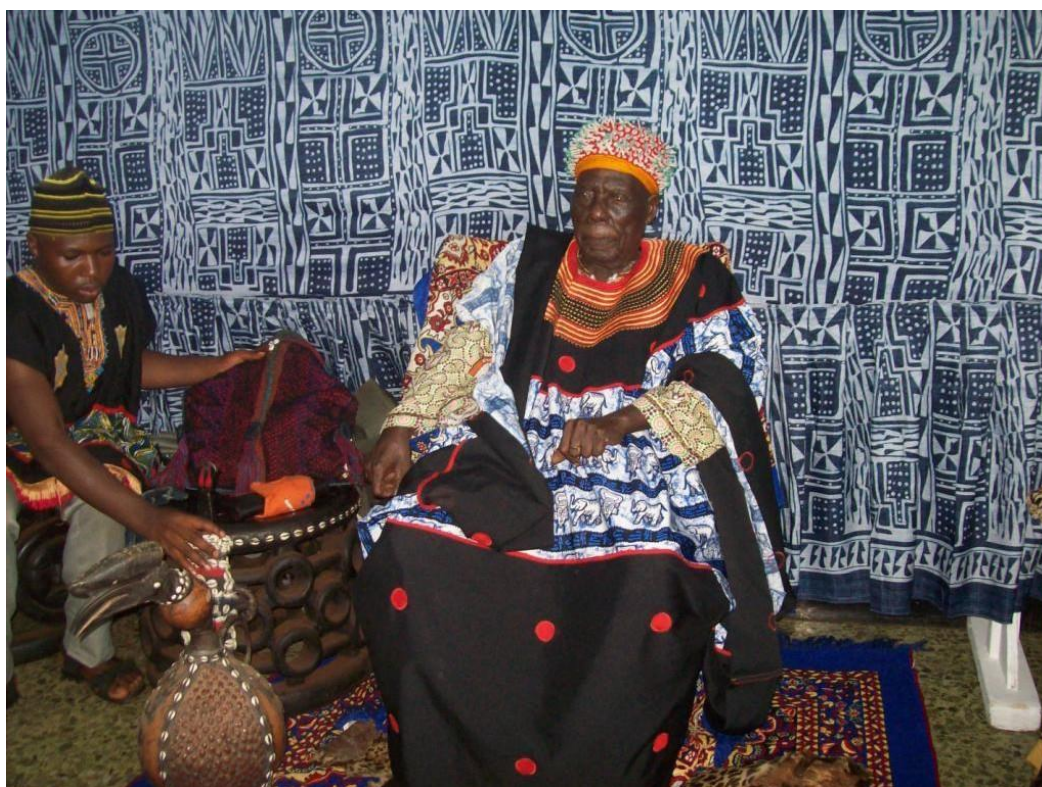
I have the honour to return herewith a copy of your correspondence to me dated 12/11/2015 with its accompanying documents same as attached, relating to the aforementioned subject as insinuated by you. In this vein, you are henceforth requested to stop sending any correspondences to me on any issue, no matter the nature of its subject. It will be of utmost importance for you to consult some of your educated elite who can guide you in your actions, rather than for you to be surrounded by 'idle hungry and good for nothing individuals' who only want to satisfy their personal ambitions. However, any correspondence from you will henceforth not be welcomed by the Administration of Boyo, as a result of your total lack of collaboration and approach to Administrative issues that need your opinion, not forgetting failure on your part to perfectly organize the functioning of your Fondom[sic].

The selection of pseudo king makers by the political elites, endorsed by the SDO, shows how such categories are also imposed, institutionalised, discursively articulated and entrenched within a society (Brubaker 1994). For the elites and the administration to have come up with king makers who then installed people of their choice into royal compounds contravenes the culture and practice of Kom. Such actions could also set controversy in the future about succession rites in Kom. It would raise questions and cast doubt on the exclusive power of the Fon to approve the legitimacy of king makers in the fondom. In retaliation the Fon made his position clear to the SDO when he wrote:

Letter 02

...It should be noted that I am not against the reclassification of chiefs in my fondom but only pray that each of these chiefs should be traditionally legitimate before being reclassified by the government. For now, my opposition is limited to the Belo and Anyajua 2nd class compounds respectively. The person who is fit to occupy the Anyajua second class chief's compound is Mr. Kini Joseph and that of Belo is Mr. Nfuo Ngwa Emmanuel.¹⁴⁸

Figure 18: The Fon of Kom and one of his palacestewards



Source: www.icameroon.com

Against the consent of the Fon, the SDO installed Mr. Nsom Johnson and Peter Ndong of Anyajua and Belo (royal compounds) respectively. Their names were forwarded to Yaounde for reclassification in conformity with state laws. This was to enable the new chiefs to have access to state remuneration. The documents of these chiefs coincided with petition letters

¹⁴⁸ The Fon's reply to the SDO dated 4th of January 2016.

from the Fon and princes which hindered the reclassification process in Yaounde. This not only frustrated the local administration, which had hitherto denied that there were no succession disputes in Kom, but also the political elites who perpetuated the act. Faced with the impasse, some elites tried to get a royal disclaimer from the Fon to attest to the fact that he was not the author of the petitions that were sent to Yaounde against the installations and reclassification.

The letter written by the elites partly reads: *'the Fon of Kom has never sent any opposing letter to Yaounde protesting against succession to royal compounds'*¹⁴⁹. Rather, the elites who wrote this letter accused some members of the royal family (Fidelis Gham Lo-ah and Nyongo Kuh Joseph) of sending petition letters to the presidency without the knowledge of the Fon. In the letter petitioning the installation of the illegitimate occupants of royal compounds, the Fon accused the administration of attempting to seize his authority over royal compounds. The Fon also petitioned against some of his political elites. The letter in part reads: *'The Fon frowns at the devilish intentions of his elites to team up with the administration to destroy the identity and destiny of Kom'*.¹⁵⁰ At the time of writing, a deadlock has ensued between the Kom political elites and traditional leaders. Political elites have failed to obtain the support needed to sustain their political aspirations from their home communities in exchange for development projects. As a result, they indulge in practices in collusion with local state administrators that destroy the enabling peace between traditional leaders and the state administration in Kom.

Whereas Kom has not experienced violent conflicts, the tensions described above highlight that apart from situations of group violence, ethnic conflict may lack a definitive form, and can manifest in multifarious ways (Bailey 1997). This is often perpetuated by the ethno-political entrepreneurs through every day actions such as shunning, insults, demand for difference or conformity or withholdings of routine interactional tokens of respect (Brubaker

¹⁴⁹ A disclaimer written by the elites dated the 10th of May 2016.

¹⁵⁰ Kom Fon, SDO quarrel over installation of impostors, report written by Kini Nsom, 15th December 2015.

2002; Brass 1996). In the context of Kom, there are two main ways in which Kom political elites have undermined the enabling peace between the state and traditional leaders.

The first is by distorting Kom tradition and history, especially within the royal family, to manipulate the selection of candidates to royal compounds who were more compliant with the expectations of some political elites to engage more into party politics. This is done in collaboration with the administration who have the constitutional authority to appoint traditional leaders in consultation with king makers of such a community. Secondly, the failure to obtain the necessary political backing from Kom traditional leaders to endorse their quest for political offices has resulted in a situation where some political elites have chosen to support the local state administration against the traditional leaders. This is largely because traditional leaders in Kom have chosen to remain relatively apolitical. The fact that political elites can distort the history of a people through questioning the legitimacy of the royal family with the support of the local administration, or manipulating compliant candidates into royal compounds, gives a deeper insight into the emergence of ethnic tensions.

The preference by Kom political elites to collaborate with the administration in Kom is better understood if we consider their political ambitions within a broader context of national politics in Cameroon. Their choice is informed by the understanding that the SDO plays a vital role in recommending ministerial and Senatorial appointments. This obliges political elites who aspire for such positions to work closely with local administrators which results in some cases in these actors ignoring traditional authority. Such expectations of political nomination in Kom have further escalated after the death of former Minister Bochong Francis Nkwain, who connected the Kom Clan with the political regime in Cameroon as a member of the CPDM central community and a Senator.

According to some political elites in Kom, the death of Francis Nkwain left a vacuum among Kom political elites for the regime fraternity which needed to be filled. One of the interviewees in Kom observed that:

*Everybody in Kom wants to succeed Nkwain. Kom is now without a god-father though he [Nkwain] did nothing, it is better to know that we have somebody there [in government].*¹⁵¹

The hope of replacing the political ‘big man of Kom’ has shaped how some of the politicians in Kom relate with local administrators like the SDO. While Kom politicians, in comparison to other regions are still out of favour with the regime in terms of holding key positions in government, they continuously tried being in the good books of the state in order not to worsen the situation. To do this, they turn to disagree with traditional authority because they see them not to be supportive, given that the Fon refused to engage in partisan politics.

The abstention of chiefs from party politics is not unique to the Kom fondom or a new phenomenon in Africa. Boafo-Arthur (2001) notes that Chieftaincy in Ghana is marred with challenges of inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts fuelled by chieftaincy disputes over succession and in some instances land which bring the revered institution into disrepute. A key political challenge to traditional authorities however was the barring of chiefs from participation in partisan politics (Boafo- Arthur 2001). The 1992 Constitution of Ghana restricts chiefs in party politics. The constitutional ban on chiefs from active politics was meant to protect the sanctity and respect of the institution of the chieftaincy in Ghana.¹⁵² Gyampo (2009) contends that while some chiefs respect the ban, others see the ban on them as discriminatory and against their human rights. A similar case of political neutrality for chiefs is recounted by Muriaas (2009) in the context of Uganda, South Africa and Malawi, except that neutrality within these countries is understood and interpreted differently. Muriaas (2009) notes that policies which specified the political neutrality of traditional institutions were adopted in Malawi, South Africa and Uganda. This was based on the perception that it was unethical for traditional rulers to engage in active politics. However, the concept of ‘neutrality’ is understood as ‘support the government of the day and not the opposition’

¹⁵¹ Interview with a Kom elite, 4th of May 2015 Belo-Kom.

¹⁵² Article 276 (1) states that, ‘a chief shall not take part in *active party politics*; and any chief wishing to do so and seeking election to Parliament shall abdicate his stool or skin’. Article 94 (3) (c) reinforces this by noting that a person shall not be eligible to be a member of Parliament if he is a chief (cited in Gyampo 2009).

(Muriaas 2009 p.1). This is because traditional authorities rely on the government for their resources and survival (Muriaas 2009).

Unlike in Ghana where there is a Constitutional ban on chiefs to engage in politics, the choice of Kom Fons to disengage with party politics so far appears to result from a consensus between the Laikom administration and the Fons given that there is no law that restricts the Fons from political participation. It is this abstention from active state politics that I contend has protected the sanctity and respect of the institution of chieftaincy in Kom. This abstention from active politics has less been the case in Bali. Whereas the struggle between political elites, traditional authorities and the local state administration in Kom has given rise to local tensions, these tensions have so far remained latent due to the relative cohesion that still exists between the traditional leaders and the local communities. This relationship between the Fon of Kom and his subjects exists because the Fon has exempted himself from national politics and devotes more attention on his role as the spiritual protector of the people which gives him his moral legitimacy (discussed further in Chapter Eight and Nine).

Political elites in Kom have failed in their efforts to both appeal to regionalist or ethnic sentiment or to use neo-traditional institutions like chieftaincy as a means of mobilising political support and asserting control over local populations. Although tensions do exist in Kom, the political neutrality of the Fon and his strong relation with his subjects has thwarted any attempt by the political elites to magnify such tensions, promote violent movements and incites one's rival and their supporters to a point where violence become almost unavoidable. The Fon of Kom is thus able to mediate on community issues without a sense of discrimination along party lines.

7.3 Political dynamics in Kom and Bali compared: Electoral incentive for ethnic violence

The main similarity between elite politics in Kom and Bali is the way in which they manipulate divisive issues to secure political gains and, in some cases, use violence (or allow it to prevail) to solidify their support and undercut the votes of their political opponents. In Bali, political elites have the means to influence constitutional values or electoral norms, and their preferred strategy is to manipulate the voting patterns in areas where they doubt the local

support or fear their political opponents. This was apparent when the identity of the SDF candidate for Bawock was questioned in an effort to fault the SDF in its adherence to the clause on including minorities in the electoral code. In addition, we also notice in Bali that political elites also negotiate new alliances that can guarantee victories in elections. One such alliance was the Mbu-Pin-Wock alliance that sought to establish a new pan-ethnic group within the region.

The main difference between Kom and Bali with regards to elites' politics and mobilisation is the level of political engagement and tensions. Tensions are lesser in Kom because the struggle is largely between the opposition (SDF) and the ruling CPDM. The implication is that there is less internal fighting within the ranks of the CPDM, as their focus has been to ensure that they control the electorates in Boyo Division which has traditionally been an opposition strong hold. In addition, most of the CPDM party elites in Kom are middle class civil servants whose jobs are not very dependent on result of the polls.¹⁵³ By contrast, in Bali, there is a high level of competition between the opposition and the CPDM, and within the CPDM elites themselves in Bali and Santa constituencies. Sons and daughters of both Bali and Santa communities occupy high positions within the ranks of the government and require the mobilisation of local support to maintain these positions. In Bali, this has generated tension between the CPDM and the SDF but also among CPDM party elites in the region that have led to violent outcomes.

According to Wilkinson (2004), violence is most likely to occur in communities where political competition is more severe. We see that when electoral competition increases in ethnic communities like in Mezam Division, political elites respond by polarising boundary conflicts or manipulating the eligibility of opposition candidates in order to mobilise stronger support and votes. If violence erupts from such mobilisation, the state response is dependent on the extent that the party in power relies on the votes of the group that is the aggressor or the victim. The dominant ethnic group in a multi-ethnic coalition may prevent minority groups from their quest to secede in order to maintain political gains associated with such a

¹⁵³ Interview with a Kom elite, 4th of May 2015 Belo-Kom.

coalition. This is one reason why the Bali seem to object to the Bawock joining Santa sub division. However, when this strategy does not work out, political elites turn to ethnic polarisation to undercut the turnout of competing ethnic groups.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has compared the nature of elite politics in Kom and Bali. In Bali where there is a strong relation between the elites and traditional institutions, I have shown how elites use traditional leaders as controllers of vote banks and how this fuels local conflicts. In Kom, where there is a weaker relationship between elites and traditional leaders, elites struggle to gain local control in collaboration with the administration. This also breeds local tensions. However, these tensions have not so far manifested in violence because the politicians in Kom lack the grassroots influence needed to mobilise the communities into such violence. This is also because the Fon has opted out of party politics.

By comparing the politicisation of traditional institutions in Kom and Bali, this chapter has demonstrated that the active engagement of traditional authorities in party politics can provoke tensions to escalate into violent conflicts. Traditional leaders who take interest in national party politics give political elites the opportunities to use traditional institutions like the chieftaincy as a way of mobilising political support and reasserting control of local communities. The tendency of traditional authorities liaising with political elites to attract state resources for local development such as the KRSC also permits political elites to appeal to regionalist sentiment and to use traditional institutions to defend their position within the destabilised nature of state power. Political elites thus find it easier to collaborate with politically active traditional leaders where focalised claims magnify local tensions, promote violent movements and incites one's rival and their supporters to a point where violence become almost unavoidable (Brass 1997).

As traditional leaders take up an active role in national politics, they destroy in the process the very moral basis of their power. For example, they destroy the basis of their authority which is derived from the unbiased execution of their role as the spiritual protector of the people which gives them their moral legitimacy. The active political role of fons in the Bali

has seen their legitimacy wax and wane. While the Fons of Bali and Bawock have chosen to liaise with political elites in party politics as a way of negotiating local development, in doing so, they have significantly destroyed their legitimacy in the eyes of those who differ with them in their political views. This has affected their ability to mitigate local conflicts. In Kom, the relationship between the Fon and his subjects is consolidated because the Fon has remained neutral in national politics and devotes more attention to his role as the spiritual protector of the people, which the people support. The Fon of Kom is thus likely more able to mitigate community tensions from escalating (see Chapter Six and Nine). This is because there is a sense of impartiality in his decisions among his subjects since such interventions are not influenced by party sentiments. Although traditional leaders could play an active role in national politics and still retain their local prowess to adjudicate on local issues, this is largely possible only if traditional leaders enter the political scene as neutral mediators.

Theoretically, the Kom example suggests that what could be termed ethnic tensions should not necessarily be understood simply as conflict between groups. The political dynamics in Kom shows that there are often individuals – ethno-political entrepreneurs – who may live ‘off’ as well as ‘for’ ethnicity with what Brubaker calls a ‘performative character’ (Brubaker 2002 p.166). When some categories of people begin to sympathise with their agenda, only then do they venture to invoke groupism, and by doing so, they seek to evoke and summon them into being, with the intention to justify and mobilise such imaginary groups (Brubaker 2002 P.166).

CHAPTER 8: CONSTRUCTING AND CONTESTING LEGITIMACY IN KOM AND BALI

8.0 Introduction

Traditional leaders continue to wield authority in Cameroon especially at the grassroots, which has led to the ongoing debate as to why and how they continue to do so. The ongoing debate suggests that the continuous presence of traditional authority is related to legacies of indirect rule, the nature of weak post-colonial states, the allocation of land and the adaptability of traditional authorities, among other reasons. However, the literature on the legitimacy of traditional leaders and their authority is limited in its exploration of the processes through which traditional authorities, the state and the local population negotiate the interface between the different types of norms, rules and institutions. While previous research has attempted to fill this gap by focusing on the relationship between traditional authorities and state (discussed below), the variance between context and local construction of authority and legitimacy has received less attention in the literature specifically on Cameroon. This chapter seeks to complement the existing literature by nuancing the suggestion that the survival of traditional authority is primarily about links to the state, particularly in Cameroon. This chapter draws together previous discussions and empirics to specifically focus on legitimacy in relation to the role of the fon and their engagement in party politics.

This chapter puts in context the different ways in which legitimacy is acquired in Kom and Bali. I argue that construction and interpretation of legitimacy in Kom and Bali is significantly different and even though traditional leaders in both communities draw on tradition for their authority, Kom tends to lean more on cultural attributes for their legitimacy which they see as incompatible with modern state politics. In Bali on the other hand, traditional leaders can use their active engagement in party politics with the state to achieve legitimacy even if this is sometimes contested by the people.

In Chapter One, I engaged with the theoretical approaches that have informed the debate on chieftaincy in Africa. The key debate within the literature has been about the in/compatibility of chiefs and democracy in Africa (See Maloka 1995; Mamdani 1996; Tsebeza 2005). This

chapter expands on the argument of Maloka (1995) and Mamdani (1996) who contend that traditional authorities have survived and continue to do so in Africa not because of their own legitimacy but because of their cooperation with the colonial or post-colonial states. While Maloka's (1995) and Mamdani's (1996) claim of traditional leaders depending on the state for legitimacy partly resonates with the findings of this thesis, this chapter will demonstrate that it varies in context and scope. Using the cases of Bali and Kom this chapter pushes beyond the limit of their argument to show that not all traditional authorities anchor their legitimacy in collaboration with the state. Traditional authorities are evaluated on basis of what they do for their community and what they represent to their local population, which varies with the different audiences within the local communities.

The first section revisits the scholarly debate about the resilience and the sources of legitimacy used by traditional leaders to enforce their rule. The second section discusses the re-introduction of multipartism in Cameroon and the legitimacy challenges that traditional leaders encountered. It also discusses the strategies of the legitimisation process in Bali and Kom. The main purpose here is to understand the varying ways through which traditional authorities, endeavour to promote and reproduce already existing state governance norms, while concurrently informing /responding to new norms, rules and institutions at the local level. This leads to the idea of multiple sources of legitimacy that traditional authorities rely on to justify their rule. In the third section, I explore through a systematic, comparative evaluation of the legitimisation process in Bali and Kom.

8.1 Understanding legitimacy within chieftaincy discourses

Mamdani (1996) examines the legacies of indirect rule and the forms of power that existed during colonial rule and in the post-colonial states in the context of the apartheid regime in South Africa. He notes that the legitimacy of government depended on the willingness of traditional authorities to implement state policies. Further, both Mamdani (1995) and Maloka (1995) contend that the authority of traditional leaders is derived from the central state. According to them, traditional authorities lack an autonomous source of legitimacy and therefore, continue to exist only because the state is reluctant or unable to abolish the institutions.

Mamdani and Maloka argue that although traditional authorities may exercise power, they do not necessarily have legitimate power in the eyes of their 'subjects'. Traditional leaders are only able to control their 'subjects' because of the threat of sanctions that comes from the state or because of the broad definition of customary law to justify and give legitimacy to actions that would otherwise not be traditional (Oomen 2005). Meagher (2012) however argues that issues of order need to be connected to an analysis not just of the embeddedness of non-state actors in the state, but also of social legitimacy and sources of power behind non-state actors and their governance agendas. While legitimacy and power are both ways of achieving influence, power can also be coercive. Power constitutes the ability to influence one to do something he or she would otherwise not do with the use or threats of sanction where necessary (Mansbridge 1994). On the other hand, legitimacy is a concept meant to capture the beliefs that bolster willing acceptance of authority and power from audiences associated with such leaders. It is obtained from a sense of responsibility that motivates voluntary respect to the directives of authorities and rules precisely because they are trusted, supported and believed to be legitimate (Levi, Sacks and Tyler 2009). Legitimate power involves some value or standard, accepted by the individual or community, by which the public authorities can assert power (Raven et al. 1956).

What Mamdani and Maloka do not explain is the fact that the state in some societies has limited power at the grassroots and that in other circumstances traditional authorities are required to comply with the predominant view of local communities to maintain legitimacy (Oomen 2005; Williams 2010). For example, Ntsebeza (2005) on his part argues that traditional authorities especially within the context of South Africa have remained relevant only because of the role that they play in land allocation. This, in his view does not impute legitimate power because their power over land is derived from the state. He contends that as long as the state continues to empower traditional leaders to control land under their custody, chiefs will remain key actors at the local level. However, while land is an important

factor that has made chiefs key actors, Ntsebeza also underestimates the symbolic and moral force represented by traditional leaders within their communities.

The argument that chiefs only derive their legitimacy by aligning with the state in other contexts emerges because of the claim that post-colonial African states are declining or lack the necessary state capacity which pushes such state to give some limited sovereignty to traditional authorities. Scholars like Meagher (2012), Hagmann and Peclard (2010) and Raemaekers et al. (2008) have all emphasised the need to move beyond the analysis of political order in Africa where organisational systems are judged based on what they are not rather than what they are. These scholars highlight the need to understand different systems of order which in some occasions are more successful in-service delivery such as local conflict management and fostering local development at the grassroots more than formal governance structures in contemporary Africa.

The argument by Mamdani and Maloka does not explain why traditional leaders continue to wield authority over people, even where the state is present in full capacity and is adequately providing for local needs (Fokwang 2009; Williams 2010). Without being dismissive of all the factors that account for the resilience of traditional authorities, it is also important to understand how local norms, processes, and newly introduced institutions- such as electoral politics and development projects- influence how legitimacy is built at the grassroots and how such communities use traditional authorities to give meaning to these new forms of authority. Such an understanding of local dynamics gives a broader perspective to understand the multiple forms of legitimacies that traditional authorities may deploy at the grassroots.

8.2.1 The multiple legitimacies argument

According to Williams (2010), legitimacy is an evaluation of the relationship between political actors and their communities and the extent to which there exists an agreement on the basic dynamics of power such as the specific norms, rules and institutions that are used to enforce obedience. To achieve this, political actors desire that respect for such rules should be voluntary and not by force (Williams 2010). Based on this understanding, Alagappa (1995) contends legitimacy is thus an ongoing process that involves the critical evaluations from both those who exercise authority and power and the different audiences within a given

community. People are more likely to respect political actors if they perceive the underlying moral basis of the leader as appropriate and right (Alagappa 1995). People are also more likely to obey political actors if decisions are made and enforced in a way that is perceived to serve the interest of the whole community (Alagappa 1995; Williams 2010). Each of these considerations constitutes a distinct dimension of legitimacy which could either be moral, performative, relational or material legitimacy (Williams 2010 p.20).

The moral dimension of legitimacy is defined by the underlying norms, myths and symbols that each community or social group adapts to judge what they perceive as correct political actions. Norms, myth and symbols that offer the lens that shape the structures of authority as well as an understanding about how things should be and what is, and this varies between local contexts (Schatzberg 2001). From Schatzberg's (2001) perspective, the moral dimension of legitimacy offers both explanatory and normative understanding and sets some standards that can be used to distinguish between right and wrong. Moral legitimacy emphasises the cultural dimension of authority and the local beliefs that communities construct about their leaders. Geertz (1973 p.312) calls this the 'structure of meaning' through which local communities construct a sense of who they are in their daily lives.

Tyler (1997) contends that political actors are considered legitimate when they are perceived as promoting the material interests of the individuals or groups. Williams (2010) further asserts that in some instances where political actors lack institutional capacity, they may decide to make some promises to realise certain developmental projects within the community to raise expectations. These, according to Williams, are strategies to build trust and to rekindle moral order. The material dimension of legitimacy therefore builds on the political economy of patronage politics (Scott 1972). The patron-client relationship is such that relationship between the community members and their political elites enter an instrumental friendship in which the elites of higher socioeconomic status (patron) use their influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a community or people of lower status (client) who, for their part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron (Piliavsky 2014).

The continuing pattern of reciprocity that builds and strengthens patron-client relationships often creates trust and affection between the partners (Arriola 2009). Whether termed

clientelism, neopatrimonialism, or 'big man' rule, the patron–client relationship is understood to be the principal mechanism regulating political and economic life in African countries (Bratton & van de Walle 1997). Although political elites are perceived as self-seeking without any ideological commitment, Arriola (2009) contends patronage constitutes a form of legitimation, rather than a form of illegitimate power. Bayart (1989) asserts that the underprivileged members of marginalised communities often rely on patrons to access state services and resources even if such resources are obtained in ways that violate legal procedures of resource distribution. Piliavsky (2014), although writing from an Asian perspective asserts that looking at patronage simply as a 'set of transactions' misses the morality engrained in patronage relations. Patrons are not necessarily self-seeking and corrupt, but also generous leaders, capable of bestowing gifts and providing selfless service. Patronage is not just about resources. Lavi (2016) argues that deriving public authority from such resources require the leaders to act in ways that shows that they have the communities' interest at heart. Lavi further contends that the ability to make a material difference boosts political potency of such performances. Failure to deliver can affect the reputation of the leader in question. In parallel to material resources, those that govern use symbolic repertoires to further their interests, to mobilize popular support, and to give meaning to their actions (Lavi 2016). They do so by referring to existing repertoires or (re-) inventing them to legitimize their exercise of, or their quest for, political authority (Black 2008). Lavi (2016) sees the performative dimension of legitimacy as a social fiction, perpetually constructed through social enactments, performances, and imaginations. Legitimacy not only changes over time, but it is constantly constructed in the public discourse. From this perspective, legitimacy becomes something that is an ongoing process of manipulating images, narratives, symbols, popular views, values to build and sustain a given political order (Black 2008). In this view, if the state can perform this function it may gain legitimacy. It is through such performances that the power and legitimacy vested in public authority are re-affirmed and trust is built.

Relational legitimacy emerges from the extent to which a social entity communicates to the individuals that they are accorded respect, dignity, and status within the context of the community that they belong to (Tyler 1997; Tyler & Lind 1992). From a relational perspective,

Tyler (1997) contends that an authority is perceived as legitimate when he/she affirms individuals' social identities and bolsters their sense of self-worth. Tyler (1997) examined the impact of instrumental/material and relational concerns on voluntary deference to authorities when a conflict emerges between authorities and subordinates. His work demonstrates that in cases of conflict between authorities and subordinates, the impact of relational concerns is larger than the impact of material concerns, and he therefore concludes that the content of legitimacy judgments derives from individuals' identity concerns.

Tyler's multiple legitimacy argument is important in that we cannot understand the decisions that traditional leaders make or the evaluation of their performance, without taking into consideration their cultural context and the extent to which their authority is embedded within their spheres of influence (Comaroff 1997; Crais 2006) In the sections below, I will use this theoretical understanding of legitimacy to show how traditional leaders who weighed up whether to join national politics were faced with the challenge of devising new strategies of maintaining their authority and legitimacy within their communities. This was contingent on what the community aspirations were and what their subjects expected from them. Specifically, I examine the extent to which the fons of Bali and Kom became implicated in national politics and the different ways in which each of them has attempted to maintain their authority using different sources of legitimacy discussed above.

8.3 Multi-party and the question of legitimacy among traditional authorities

Multi-party politics in Cameroon was very short-lived after independence and lasted only from 1960-1966. Cameroon became a one-party state from 1966 right up till 1990 when multi-party politics was reintroduced. The reintroduction of multi-party politics was triggered by deep economic crisis that Cameroon suffered in the 1980s (Ndi 2013). Cameroon like most African countries had their currencies devalued and the public service was downsized as civil servants were sent on early retirement. Critics blamed poor government stewardship of the economy. Corruption and embezzlement under the President Biya administration led to the push for multi-party politics and accountability by SDF in 1990 (Ndi 2013).

According to Geschiere (1993), the rebirth of multi-party politics in Cameroon in the 1990s created conditions that facilitated the return of old political actors such as traditional leaders to the national political scene even if this was against the will of the masses (Geschiere 1993). Most Cameroonians during this period were worried about the basis of the legitimacy that traditional leaders were to use to engage in national politics. It was also not clear how their active participation in politics was going to affect their role as sacred rulers over their subjects. Were fons to draw from tradition for these new roles they were assuming upon themselves or on the grounds desired by their subjects for their leaders? Geschiere concludes that some traditional leaders tried to merge the two by claiming legitimacy on grounds of their status as natural rulers and claiming to seek the welfare of their community (Geschiere 1993).

The legitimacy and power of those traditional leaders who overtly participated or identified with any party politics in the 1990s became seriously criticized mostly by their 'subjects' This was the case in wider Cameroon, as well as in Bali and Kom as was discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter Seven) with particular relation to Bali. This was because most of those chiefs who opted to engage in party politics did so under the banner of supporting the ruling party while most of their 'subjects' militated with the opposition. Fokwang (2009) posits that this was largely because the government and the CPDM party were seen by local communities and opposition political leaders as a hindrance in the quest for pragmatic democratic renewal in Cameroon. While some fons like the Fon of Kom and Nso took a neutral stand in politics, others like those of Bali and Mankon decided to fully engage with national politics. Their participation in active party politics resulted in tensions that emerged in places like Bali, where

the authority and the legitimacy of the Fon came under question by those who disagreed with his political stands (see Chapter Six Seven). The North-West population became aggressive to fons who took active role in national politics in the early 1990s (Ndi 2013). Traditional leaders who weighed up whether to join national politics like the Fon of Bali, were faced with the task of adopting new strategies for maintaining their authority and legitimacy within their communities. This was contingent on what the community aspirations were and what their subjects expected from them.

8.4 Strategies and claims to legitimacy in Bali

The Fon of Bali has used both direct and indirect approaches to exercise political influence to gain legitimacy, authority and power. Both direct and indirect approaches have affected his legitimacy in different ways depending on various audiences that the Fon engages with. Through the direct approach, the Fon took up responsibilities and nominations to public institutions which initially undermined his moral legitimacy, although through such public engagement (see below), the Fon also gained different forms of legitimacies such as the material and the performative legitimacy. Through the indirect approach, the Fon has been involved in lobbying state actors for development projects and for building regional networks to gain political legitimacy.

8.4.1 Direct approach- through taking up office

When the Fon of Bali decided to run for public office in the 1990s against the will of some of his subjects, his moral legitimacy was greatly compromised, and his authority came under serious criticism. One interviewee noted that the Fon's legitimacy and authority was challenged because *'every event within the fendom was politicized and the people who could not see the collective interest to the fendom began disobeying his leadership.'*¹⁵⁴ While the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

participation of Bali Fon in national politics might have been strongly resisted by the public in the early 1990s, over the years, Bali people have largely endorsed a political role for their fons. This change of perception since the early 2000s, has come partly because of the changing hopes and aspirations of the people and the failure of opposition parties like SDF to defeat the CPDM after the 1992 presidential elections.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the people totally support his active role in national politics. Rather, partial support arises as, in the views of the local people, access to the state is needed for resolution to the persistent territorial disputes that Bali has been having with her neighbour which requires a fon who can lobby for government support to maintain the territorial integrity of Bali (see Chapter Six and Seven). As one Bali informant stated, *'our neighbours have always enjoyed the support of the government... Bali in the past was unable to attract government support because we were noted as an opposition stronghold'*.¹⁵⁵

Intra-ethnic, but also the inter-ethnic conflict between Bali and Bawock helped to influence local perception on the Fon taking up active political responsibilities. Some informants believed that Bawock enjoyed a lot of support from high ranking government officials before, during and after the conflicts which increased the need for Bali to build better ties with the state through their traditional leaders and her political elites. One elite of Bali sums it in the following words:

*The government supported Bawock against Bali in many of the meetings during the Bali-Bawock conflict. This was proof of their relationship with the state. Anything contrary would have meant that political patronage had come crashing down like a pack of cards.*¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Interview with a Bali traditional councillor 25th August 2015, Bali.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with a Bali elite 23rd of July 2015, Bali.

Party politics offered the Fon of Bali an opportunity in his view to contribute in the invention of Cameroon's future but also to safeguard and enhance his individual and collective interests of his people. In the Fon's words:

*I interpreted that era as a crucial moment which we had to use to not only guide Cameroon's political evolution but also for us the fons to bring what we could offer to the benefit of the state and our people.*¹⁵⁷

Multiparty politics had reinforced local governments which coexisted with, but also threatened the survival of traditional leaders at the local level. Thus, traditional leaders needed to show more than ever their support for the ruling government. The Fon of Bali became an active CPDM militant and campaigned for the incumbent President Paul Biya in the 1992 presidential elections. Many expected the ruling CPDM to exit power in favour of the opposition party the SDF (Fokwang 2009). When the results were proclaimed, the incumbent CPDM was declared winner with 39% of the vote and the opposition SDF gaining 35%. The election outcome resulted in violent protests in the North-West and other regions of the country where the SDF commanded overwhelming support. Fons like those of Bali were threatened for complicity with the government to steal what was perceived as opposition's victory.¹⁵⁸ What this means is that, the implication for traditional authorities who took part in active politics was twofold: On one hand, they needed to engage in party politics because their survival was now threatened by local governments that were reinforced by multiparty politics and on the other hand, their active engagement threatened their legitimacy because they were seen by their communities, to collude with the government against the masses.

The presidential elections were followed by the 1996 municipal elections in which the Fon of Bali campaigned for the post of a mayor on the CPDM party list. Many of his subjects were against his candidature because they did not consider it proper for the Fon to compete with a 'commoner' in democratic elections.¹⁵⁹ Another Bali interviewee noted that '*we the Bali*

¹⁵⁷ Interview with the Fon of Bali, 26 July 2015, Bali.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with a Bali elite, 5th July 2015, Bali.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

people feared that if our Fon was defeated, it would bring dishonour and shame to his status and administration'.¹⁶⁰ The fear of losing to a 'commoner', in the views of the Bali people, threatened the moral legitimacy of the Fon, which according to Schartzberg (2001) is defined by the underlying norms, myths and symbols that each community or social group adapts to judge what they perceive as correct political actions for their leaders.

Community members were also fearful because the Fons's political engagement had implications for how the Bali people (his 'subjects' who supported contrary ideas) perceived his leadership and the risk of his orders disrespected within the community. However, the Fon, through his engagement in national politics gained some form of material and performative legitimacy. This is because he could connect with the political economy of patronage in Cameroon and present himself as the right person to mediate between the community in Bali and the state to attract state resources for local development. As the Fon himself stated, *'engaging in party politics was also a way for us the fons to bring what we got to the benefit of the state and our people'*.¹⁶¹

The promise by the Fon to be of service to the state and his community resonates with Williams' argument (2010) who asserts that where political actors lack institutional capacity, they make some promises to realise certain developmental projects within the community to raise expectations. While the Fon gained in his material and performative dimensions of legitimacy, his moral legitimacy was undermined. This was because his choice to engage in party politics differed from the neutral role that the community (especially the opposition members) desired of him. Despite gaining some form of material and performative dimension of legitimacy among those who shared his political views, most informants still felt the Fon had compromised his authority and power¹⁶² to command voluntary obedience¹⁶³ among the majority of the community members, who were of the opposition. Moral legitimacy was what mattered most to those who stood against the Fon.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Having been appointed to serve in many capacities with the state (lecturer at the Higher Teachers Training College and as Board chairman of MIDENO, a government development agency for the North-West Region) he felt it was the right decision to support the CPDM controlled government that appointed him to those government positions (Fokwang 2009). In the Fon's own words:

*Bali will be forgotten in the North-West if we do not fight for it by ourselves... My people need to have a say within the government so that we can influence government projects in our territory.*¹⁶⁴

The Fon's determination to stand for the 1996 elections led to internal division within the CPDM party in Bali. Eventually the CPDM ended up with two candidates who were all aiming for the post of the Mayor in the 1996 polls. Although the Fon was finally selected as the unique candidate for the CPDM, he was eventually defeated by a non-traditional figure who campaigned on the SDF list (Fokwang 2009). The Fon's defeat made him unpopular amongst his subjects especially those who advised him against his decision of standing in for the election. Critics of the Fon and those who stood against his overt political participation began to disrespect his orders.¹⁶⁵ For example, one interviewee questioned why the Fon could demand community labour:

*Everything we did was credited to the CPDM... even schools we built and roads that we dug and maintained through community labour were credited to the CPDM by the Fon to win government support... We of the opposition saw no reason to continue to offer free labour which was used by our Fon to campaign for the CPDM against the opposition*¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Interview with the Bali Fon 26th July 2015, Bali.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with a Bali elite 5th July 2015, Bali.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Even though the Fon and the CPDM were defeated in the 1996 municipal elections, there were still some loyalists who believed that the Fon was/is obliged to support the ruling CPDM given that it is irrational to *'bite the fingers that feed you'*.¹⁶⁷

The SDF over the years has lost its grassroots support and has very slim chances of taking over power in Cameroon. This has led to the high degree of political apathy in regions where the party once had a very strong following. Some community members have also abandoned the opposition to join the ruling CPDM in anticipation for securing government jobs, contracts and local development projects like school and roads.¹⁶⁸ This is evidenced in how the SDF has lost support in both the presidential and the parliamentary elections in Cameroon. At the parliamentary level, the party's best performance was in 1997 when they won 43 seats out of the 180 seats. In the parliamentary elections of 2002, the party only managed to win 22 seats, and in 2007, the number of seats further dropped to 16. In 2013, the party won 18 seats against 148 seats for the CPDM. For the presidential elections, the party has also dropped from 35% of the vote in 1992 to only 10.71% in 2011. Such a decline in support for the main opposition party has affected the ways in which some communities have come to embrace a political role for their traditional leaders. After the elusive dreams of gaining power through the opposition has faded away, most of the Bali-Nyonga people have become more concerned in consolidating their position within Bali against sub chiefs and in the North-West Region.

Although some communities in Bali see the need for the Fon to engage in state politics, there are concerns that the Fon has in the process, merged partisan politics with traditional government in a way that victimises those who challenge his political views. A prominent opposition leader in Bali who also doubles as a member of the traditional council said:

I rarely go to the palace... what for? We of the opposition are not needed by the Fon. We are not trusted and so he excludes us from his cabinet. He does this even to traditional title holders like me who qualify to sit at the palace court... The Fon

¹⁶⁷ Interview with a Bali notable 23rd June 2015, Bali.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

*has desecrated our tradition by using traditional institutions like voma to enforce party decision*¹⁶⁹

From the above quote, we can see that the Fon of Bali has been accused of excluding his political adversaries in his cabinet. The Fon has thus, failed in building a relational legitimacy with those members of his community who criticise his ideas. As Tyler (1997) argues, relational legitimacy should emerge from the extent to which an authority accords respect, dignity, and status to his subjects. From relational perspective, the Fon can only be perceived legitimate if he affirms individuals' social identities and bolsters their sense of self-worth irrespective of their political affiliation. This is not to say everybody within the community distrusts or disobeys the Fon's orders. Women in the field were positive about the Fon's leadership in comparison to his predecessors. Women noted the Fon has expanded the membership of the traditional council by incorporating women into it. It is a new experience in the history of Bali as noted by one of the elitewomen:

*We do not seek equality... if that was the case we may appear to be asking to be made fons which is not the custom of our people. No... we just need to know that our voices are heard. We want to know that women are included to give our own perspective on local issues or projects that affect our daily lives*¹⁷⁰

The Fon of Bali has also created new traditional title exclusively for women known as 'Na Lela', a traditional title which could be given to any woman who contributes significantly in the socio-economic development of Bali.¹⁷¹ The Fon of Bali in this regard has changed traditions and made small inroads towards gender representation.

While supporters of the opposition party in Bali perceive the Fon to be illegitimate because they feel marginalised in palace affairs due to their political affiliation, women in contrast see the Fon to be legitimate. This is because the Fon has incorporated women into traditional structures which hitherto were exclusively reserved for men, while also rewarding women

¹⁶⁹ Interview with a Bali elite 5th July 2015.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Bali female elite 25th July 2015, Bali.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

with traditional titles. Most women consider this to be normatively good and support the Fon from this perspective. The broader implication of this is that different groups may have different perceptions of what may qualify an authority as legitimate or illegitimate. This judgment is not necessarily based on the same types of evaluations (Black2008).

While some women have remained critical of the limited number of women in traditional institutions some male informants were, however, not happy with the way the Fon has been distributing traditional titles within the fondom. They contend the Fon in a bid to foster his political influence, while still retaining his traditional relevance has devalued the importance of traditional titles. He does this by trading titles for political and economic gains. The Fon, however, believes that giving out such titles has only been a way to adapt tradition to the modern demands of development.¹⁷² One elite, critical of the view of the Fon, noted that:

*Today, traditional titles are awarded to bureaucrats and party elites or members of the community who have made substantial contribution [women] as opposed to the past where such title were awarded to people who had distinguished themselves in local craft or in battle.*¹⁷³

We see in the context of Bali that the Fon is faced with many and oftentimes contradictory legitimacy claims, the expectations of which he is expected to meet. And as Black (2008) noted, every political figure within every given context understands the relevance and validity of different legitimacy claims that may exist within that context. They also understand the type of accountability relationships that need to be cultivated. While the Fon could meet some of the expectations of certain groups in Bali like the political elites, those in the opposition remain critical of his active role in national politics. Black (2008) and Tyler (1997) contend that where local expectations are incompatible, authority would face a legitimacy dilemma. Black (2008) argues that even if there is no dilemma as such, engaging in multiple accountability relationships can be impossible without transforming the organisation/community to hold a single perception of what they want. The challenge of

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Interview with Bali opposition member, 7th July 2015 Bali.

satisfying the different audiences in each community may cause a political figure to lose legitimacy in the eyes of others or prevent such a leader from engaging coherently in other accountability relationships (Black2008).

The effort in Bali to achieve local development, which is largely achievable only by fostering an active involvement in state's politics also gives the state the opportunity to mediate relationships that can change local norms. The fact that the Fon relies on the state to build his material legitimacy, compromises his claims of moral legitimacy, which traditional leaders build their authority on. This is because state actors could, and does, have goals which may be incompatible with local customs, values and or expectations (Williams2010).

For example, interviewees in Bali recounted an incident where the Fon tried to use an approach which was highly performative to build his legitimacy. This was an occasion where the SDO for Mezam was visiting Bali. The Fon was able to mobilise his community which left the impression that the people were in total harmony with him. People attended irrespective of their political affiliation. According to one interviewee, although there was a considerable turn out, most people were actually disgruntled that the visit took place on a market day, which affected their ability and other neighbouring villages to attend the market which they depend on for their local economy.¹⁷⁴ The Fon, as a result of the SDO's visit decided to postpone the local market. This resulted in protest among the people in the form of gossip.¹⁷⁵

Although the villagers obeyed, they were not happy that their Fon could not stand up against the visit of the SDO to protect their interest. The Fon presented the visit of the SDO as an occasion for Bali people to channel their local concerns via the SDO to the president of Cameroon. The Fon also presented the visit not as a CPDM affair, but rather as an opportunity for the people of Bali to showcase the paramountcy of their fondom within the region to the state. According another interviewee in Bali, the Fon emphasised that '*any boycott would expose the internal dirty politics of Bali to strangers*'.¹⁷⁶ One thing is clear from the SDO's visit; the Fon's perceived inability to reschedule the SDO's visit confirms the fear of some of

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Bali female elite 25th July 2015, Bali.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

the villagers that his relationship with the state makes it difficult for him to protect their local interests from the incursion of the state. The perceived inability to reschedule the visit affected the moral legitimacy of the Fon especially among the grassroots populations. According to one opposition leader in Bali, visit of the SDO could not have been avoided because the Fon's relationship with the state had partly compromised his ability as a traditional leader to oppose the visit of the SDO.¹⁷⁷ The Fon, through the same visit was able to use the occasion to strengthen his legitimacy which was highly performative in character. The Fon highlighted the visit as an opportunity of channelling the socio-economic needs of Bali to the state via the SDO. By so doing, he was also gaining a material dimension of legitimacy by building patronage networks, linking Bali to state officials who could influence local development. Such a framing by the Fon was supported by political elites.

According one of the elites in Bali '*Bali needs to go closer to the government, they are those that control this country.*' While the Fon was been praised by the Bali political elites, he was doubted by mostly the grassroots community members, predominantly farmers. This affected the moral legitimacy of the Fon for being unable to protect his people against the visit of the SDO. Fons in Bali, aware of their broader community concerns about their role in national politics which has affected their moral, but also relational legitimacy, have redefined their role as fons by building stronger relations with political elites and the state as strategies to gain material and performative legitimacy among his subjects derived through networks of patronage politics in Cameroon.

8.4.2 Indirect approaches - Lobbying for local development projects

The Fon has gained material legitimacy by leading the campaign which lobbies for the elevation of the Bali subdivision to a full administrative division to attract local development and a designated national budget allocation for Bali. The Fon and elites have constantly emphasized the need for the people to rally behind the CPDM and according to them, the decision to create a division in Bali depend on whether the government thinks there is strong

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Bali opposition member, 7th July 2015 Bali.

support for the regime coming from Bali. The Fon has used this campaign to win over his subjects who are critical of his active role in national politics. He does this by highlighting what Bali stands to gain (collective benefits) from his active role in national politics.

However, one of the interviewees in this research, a member of the opposition party, questioned the benefits of reconfiguring Bali into a full-fledged division. He rhetorically asked:

What has changed in Momo, Ndonga-Mantung and even age old Menchum division [these are all divisions in the North-West Region] that Bali should wish to be upgraded to a division?’¹⁷⁸

Another interviewee noted that:

You cannot tell what the Fon may want to bring to Bali after Bali becomes a full administrative division... It may be a government University for our children who knows?

While the first interviewee is completely negative, the second is sceptical about the level development that Bali can get from their Fon’s involvement in national politics. Views like these are indicative of the fact that although the Fon could use the promise of development to provide a material basis for his legitimacy; such legitimacy may hardly be sustainable over longer period. Material legitimacy for the Fon is not instantly achieved through a single project. The Fon is constantly expected to build trust and to demonstrate the effectiveness of local projects or the people may withdraw their support from the Fon.

Alagappa (1995) argues that although the promise to foster local development may in the short term generates trust on rulers; such trust is always short lived. In the long term, legitimacy should be built on something more than just performative or material dimensions. In Bali, performative legitimacy is connected to patronage politics and the Fon presents himself as the best person to solicit resources for local development from the state. He

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Bali elite 5th July 2015, Bali.

becomes obliged to meet this expectation and try to do this by building cordial relations with the government officials as a way of lobbying for state resources. The anticipation in Bali that traditional leaders and the state should bring local development has meant that, material expectations, or lack thereof, has become a critical part of the legitimization process.

8.4.3 Building regional-networks

The Fon of Bali has also strengthened his political legitimacy and power by establishing and building networks with other fons in the North-West through regional associations that seek to address their collective interests. The Fon of Bali was very instrumental in the creation of the North-West Fons Association (NOWEFA) in 1993 and was elected the pioneer Secretary General to the Association. This group was primarily aimed at fostering the relationship between traditional leaders, but also to collectively lobby for development to their fondoms and the region as whole. NOWEFA as a group was supposed to be apolitical although fons were individually allowed to decide whether to engage in an active political life (Nyamnjoh 2002).

However, Nyamnjoh (2002) notes that the former Prime Minister Simon Achidi Achu, in collaboration with other fons, created what became known as the North-West Fons Conference (NOWEFCO) in opposition to NOWEFA. NOWEFCO had the main objective of openly declaring their support for the ruling CPDM regime. This was in contrast with the neutral stance that NOWEFA had taken. Nyamnjoh (2002) further contends that the division that plagued the two associations was largely perceived as that of power struggle between the first-class fons, who on one hand who made up the NOWEFA, and the second class fons who constituted the NOWEFCO.

Plagued with the contradictions of which group represented the collective interest of fons and their 'subjects' in the North-West, Prominent fons - like Gayongha of Bali among other paramount fons took the lead in 1998 in bringing together the two aforementioned associations. The 1998 deliberations at the Nkwen palace (a fondom in the North-West) marked an end to the NOWEFA and NOWEFCO which led to the creation of the North-West fons union (NOWEFU) (Nyamnjoh 2002). This association was then presented to the Prime Minister to lobby for recognition of what was to become the umbrella association that could

speak on behalf of the people and lobby for the development of the North-West Region. Fons such as that of Bali have individually and collectively tried to build their political legitimacy at the individual and collective levels through such associations. They negotiate their status within the patron-client networks of Cameroon bureaucratic order, lobbying for positions and developmental projects both for their specific fondoms and the region as a whole

We see in Bali that the Fon is faced with a legitimacy dilemma. He uses both direct and indirect approaches to legitimise his authority and power. He has tried to build multiple accountability relationships which has gained him predominantly material and performative legitimacy. His support in this direction is mostly among the political elites and his party members within the community. He has however, undermined his moral and relational dimensions of legitimacy. This is because his engagement in national politics prevents him from building trust with his subjects who oppose his political alignments. What Bali demonstrates is that legitimacy which is derived from the state (material and performative dimensions) is only sustainable as long as the people extract rewards for their community to enhance their perceived privileged position. From the different perspectives in Bali, political and performative legitimacy trumps moral legitimacy.

8.5 Strategies and claims to legitimacy in Kom

Traditional leaders in Kom have excluded themselves from party politics and only have a minimal interaction with the local state bureaucrats, within the constitutional provision of the law in Cameroon, which defines them as the auxiliaries of the administration. They have played a minimal role in national politics. The emphasis of the Fon being apolitical is limited to party politics.

8.5.1 Enforcing underlying norms, values, myths and symbols of Kom

The Fon of Kom has chosen to eschew any active role in national politics. He therefore limits his interaction with the government just within the provisions of the law as an auxiliary of the government. Although his action is largely acclaimed by the majority in Kom as a way of safeguarding the sacredness of the stool and respect for Kom tradition, there are some people, mostly state and Kom political elites, who are of the view that his action has limited the Kom's national budget allocation hence development for Kom. This is captured by one D.O. in Kom who claimed that:

Tradition does not and cannot stand alone any longer... Today we need to be more conscious that where a road goes development follows. We should today be more conscious and ready to face development with increased accessibility to Laikom [referring to the poor state of the road that leads to the Kom palace], the seat of Kom tradition ...Traditional chieftaincy is therefore not just symbolic, but an instrument of development and as a matter of fact merits the good will of the custodians who assist the authority which we are yet to get in Boyo-Kom.¹⁷⁹

According to the D.O. traditional authorities in Kom have not assisted the local political elites and local government officials to lobby for state funds to develop the region. On the contrary, traditional authority in Kom has focussed more on upholding their cultural norms, which is linked to their ability to protect their villages spiritually, and specifically from the predation of the state. By so doing, the Fon of Kom has exempted himself from national politics as way of fostering his moral and relational legitimacy which is derived by safeguarding the traditional values of Kom. This also implies that Fon has limited his material legitimacy. In Kom, the hatred for politics among the grassroots was evident in most of the responses from the interviewees. It was common to hear people define politics as promoting 'different opinion' and fostering violence.¹⁸⁰ And because the maintenance of unity was regarded as one of the greatest social goods, the existence of different opinions through politics was

¹⁷⁹ Interview with the Divisional Officer for Boyo.

¹⁸⁰ A Kom notable (FGD) 22nd May 2015 Fundong.

perceived as dangerous for the Kom community. From the different perspectives in Kom, moral legitimacy trumps material or performative legitimacy. Many informants suggested that politics leads to killing,¹⁸¹ fighting¹⁸² and division¹⁸³ and that it brought hatred among people.¹⁸⁴ Another palace retainer in Kom simply noted that 'politics can break us'.¹⁸⁵

Given this public understanding of politics, it was not surprising that many interviewees in Kom believed that fons should not be involved in national politics. While there was some fear that if fons were actively engaged with politics there would be violence, most informants suggested that a political role for fons would force them to take sides, and thus not be able to decide community matters fairly. One interviewee noted that if this was the case, '*the community would lack peace, harmony and unity*'.¹⁸⁶ Fears that politics would result in biased decision making and the lack of unity were also common in Kom. One informant summarised these sentiments stating that:

*The Fon must be fon for all and this is not possible if he is involved in politics. In Kom, it is undignified for fons, whose authority is sanctioned by tradition, to run for elective office, and thus allow ordinary people to choose whether he should lead or not.*¹⁸⁷

Such a perception of grassroots community members in Kom is indicative of the fact that traditional authorities in Kom are expected to consolidate the unity of the community and to foster their sense of belonging by safeguarding their cultural values. Another Kom notable describes the nature of respect the people have for the fon:

The people respect the Fon for what he is and what he stands for ... he is more than a secular ruler... His credentials are mystical and are derived not from the state but from antiquity. We speak to him with respect with our hand in our

¹⁸¹ A village head in Kom (FGD) 22nd May 2015 Fundong.

¹⁸² A Kom elder (FGD) 22nd May 2015 Fundong.

¹⁸³ A female councillor (FDG) 26th of June 2015 Belo-Kom.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Kom palace retainer (FGD) 4th of June 2015, Njinikom.

¹⁸⁶ Elderly Kom woman (FGD) 26th June 2015, Belo- Kom.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with a Kom elite 3rd July 2015 Fundong.

*mouths through a trained palace aide. We approach him with body gestures and address him with carefully selected words exclusive to him. These praise names reflect his power and supreme authority over his subjects and the protection they need. Our culture and 'Komness' would be dead should our Fon now or in future choose politics as a way of life.*¹⁸⁸

Chilver and Kaberry (1967) also note this when they contend that the Fon of Kom derives his authority largely from the beneficent and protective aspect of his kingship which is manifested in its priestly and ceremonial role which is believed to bring peace, fertility and prosperity in the kingdom (Chilver and Kaberry 1967, p. 148). Kom adhere more strictly to the view that the Fon 'is above party politics'.¹⁸⁹ An informant drew a distinction between politics in traditional society and politics in modern state and concluded that '*in state's politics there is minimal or no regard and respect for tradition or one's status*'.¹⁹⁰ The Kom people who share this view base their argument on the grounds that the political field is impermanent, given that competition for power is a continuous process. They are more critical about the fate that could await traditional leaders in a situation where power was to change hands bringing in new actors that had different political ideologies from the Fon. The conclusion is that such a scenario could bring total disrepute to traditional leaders that would compromise their relational and moral legitimacy.¹⁹¹

Women in Kom were positive about the role that they play in the internal administration and their admission into key governance institutions in Kom. It is important to note that Kom is a matrilineal society where a person is considered to belong to the same descent group as his or her mother. Also, succession is traced back to the deceased person's female relatives. Even though Kom is matrilineal, the society is highly patriarchal as evidenced by the number of men in formal leadership positions, and women play a limited role in the society in terms of public representation. However, women admitted having an increasing representation

¹⁸⁸ Interview with a Kom elite 4th May 2015 Belo-Kom.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Elderly Kom woman (FGD) 26th June 2015, Belo- Kom.

over time within local traditional councils. The increase in women's representation has given them a voice in village administration. Women were said to always be the majority in village meetings which necessitated that women be incorporated into the village traditional councils. By rationalizing and reforming the traditional culture of the Kom to create new economic roles for women, also shows the challenge on the extent to which modernity can affect tradition and the role that women can play in such cultural context. The risk is that such roles informed by modernity threatens the very foundations of local cultures. However, as long as the Fon ensured to retain the cultural element in the new positions he created, he could make all the compromises and adjustments necessary to adapt to the requirements of modern material and structural demands for women without losing the cultural context in which such positions were created. While the above effort by the Fon could be seen as significant inroads into gender representation, in reality, the exact role that women can play within such structures of governance are continuously defined through cultures of patriarchy. Writing from an Indian perspective, Chatterjee (1989) captures the tensions between the modernising impulse of equal right for women and traditional patriarchal systems within the discourse of nationalism. Chatterjee notes that while colonialists condemned the treatment of women that was imbedded in traditional belief systems in India, nationalists took upon themselves an approach to construct a reformed tradition and defend it on the grounds of modernity. In the process, it created the image of a new woman that was still subjected to new forms of patriarchy. This new patriarchy invested women with the dubious honour of representing a distinctively modern national.

Most women also regretted the fact that although they were members of the traditional council at the village level most of the agenda was set at the palace level, through the Kwifoyn which is exclusively a male institution. One of the women noted that:

It is in the Kwifoyn meetings that the Fon shares his views and discusses issues that then constitute an agenda for village councils... Though we now sit in council, we are hardly part of those who decide what should be discussed in the village

*councils. However, we think there is a significant shift from the previous fons... We feel more represented today.*¹⁹²

The above quote demonstrates that although men still dominate decision making, the Fon has a changing attitude concerning the role of women in traditional administration which he has used to gain some moral and relational forms of legitimacy from the women. Female respondents also spoke positively about the Fon for relaxing certain cultural norms, particularly on issues of succession and on women becoming family heads. As mentioned above, it is the internal structure of the lineage in Kom that determines succession. All close biological males of the lineage are eligible for succession, but preference is given to biological brothers and then to sons of biological sisters (Nkwi 1973). The female members are also not eligible for succession and inheritance. However, according to a female respondent '*women can act like a wul-nchi [caretaker] especially if the prospective heir is her young son... In the past; this was only possible if the women did so in defiance of lineage decision*'.¹⁹³

In addition, mention was also made of the situation in the past where, if a woman assumed such control over her brother's compound and property, his wife or wives were free to choose husbands from among the close biological relatives of the deceased. If not, the normal process was that the successor was given the right to control the deceased's compound and property. The successor was also given the right to become the legal husband of the deceased's widows as well as the legal father of their children. Women were particularly positive that this culture is changing over the years and today it is more of symbolic culture than what is obtained. As stated by one woman:

Some families have scrapped off this law with some form of approval from the Fon and widows have a free will to live their lives after the death of their husbands... They can decide whether they want to marry a new husband or to stay on with the successor. Some control their husband's assets a thing which was not head of in the past. Gradually, we believe the whole of Kom will accept the reality that

¹⁹² Interview with female elite 5th May 2015, Fujua-Kom.

¹⁹³ A female councillor (FGD) 4th of June 2015, Njinikom.

*women cannot be forced to marry people they do not want. However, there is also the 'family compound' where traditional rites are performed which women cannot and should not try to own... that will mean standing against the culture. Every true Kom woman allows the successor to take control of the family compound.*¹⁹⁴

What we see in Kom is that the attitude concerning the appropriate place for women in public affairs is changing. These changes however have been slow and have been dependent on many factors including the attitude and tolerance of traditional leaders but also the socio- political context. However, the Fon has continuously constructed his legitimacy which is performative in character by presenting himself as a leader who is willing to incorporate women.

The paramount Fon of Kom maintains his relational and moral legitimacy almost entirely through this association with the traditional, incorporating almost all the different groups like women in decision making while significantly falling apart with some of the political elites. While some elites in Kom decry that his inability to cooperate with the government has retarded the development of the region, most of the local people in Kom believe that he is active in the village spiritual life and possesses the wealth of knowledge about tradition in which he anchors his legitimacy.

From a material perspective, the Fon has fallen short of promoting what Tyler (1997) referred to as 'the material interests of every group' (Tyler 1997). Those who question the performative and material legitimacy of the Fon are mostly the political elites who argue that the Fon could do better to connect with the state. However, the Fon has gain moral and relational legitimacy from mostly the grassroots population for upholding the Kom cultural values and for incorporating women into decision making structures. Such forms of legitimacy as Black (2008) argues, are gained when individuals or groups perceive the goals and/or procedures of the organisation or the actions of their leader to be morally appropriate. While there may exist in Kom what Black (2008) calls 'multiple legitimacy claims' the Fon's decision to disengage in national politics implies that the Fon is confronted with

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

fewer groups, what Black calls legitimacy communities. He has also a far lesser challenge of building his legitimacy, by enhancing the accountability relationships with a clear majority of his subjects who share similar views on how the Fon should govern. In the next section I compares the peculiarities in the legitimisation process in Kom and Bali.

8.6 Processes of legitimisation in Kom and Bali: Towards a comparative perspective

A comparison of the active political role of traditional leaders (as in Bali) or the political neutrality (as it is the case in Kom) is important in understanding the broader literature on the kinds of legitimacies that traditional authority can build for themselves and the broader importance for conflict management. Suh comparison shows how emphasis on different types of legitimacy are negotiated and achieved, by (dis)engaging national politics. This then affects the extent to which such fons could mediate in local conflicts and how their decisions could be binding within such communities. The main criteria used here for comparison are the typology of legitimacy that these a fon can claim, the differences in community aspiration and perception, the historical sources of building legitimacy and lastly the role of local elites.

8.6.1 The dominant sources of legitimacy in Kom and Bali

Leaders should have all the different sources of legitimacy (moral, material, relational and performative) if their leadership is to be easily sustained (see Black 2008). Both the Fons of Kom and Bali do not have all these different sources of legitimacy as is clear from above. In Kom the Fon has gained more of moral and relational legitimacy and less of material and performative legitimacy. In contrast, the Fon of Bali has gained more of performative and material legitimacy through his active role in party politics which connects him to state and enables him to influence state funded projects in Bali. However, reliance on the state compromises the claims of moral legitimacy which traditional leaders build their authority on. This is because those at the grassroots feel the Fon does not work in their interest.

8.6.2 Differences in community aspirations and perceptions:

Traditional leaders in Kom and Bali act skilfully in accordance with inter/intra village concerns and also their personal attributes. The Fon of Bali is keen on party politics and gains performative legitimacy as a result because he presents himself as key to provide development

In Kom, emphasis on legitimacy is privileged on the traditional role of the Fon as a spiritual protector which the community supports. The inability of the Fon of Kom to connect with the state in the patronage relationship that could enable him broker for local development implies he is not held accountable by his subject where such projects become abortive or poorly executed. Local politicians are those who are expected by grassroots communities in Kom to lobby for local denouement. And because of this, the Fon's role is not perceived as such, as a development provisioner and his legitimacy is independent on the success of such projects. This observation indicates that community's perceptions, interpretation and utilisation of political rhetoric on fons to participate or whether to remain neutral in politics inform their legitimacy in different ways as discussed above.

The Fon's ability to distance himself from modern politics while simultaneously reinterpreting cultural norms to create space for other groups in society like women who hitherto were excluded gives him his strong approval rating within the community. This is however not entirely the case in Bali. In Bali, the exclusion of women in Bali traditional setting was not as severe compared to Kom. This partly explains why women in Kom highlighted their incorporation to traditional structures which was less stressed in Bali. In Bali where the process of legitimisation has been more fluid, emphasis is place more on supporting a fon who draws from his traditional privileges (the moral dimension of legitimacy) to be able to negotiate a space for himself between development and political legitimacy, while pushing for regional dominance.

8.6.3 Historical sources of legitimacy

Traditional authorities in Kom and Bali derive legitimacy in cultural values that are believed to predate colonial rule. Although these are changing, for example, the increased role for women, fons still do have some agency in facilitating such changes. While such claims today are not unquestionable, it is hard to understand the political legitimacy of traditional authorities without seeing the extent to which they draw on these myths and norms for their authority, whether this is real or imagined. Cultural norms provide a framework through which traditional authorities, local populations and the state engage in the legitimization process in both Kom and Bali.

The Bali and Kom desire to retain their Fons because they have historically always been there and symbolise authority, dignity and respect. These communities perceive they risk total disorder without their Fons. Though respondents in both Kom and Bali define themselves through these institutions, they differ in the nature of responsibilities that they associate traditional authorities with. Both communities agreed on issues of maintenance of culture, land allocation and the resolution of conflict. Bali differed mostly on aspects of law and order, as they do not necessarily think the Fon provide law and order within the communities. However, we see that despite these slight differences in terms of the responsibilities that communities ascribe to traditional leaders; Kom and Bali still perceive traditional authority as a symbol of authority, unity and continuity even within the context of the modern state. This questions Mamdani's (1996) argument that colonial rule destroyed traditional political order. The evidence as presented in Kom and Bali indicates that the ideological framework of traditional political order which predates the colonial period continues to provide their terms of reference, albeit with some changes.

In South Africa, Williams (2010) recounts similar views by chiefs in Ximba and Kholweni who also rooted their claims of moral legitimacy in a set of norms and traditional beliefs that predated the creation of the colonial and post-colonial South Africa. Williams opines that there exists the notion in South Africa that the people are bound together with the chieftaincy and that the chieftaincy gives meaning to the identity of the people. According to Williams, most South Africans in Ximba and Kholweni wanted the chieftaincy to continue not only for

what it did on its daily basis but for what it meant to the community in the broader sense. Williams demonstrates how pre-colonial political traditions and myths continue to help shape the structure of traditional political order, which scholars like Maloka (1995) and Mamdani (1996) are silent about.

8.6.4 Role of local elites

Local elites play significant roles in the legitimation process in Kom and Bali, where in Kom, the Fon has exempted himself from national politics. By so doing, he has created space for local elites to build networks with the state with the aim of attracting state sponsored development projects. However, the lack of cooperation with the traditional leaders in Kom implies that political elites have failed to obtain the kind of power and identity that is needed to function within the patronage system in Cameroon. While the decision by the Fon to exclude himself from national politics is supported by the local population in Kom, local state bureaucrats and elites perceive the Fon's action to be hindering their political ambitions and hence the national budget allocation for development in Kom. This is because the Fon's actions limits the extent to which elites can have access and control on local votes which they need to maintain their links with the state. Political elites have thus lost their relevance within the Kom context in this regard, and in their struggle to regain such local identities and influence, some elites connive with local administration to usurp traditional power in Kom.

In Bali, the Fon has come to derive part of his political legitimacy by collaborating with political elites and assumes an active role in national politics. The desire by political elites to control local constituencies and to use traditional leaders as controllers of vote banks gives political elites the opportunity to consolidate their positions and relationships with the state. It also gives political elites the power and the support needed to elicit infrastructural developmental projects on behalf of their communities. By co-opting traditional leaders into party politics, the Fon of Bali obtains a form of legitimisation and authority that is not only derived from his moral basis of legitimacy through myths and customs, but also through the state by way of his political commitments.

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that legitimacy is derived more in the values, interests and different expectations that different audiences may have, which varies significantly across time and space, and between actors and contexts. Through the cases of Kom and Bali, I have demonstrated that traditional leaders can be engage with what Black (2008) calls multiple legitimacy claims, many of which may conflict. This is because different groups can and do hold different perceptions about their leaders and what they expect of them, and these perceptions on whether a leader is legitimate are not necessarily based on commensurable evaluations. Those who govern in informal political orders may as a result seek to build legitimacy for themselves by conforming to the claims of all or a selective group of legitimacy community.

In Bali and Kom, the fons have been challenged to choose the types of accountability relationship that they enter with their subjects because of competing perceptions about how different groups expect their leaders to govern. They make these choices based on what they think is most appropriate to do to gain trust or the legitimacy claims which they think should be prioritised. For fons to be willingly respected and trusted by the different groups, Black (2008) contends requires the construction of different narratives in such a way that every group will perceive the leader to be working in their best interest to merit their trust. I, however, have argued that any effort to construct such a solution should be rooted in a greater understanding of the community's aspirations and expectations; that is, what it means to be legitimate and accountable to them. We can then begin to understand the dynamics of legitimacy and accountability relationships.

I have argued that the Fon of Kom has more relational and moral legitimacy than performative and material legitimacy, particularly due to his weak connection with the state due to his lack of interest in party politics. The Fon of Bali in contrast has strong connection with the state through his political affiliation with the CPDM which gives him material and performative legitimacy, but which also undermines his moral legitimacy with the grassroots population. To say the Fon of Bali lacks moral or relational legitimacy does not imply he is totally illegitimate

on these fronts within Bali. Rather, my assertion is that he has sustained his power and authority mostly by aligning with the state in collaboration with Bali political elites who see his political activities as appropriate, but that has created other challenges. The political elites constitute thus, one of the many legitimacy communities in Bali, and they do not think the Fon's moral and relational legitimacy is compromised by his political activities. To most of the Bali grassroots population, their relationship with the Fon and his moral legitimacy wax and wane depending on the Fon's ability to deliver on his promises or on the issue at stake at a given time. For example, the Fon's moral legitimacy is heavily compromised among the members of the opposition who feel the Fon does not act in their best interest given his partisan affiliation with the CPDM.

Regarding Kom, I have argued that the political neutrality of the Fon of Kom has enabled him to accommodate multiple audiences within the system that reduces the political aspect of inequalities. He gains support as a result, mostly from the grassroots through which he builds his moral legitimacy. While his political stands remain unpopular among the political elites, the Fon has tried to gain popularity among the political elites by creating space for them to connect with the state to canvas for local development. The Fon's abstention from party politics has reduced in Kom the number of legitimacy communities that could possibly emerge because most of the grassroots population supports the Fon and thinks abstaining from party politics is the right thing for the Fon to do. What this means is that, in accepting certain legitimacy claims and developing certain accountability relationships rather than others, the Fon of Kom has chosen to respond to what the grassroots population aspire for, which is to maintain his role as a custodian of their cultural values, adjusting it where and when the people deem so. For example, incorporating women in decision making within the fondom is one of those things which the Fon uses to gain moral legitimacy among women. Because of this, the decisions of the Fon are wilfully obeyed by most of his subjects. Even though there are a few who think the Fon has retarded development in Kom, this view is only popular among the politicians, given that the grassroots communities do not attribute this function to the Fon. The Fon of Bali has on the contrary, a stronger coalition with political elites and less so with most of the grassroots population. Through his collaboration with the

elites, the Fon can attract local development which helps him to build his material legitimacy. The Fon's political affiliation with political elites and the state has created a scenario where concerns of inequalities in Bali have become highly politicised and sadly the Fon is not perceived as a neutral mediator by the grassroots population especially those of the opposition. While the Fon has tried in other ways to accommodate the multiple audiences in Bali his inability to remain neutral has affected the extent to which people trust and obey him as their leader.

CHAPTER 9: CONTESTING FORMS OF AUTHORITIES IN GRASSROOTS GOVERNANCE

9.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the relationship between traditional leaders and the state at the local level and reviews the ways in which these local stakeholders collaborate as well as the tensions that emanate in the execution of their roles. The focus of the chapter is specifically about adjudication of local conflicts and about the complementary, overlapping and the contradictory roles of traditional and state institutions at the local level. The chapter also brings together empirics from previous chapters and theories of legitimacy and political orders in relation to the larger conflicts which I discussed in Chapter Six. Whereas there is a significant overlap between traditional and state institutions regarding the exercise of authority, execution of responsibilities and management of local conflicts, this chapter argues that these overlaps are sometimes mixed with individual interests of the mediators involved in a way that promotes conflicts. Mediators such as D.Os. and the fons are struggling for positions as they grapple with conflict. This is compounded by the fact that neo-patrimonial dynamics generate adverse incentives where some state mediators like the D.O.s seek avenues to make money, vie for relevance and have no long-term interest in the resolution of such conflicts, while others like the fons in Bali are limited by their political engagements. This has an impact on the way that conflicts are managed at the local level by both traditional leaders and state bureaucrats, where such conflicting interests sometimes generate tensions and perpetuate conflicts within communities.

I have demonstrated in Chapter Eight that traditional leaders in Bali and Kom have different sources of legitimacy through which they enforce their authority and power. This chapter builds on that and explores how the different sources of legitimacy are embedded in specific policy fields such as land governance, especially in a context where their authority on such policy fields is questioned by local state bureaucrats who have the legislative authority to control local land on behalf of the state. By so doing, I intend to show how different sources of legitimacy impact on the role that traditional authorities play in conflict management. This will highlight the fact that different sources of legitimacy matter most in conflict management depending on the audience and the issue(s) at stake.

From a theoretical perspective, this chapter extends my critique of Maloka (1995) and Mamdani (1996) who both argue that chieftaincies in contemporary African states have become obsolete and as such are unnecessary. Their argument is based on the claim that traditional authorities have had detrimental impacts on the local population. However, the coexistence of multiple political orders implies they do not only rely on different norms, rules and institutions to foster their legitimation process (see Tamanaha 2008), in some instances, there is complementarity between the different political orders (even if such complementarity is being critiqued) that may coexist within states in Africa.

This chapter draws on the literature on legal pluralism, which emphasises the existence of multiple systems of legal obligation within the confines of the state. I draw particularly from the works of Hooker (1975), Von Benda and Beckmanns (1981) and Tamanaha (2008). I also draw from the hybridity literature which highlights the complementarity between different political orders within the state such as Boege et al. (2009), Richmond (2010), Moe (2011) and the work of Meagher (2012). These scholars offer a nuanced argument which critiques the functioning of hybrid orders, especially in contexts where such informal authorities lack popular legitimacy. By engaging with these two strands of literature and showing how traditional authorities and state straddle between fuzzy boundaries, this chapter offers a more nuanced account of the bifurcated state (cf. Mamdani 1996) to show how traditional authorities can function together.

This chapter consists of four sections. The first section recaps the debate in the literature on legal pluralism which describes separate but parallel-operating orders. The section also discusses a melted combination of diverse and competing political orders with different claims to power and how they overlap, interact and intertwine, which many have also described as hybrid political orders. The second section focuses on the level of cooperation between the state and traditional authorities at the grassroots level in Cameroon. The idea here is to understand which authority has jurisdiction over what type of conflict within these

local communities. The third section seeks to show how different state and traditional leaders navigate such spaces when their authority overlaps. The fourth section demonstrates how both traditional authorities and the state operate as mediators, often shaping their role so as to defend their interests in the ways they engage with local conflicts.

9.1 Understanding relations between and among multiple political orders

African states are often confronted by multiple political orders that create the potential for an uneasy coexistence or supportive alignment within the different normative systems (cf. Meagher 2006; 2012). A common challenge that often arises is between the non-state or informal political orders and the state legal system. The state legal system under such circumstances may either confront or assume a position of neutrality with regard to other non-state actors (Tamanaha 2008). In so doing, Tamanaha (2008) contends the state allows the multiple political orders to function in parallel with each other within the state, each with a degree of autonomy. This gives rise to what many scholars have described as legal pluralism. The state may also build a supportive alignment between informal and formal state actors, especially in contexts where the state is weak or fragile (Tamanaha 2008), which results in what the literature describes as hybrid political orders. Legal pluralism and hybridity are thus two concepts within the literature that capture the coexistence and or complementarity between multiple political orders within the state. While similar to legal pluralism, they two concepts differ in that hybridity emphasises the complementarity between the different legal systems that coexist within states in Africa.

Hooker (1975) defines legal pluralism as ‘the existence of multiple systems of legal obligation within the confines of the state’ (p.5). A defining characteristic of legal pluralism according to Tamanaha (2008) is not only the fact that there are multiple uncoordinated, coexisting or overlapping bodies of law and norms, but that these bodies of law are also diverse in their nature. These multiple legal systems can and do make competing claims of authority. The coexistence of multiple legal systems implies community members can select from different legal orders that they think can better advance their course (Von Benda & Beckmanns 1981). These tensions also pose a challenge to the legal authorities, because they can use the lack of clarity to create rivalry in authority. This reciprocal process of both disputants and the

multiple authorities taking advantage of the multiple legal systems to achieve their interest is captured by Von Benda Beckmanns (1981).

Although Von Benda and Beckmann write from an Asian perspective, they use the concepts of 'forum shopping' and 'shopping forums' to describe how not only parties in disputes select from among the different legal authorities available within a given community but also how the various institutions 'shop' for disputes in which they can intervene. Von Benda and Beckmann contend that the field of jurisdiction between these multiple legal systems overlap, which gives disputants the chance to choose between the different institutions available (basing their choice on what they expect the outcome of the disputes might be), which they call 'forum shopping'. Similarly, Von Benda and Beckmann (1981) note that besides forum shopping, the different institutions also engage in what they term 'shopping forums' where the different institutions like the state, traditional authorities, religious councils and judges try to resolve disputes which they expect to gain some political advantages or avoid cases they perceive to threaten their interests. He notes that 'manipulating disputes to suit their interests seems to be a favourite pastime of many functionaries' (Beckmanns 1981 p.117).

Conversely, there is the concept of hybridity which has emerged as a critique of the notion of failed or fragile states in Africa (cf. Clement et al. 2007). Moe (2011) contends that in hybrid political orders, multiple and competing authority structures, rules and claims to power can coexist. They overlap, interact and intertwine with each other. In the process, these institutions combine elements of both liberal and indigenous governance, leading to local-liberal hybrid forms of order. Boege et al. (2009), Richmond (2010) and Moe (2011) see hybridity to be productive, given it allows for a complementary accommodation of both formal and informal forms of authority operating within a given territory to advance local peace.

For example, Moe (2011) argues that concepts such as clientelism and neopatrimonialism are indeed forms of hybridity in the ways that they combine different realms of governance

logics. However, these concepts are continuously and erroneously studied against standards of the formal 'ideal type' state. Boege et al. (2009) are of the view that some structures of traditional authority can provide ideas that could inspire and build constructive relationships between communities and the formal state. Meagher (2012) has however, critiqued the functioning of hybridity especially in context where such informal authorities lack popular legitimacy. Her focus on a large part is whether such informal actors are predatory. Based on her comparative studies of the RCD-ML of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and the Bakassi Boys vigilante group of eastern Nigeria, Meagher (2012) demonstrates how locally embedded forms of political orders ended up reproducing rather than challenging the predatory and uncountable governance style of the formal state.

Meagher therefore contends that advocates of hybrid forms of governance like Boege et al. (2009) sometimes over emphasize the strength of informal political orders, misconstruing intimidation and political capture for popular legitimacy. Rather than assume informal state actors as productive and often enjoying popular legitimacy, Meagher argues for a more nuanced and a comparative approach to informal political orders that can decipher between constructive and corrosive forms of non-state orders. Such a comparison has the strength to clarify rather than blur the relationship between local orders and local legitimacy (Meagher 2012 p.1074). Exploring legitimacy is thus critical when criticising authority and informal political orders are relevant only if they remain legitimate (Meagher 2012).

9.2 Relationship between the state and traditional authorities in conflict management

In Chapter Four, I discussed how the status of traditional authority in Cameroon is defined within Law No. 77/245 of July 1977. This is important because it shows how the two forms of authorities cooperate but also how they conflict at the local level.

The 1977 law defines traditional authorities as auxiliaries of the state at the local level, who must meet certain criteria for selection (e.g. read and write; moral and physical ability). The decree (section 20-21) further provides traditional leaders with judicial powers and responsibilities in conflict management. The law, by this provision implicitly delegates some governance role to traditional authorities in Cameroon in which they work in collaboration with the local state bureaucrats within their communities. In the 1977 law, there is therefore a considerable effort to enhance the legal jurisdiction of indigenous customs, by devolving certain judicial responsibilities to the local elective village traditional councils. It is however the state, via D.O.s, who set up these traditional councils within every village, which are then charged with full jurisdiction on civil and commercial offenses within their defined territories. This has implications for patronage networks because the D.O.s get to mostly choose members of the community (often those that are loyal to his/her agenda) and can dissolve the council when he thinks it no longer serves the intended purpose.¹⁹⁵ Appointment to the council in such instances becomes a form of reward to villagers who support the D.O.'s agenda.¹⁹⁶ Local communities can request these councils to adjudicate conflicts that have cultural implications.

However, the traditional councils are largely different bodies from purely traditional systems of governance and conflict resolution, as the decisions and rulings from traditional councils draw from both cultural norms and are obliged to conform to state laws. Thus, where customary norms contravene state laws the latter is expected to prevail. Some traditional leaders also perceive these councils to lack the required indigenous skills and competence (to manage conflicts that have cultural implications) and allow considerable discretion to the

¹⁹⁵ Interview with a Bali elite 7th July 2015 Bali.

¹⁹⁶ By the provisions of the 1977 law, the village heads of every community are installed as presidents of these traditional councils.

state legal systems (police, courts, civil and local district administrators) to interfere.¹⁹⁷ Further, in addition to the 1977 Law, the 1974 Land Ordinance and the 1976 Presidential decree require the participation of chiefs and some notables in Land Consultative Boards that adjudicate over land and land-related conflicts in collaboration with the state's administration. The 1974 Land Ordinance and the 1976 decree substituted the customary land tenure system that was in practice in Cameroon before the laws were enacted.

9.2.1 Evolution of land tenure systems in Cameroon

Before the advent of colonialism, native land was not evaluated in economic terms and had no economic value. Perceived as a free good, it was not seen as something that could be owned by an individual (Fonjong et al.2010). Fonjong et al. (2010) argue that land was used to acquire basic goods (such as food, fuel and building items) that communities needed to sustain their livelihoods. Land in this sense was an ancestral gift that was placed under the control of a traditional leader on behalf of the community, which was passed on from one generation to the other (Fisiy 1992). According to the Fon of Kom, the distribution of land was limited only to men and not to women. Women could only come on to a piece of land through their male matrikins¹⁹⁸ or patrikins.¹⁹⁹ The reason for this was that women did not have the customary legal capacity to perform customary rituals, which was mainly the pouring of libation. This was a function that was exclusive to men.²⁰⁰ The German colonisation of Cameroon in 1884 set a new precedence in native land tenure. Native land was appropriated for plantation agriculture with little or no considerations for the tillers/owners of land (Ardener 1968). The German 'Kronland Act' of July 15, 1896 was also enacted which stipulated that any land which was not occupied by the native was considered as free land and eventually became German property (Ardener 1968). The implication of this was that traditional leaders were beginning to lose their control over communal land which was entrusted under their care.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with a Bali elite 7th July 2015 Bali.

¹⁹⁸ One related by blood on the father's side.

¹⁹⁹ One related by blood on the mother's side.

²⁰⁰ Interview with the Fon of Kom 19th of March 2015, Liakom Palace.

The main land tenure law for the British administration was Ordinance No 1927. According to its provisions, all lands - apart from estates registered and recognised by the British administration was considered native land. These native lands were put under the disposition of the British Prime Minister who was charged with controlling it on behalf of the locals (Fonjong et al.2010). It was impossible to use such land without the consent of the Prime Minister. According to this law, natives' rights of ownership over their customary land were converted into customary rights of occupancy as per Article 2 of the law. Natives were basically given mere use and occupation while non-natives who had acquired land in disrespect of the 1927 Ordinance were given certificates of occupancy over the lands they acquired illegally (Fonjong et al.2010). Colonial rule therefore disposed the communal land tenure that natives enjoyed.

At independence, very few changes were made to the land tenure system as the post-colonial state simply continued with the colonial land policies that the British left behind. Through the 1974 law, the government made efforts to harmonize the many land laws because of the British and French legacies (Fonjong et al.2010). Section 1(2) of Ordinance No. 74-1 of July 6, 1974 provides that the state owns all lands in Cameroon and could step in at any time in land disputes to ensure rational use of land, or to acquire land for defence or the economic policies of the nation.

Judging from the provision of the 1974 Land Ordinance, the law made it difficult for women to acquire or exercise land rights in Cameroon. This is because most of the customary land which comprised over 80% of all land in Cameroon that was to be registered or be seized by the state was owned by men (Fonjong et al.2010). The fact that women could only get access to land through their patrikins or matrikins meant that they could not register the lands before April 5, 1974 since they were not considered the owners of such land (Fonjong et al.2010). While attitudes have changed with regards to women and the ownership of land - mostly where they purchase or inherit the land - women's right to land remains precarious. This is because though there are gender-neutral laws in Cameroon on land ownership, their

coexistence alongside very strong customary laws have continued to violate women's rights to and ownership of land (Fonjong et al. 2010).

9.2.2 The intersection between the state and traditional authorities in land conflicts

According to Section 12 of Decree No. 76-166 (27, April 1976) establishing the terms and conditions of land laws in Cameroon, the chief and two of his elders are required to sit on the Land Consultative Board which is largely made of government officials. Moritz (2006) contends that the involvement of traditional leaders in this Board was meant to ascertain the authenticity of customary claims prior to their being converted to statutory rights of ownership under the new law (Moritz 2006). Thus, Moritz argues that traditional leaders were/are expected to take no rather marginal roles on the Board. For example, the D.O is nominated as the Chair of the Consultative Board, while the Head of Service for lands sits as the Secretary. The new framework on land control gave absolute power to the state as the custodians of national land, and the real powers of land control lie with the Chairman (D.O) and his Secretary, not the chief and his notables (Moritz 2006). These power dynamics between the traditional leaders and D.O.s in relation to control of national land also inform the ways different land conflicts are interpreted and resolved through the committees of the Land Consultative Boards.

The 1974 Law broadly groups land conflicts into two main categories: inter- community land conflicts (conflict that involve two communities that fall within two different sub divisions in the same administrative division or two separate administrative divisions) and internal or intra-community land conflicts (these are conflicts that involve two communities or groups within the same administrative sub division). The intra-community land conflicts are also subdivided into two; that is, land conflict between people from the same family unit and land conflict between people from the same village but from different families or from separate villages within the same administrative division.

The D.O. is, by the provisions of the 1974 Land Ordinance, the competent authority for resolving land conflicts between individuals or communities within the same administrative subdivision. With the use of aids like maps where available, the D.O. contracts the services

of land and survey agents who interpret the map before a Commission of Inquiry and who is sent to the field to identify the land boundaries. In the same vein, the SDO by the same provisions of the 1974 Land Ordinance is charged with the responsibility of handling land conflicts between two subdivisions of the same administrative division and he follows the same procedure as the D.O. in inter- community conflicts that involve groups from two different administrative divisions. The Governor is the competent authority in setting up a Commission of Enquiry in collaboration with the traditional authorities of the disputing communities. Here, the traditional authorities work with the Land Consultative Board, which is charged with the demarcation of land and giving land titles to ensure that the appropriate land is been given to the rightful owner.

Any verdict of a Land Consultative Board over a disputed territory without the endorsement of the traditional leaders is considered by the law as null and void. While the law seems to empower traditional leaders with a right to veto controversial decisions of the Land Consultative Board, it has also given rise to the situation where state bureaucrats manipulate the appointment and recognition of chiefs and village representative (which I have discussed in Chapter Seven) to ensure that they get compliant candidates appointed as chiefs. Such patronage relationships allow state bureaucrats to sell national land to private investors or for their own private use with the aid of such compliant chiefs.

Although the 1974 Land Ordinance empowers the Land Consultative Board in handling all land related conflicts, there was consensus among informants in the field (that is, state administrators, traditional leaders and the members of the community) that traditional authorities were/are have the capacity to resolve intra- community land conflicts, especially conflicts that involved members of the same lineage or between different lineages. The reason for this according to one of the D.O.s I interviewed is that:

Traditional leaders can easily ascertain how such lands under dispute had been used in the past. Neighbours to the disputed piece of land can easily be called up

*to testify on such matters and their testimonies can be verified with neighbours to the disputed territory...*²⁰¹

Regarding inter-community conflict one interviewee in Bali noted:

*Unlike intra-community conflicts where traditional leaders have local myths that could be used to enforce decisions from local courts, inter-community conflicts usually involve groups with opposing cultures who have little regard to each other's culture, making local myths as a decision- enforcing mechanism ineffective.*²⁰²

Regarding inter-community conflicts, traditional leaders are considered to lack the capacity to handle such conflicts. According the study participant above, fons lack the necessary institutions to resolve and pass fair verdicts in inter-community conflicts. Judges are usually biased²⁰³ and do not consider the merit²⁰⁴ of the case. *'Each judge in such circumstances seeks to defend his group's interest.'*²⁰⁵

The Land Consultation Boards under the chairmanship of the D.O, SDO and the Governor were considered by the local communities to have, on paper, better capacities in resolving land conflicts involving different administrative divisions and had greater potential to remain neutral. These different types of conflicts discussed and the authorities of resolving land conflicts are summarised in the table below:

²⁰¹ Interview With a senior Government official (Divisional Officer) interviewed 28th May 2015, Bamenda.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Interview with a Bawock elite 7th June 2015, Bamenda.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Queen Mother 23rd April 2015 Sho-Kom.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Table 3: Types of land conflicts and the competent management authorities.

Types of Conflict	Description	Competent Conflict Management Authority
Inter-community land conflict	Conflicts that involve communities which fall within two subdivisions, within the same administrative divisions	Senior Divisional Officer/Chiefs/Fons
	Conflicts that involve communities which fall within two subdivisions, from separate administrative divisions.	Governor /Chiefs/Fons
Intra-community land conflict	Families within the same administrative division	Division Officer/Chiefs/Fons
	Villages within the same administrative sub- division	Division Officer/Chiefs/Fons

Source: Drafted by author on the basis of the 1974 Land law in Cameroon

9.2.3 The intersection of the state and traditional authorities on criminal offenses

Criminal offenses in Cameroon are the exclusive prerogatives of the courts. While traditional councils can function at the local level, they, as well as the Land Consultative Board under the D.O., are not allowed to adjudicate on incidents that are criminal in nature. The Cameroon Criminal Procedure Code amended in 2005 by law № 2005/007 of 27 July 2005 laid down the principles and procedures involved in criminal actions. These include crimes such as the possession of ammunition, theft, murder, abduction, rape and assault. These types of conflicts are referred strictly to state courts. Many informants referred to the high volumes of litigation in state courts, indicating that some of the disputes within these communities would have been peacefully resolved or would not have even arisen without the establishment of state courts. One of the D.O.s I interviewed in this research noted that:

The population always do not know which problems to take to court... People do not know this and usually take such cases as land conflict to court and as such the

*people are sucked dry of their resources by magistrates, lawyers and at the end these cases are still referred to the Land Consultative Board.*²⁰⁶

From the above quote, we see that not only are there multiple and overlapping bodies of law within these communities, there is diversity amongst them as well. Legal plurality in this context makes competing claims to authority and may in some instances impose conflicting norms. Evidence from the quote above suggests that the people are often unaware of avenues more appropriate to their claims that they could pursue. Such confusion between multiple legal orders gives avenues for individuals or groups within these communities to select from coexisting legal authorities those that can best protect their interest (Tamanaha 2008).

9.2.4 The intersection of the state and traditional authorities in socio-cultural conflicts

The regulation of traditional authorities by the 1977 law empowers traditional leaders to administer justice in conformity with their native laws and customs, especially where litigation involves subjects under such traditional authorities. In matters of family law, inheritance and caste, religion and African belief systems, ethnic communities are allowed the discretion within the law to make decisions on the basis of their cultural norms governing such issues. However, while the law empowers traditional authorities to pass judgement on cultural issues based on native law, there is also a caveat to the law that limits the applicability of the native laws where such laws contravene state laws.

Traditional authorities are considered by the 1997 law to have the capacity to resolve family conflicts that are closely linked to property, succession, and inheritance. This is because, as custodians of such custom, they know the norms guiding succession and inheritance within such cultures. Similar to marriage related cases and divorce, the disputing parties as per the 1996 law are required to seek resolution through the customary system with the assistance

²⁰⁶ Interview with a D.O, 26th May 2015, Bali.

of an unofficial mediator and a passive presence of the state. However, state legal systems are often preferred for other disputes related to incest and adultery, and people bypass traditional approaches. In such cases, the administration requests the traditional authority (traditional council in question) to submit the report of the conflict and their verdict. One D.O. noted that:

This brings us to work together with traditional authority and by so doing, we either provide a definite solution for peace to reign or use other state institutions to enforce the ruling of the traditional council. In the North-West culture for example, a successor is only the administrator of the deceased legacy limited to property and land, but not the owner of all family land. In a case of intra-family land conflict where the successor claims to own family land and refuses to accept the verdict of traditional council, the matter may be reported to us the administration. In that situation, seven copies of previous rulings are submitted to the Land Consultative Board [the D.O., fon and two notables] which examines and passes a final judgment. These decisions are then enforced by the forces of law and order to ensure that peace prevails. At times when traditional councils take decisions, people take them to court and this goes a long way to weaken the powers of the fon.²⁰⁷

The above quote resonates with what Von Benda and Beckmanns (1981) have described as 'forum shopping' and 'shopping forums'. Perhaps even more important is their contention that even various institutions shop for disputes especially when it suits their interest to do so. The administration despite not having the authority to resolve succession disputes remain very receptive to such cases because through them, state officials can extort money from the disputants.²⁰⁸ One way they do this, Von Benda and Beckmanns (1981) argue, is by criticising other forums in procedural terms as an effective way to compete for power. Such cases of

²⁰⁷ Interview with the Divisional Officer for Bali, 26th May 2015, Bali.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

succession may be treated as if they only had to do with public disorder and violence while ignoring the real substance of the dispute.

Although traditional authorities are perceived to have the moral and legislative authority to handle conflicts that emanate from local cultures as the cases above, some disputants would only prefer the state legal system (forum shopping) irrespective of the fact that the formal political orders may be unfamiliar with the local customs. Beckmanns (1981) then argues that the existence of other legal systems gives the opportunities to disputants to select from coexisting legal authorities that they think can better advance their cause.

The above quote is also indicative of the limits of customary laws within the context of the modern state. With the advent of state laws, customary law has seen its primary ties with its social base diminished and is subjected to the legal and political authority of the state. It also shows that in disputes, many parties choose to bypass the native law system which is perceived as inefficient, unreliable and subjective in character. People or groups resort instead to seeking litigation under the state legal system. In either case, the fact that the state works closely with the traditional system in passing judgement on issues with cultural implications indicates possibilities for facilitated hybridity between the two orders. As Moe (2009) asserts, such an approach promotes positive interactions and accommodation between different bases of locally legitimate authorities to leads to a stronger and an inclusive governance.

Although traditional authorities possess the moral authority to compel attendance and compliance with local verdicts, this is often only possible when the disputants come from the same community and share the same local norms and myths that bind the society together and enforce the decisions of the fon. The usage of such myths however is not necessarily binding on disputants who have different cultural backgrounds.²⁰⁹ Sometimes local elites see traditional institutions as archaic and obsolete and would not respect any of their decision.²¹⁰ While both traditional systems and the state continue to co-exist as forms of authority at the

²⁰⁹ Interview with Bali opposition member, 7th July 2015 Bali.

²¹⁰ Interview with Bali female elite 25th July 2015, Bali.

local level, one thing remains clear: state laws legally take precedence over native laws in Cameroon. Even where such native laws still prevail, they have become less respected. With native sanctions diminished and social relations necessary for the effectiveness of native laws disrupted, the indigenous systems have declined as government's role flourishes in adjudicating local disputes (Nkwi 1979).

9.3 Tensions engendered by the relationship between the state and traditional authority

To illustrate broader arguments of these multiple legal orders represented by the two forms of authorities, the discussion in this section will focus on two of the areas where such tensions are eminent. That is, tensions over traditional marriage rites and over land and land-related conflicts. It is important to note that tensions between the state and traditional authorities are not limited only to these two areas. There are also tensions over the appointment and recognition of traditional authorities (succession disputes) which I have already discussed in Chapter Seven.

9.3.1 The state versus traditional authority in the Nchah- Wei conflict in Kom

The Nchah-Wei incident in Kom is a useful example in highlighting the complexities of the power imbalance at the local level between the state and traditional authorities. The Nchah-Wei dispute involved a groom and his father in-law. The traditional council passed their judgement according to the local customs, but this was overturned by the D.O. who relied on written manuscripts of tradition - with a presumption that culture is static and fixed. A respected Kom elder and a member of the council explained to me:

I confronted the D.O... in Fundong because he was against a decision we made over a marriage/divorce case that was reported to us. A young boy who just recently got married to the wife was being asked by his father in-law to carry out the rites of Nchah-Wei [providing the required items such as meat, corn, firewood etc. to the bride's family] in addition to paying the bride price before he could move in with his wife. The groom had been reliably informed that his father-law did not perform this rite when he was marrying the mother of the bride, and

therefore, was exempted according to the Kom culture from performing the Nchah-Wei.

In Kom there are two ways in which we could explain this: first, it is either that the father in-law never had the resources to carry out this rite of Nchah-Wei or that it was not enforced within the lineage in which his wife came from. By custom therefore, the father in-law is not allowed to ask more than what he himself had offered when he got married. This is not to say the actual dowry cannot be altered, especially in today's world where we invest a lot in our children.

In pronouncing judgement over such issues, we often consider the flexibility of our tradition and our verdict to such matters in the council is often case-specific. The father in-law in the current case could not request a traditional marriage rite which he himself did not perform. After a careful review of the matter, the council agreed that the boy deserved to move in with his wife or be refunded his items to get married elsewhere. Not happy with our judgement, the father in-law reported the case with the D.O. who requested written copies of our ruling on the conflict.

We were later told by the D.O. that Nchah-Wei is a Kom legal tradition and so the boy was obliged to perform it according to how the custom demanded. In saying this, he was referring to other cases elsewhere in Kom where he had intervened in which Nchah-Wei was a common practice. The D.O. also argued that the father in-law had the right to decide what the dowry of the daughter should be. He did not know that in Kom there is a difference between the dowry and other traditional rites. The D.O threatened to dissolve the council on grounds that we were incompetent. We were also advised to reverse our ruling and out of annoyance, I had to teach him some lessons of our culture. We refused the orders

*and till this day that we speak the case is still under review with the government people.*²¹¹

From the account of the informant above, we notice how the D.O privileged a static interpretation and understanding of Kom customary law against the traditional leader's perception and interpretation of the case. The D.O represents a unified body of law and argued that the father in-law had the right to decide what the dowry of the daughter should be. Also, we see that the state in its relationship with the traditional systems has not only diminished local techniques of flexibility and interpretation but has also narrowed the selection of what the state chooses to make relevant within these local cultures. State representatives do not consult the whole wealth of local customs where they operate but choose partial narratives that may support their actions where they adjudicate on cultural matters.

The relationship between the state and traditional authorities becomes even more critical when the state attempts to homogenise cultural practices within a community that has very fluid cultural norms. By harmonising such cultural practices, the state avails itself as a competent authority to adjudicate on local issues that have cultural implications. Although the father in-law had the option to report the case to a higher traditional court at the level of Fon's palace, he opted to shop for an alternative system, in this case, the state legal system which he understood could support his cause. It was unlikely the palace could reverse the decision of the council given that their judgements are also based on the same logic of flexible cultural interpretation.

The tension between the state and traditional authority as evident above is one of jurisdiction but even beyond that, it constitutes rivalry over procedures of how the decisions were/are made. For example, the councillors accused the D.O. of basing his decisions (of revoking their verdict) on a simplified version of the Kom marriage laws, while the D.O. on his

²¹¹ Interview with a Kom notable, 1st May, 2015- Ngwah-Kom.

part accused the councillors for incompetence and being inflexible enough to let the father-in-law to determine what he wanted as bride price for his daughter. This resonates with Von-Benda Beckmanns (1981) argument that dispute processing between different political orders is often characterised by competition for power and legitimacy and manifested in terms of jurisdictional and procedural arguments.

From the narrative of the informant above, we notice that the government attempts to treat customary laws as if it could take a fixed form. They insist on a certainty and consistency alien to Kom customary jurisprudence, which depends largely on expansive judicial discretion. While such discretion and flexibility are necessary to the working of traditional systems, they constitute an intolerable deficiency to the modern state that has no means of inserting itself into such tradition. Such flexibility could enable sound discretion to be exercised over local issues or issues that have cultural implications.

By relating the authoritative state laws to local customary norms one thing seem evident, the customary approaches can only function by taking on the character of the modern state regulation (Nkwi 1979). In this case, it must become certain, definite, consistent, obligatory rather than discretionary or circumstantial as is evident with the fluidity of marriage rites in Kom. Nkwi (1979) further notes that what the state seems to do in Cameroon is to dissolve away that which cannot be transformed into modern law and passively absorb the remainder in a way that hardly bears resemblance with the past as it was practiced within such cultures. Even in cases where traditional norms are made the basis of legislation, these norms are not implemented by the old indigenous techniques. Enforcing decisions from local traditional councils by state legislation, courts and police stands in striking contrast to allowing them simply to be adopted gradually by the individuals or groups enforced through indigenous techniques like the fear of being ostracised. Of course, this is not to say that such processes (like ostracisation) do no longer occur, rather they now operate outside the legal framework of state law in Cameroon. The relation between the state and traditional authorities is such that national laws take precedence over customary law.

9.3.2 Competition and struggle over control and access to land

Deepening conflicts around land allocation can be understood within the context of the 1974 land law which replaced the customary land tenure in Cameroon. This led to claims to land and resistances which are recurrent in Cameroon today. The 1974 Land Ordinance created a gap between the customary land tenure and the private ownership of land. The state land policies promoted in Cameroon especially from the 1970s were all anchored on the notion that customary systems of land ownership did not provide the needed security to promote agricultural investment and productive use of land. Fisiy (1995) asserts that the lack of security was thought to lie in the lack of well-defined and implementable property rights. Individual and private property rights became privileged over customary and communal ownership of land (Fonjong et al. 2010).

The effect of this was that traditional leaders and their claim to land under the customary land tenure was now being challenged by the private property law tenure (Fisiy 1995). The ability to convert communal ownership of land rights to private ownership land rights led to the illegal sale of land, accelerated by the local administrators such as the D.O.s and some fons. The D.O.s take advantage of the new land laws that place national land under their supervision to seize control over land and other land-related prerogatives that formerly accrued to traditional leaders.²¹² Two factors, particularly in the North-West of Cameroon, have marked the major turning point in the occupation of, and conflict between the state and traditional rulers, over the control of land since the introduction of the 1974 Land Ordinance.

First, the settlement of Fulani graziers who migrated from Nigeria to settle in the region has led to many conflicts over resource management since access to right for grazing competes directly with the utilisation of land by farmers. Secondly, the ensuing competition for land has given rise to conflicts over land for cash crop cultivation and for food crop cultivation and hence conflict between these categories of farmers has arisen (Angwafor 2014; Fonjong et al. 2010). In Kom for example, informants noted that the Fulani graziers who settled on Kom

²¹² Interview with Kom business elite 3rd July 2015 Fundong.

land paid an annual tribute of one cow per family to the Fon as a sign of their recognition of the Fon as landlord over all of Kom. This practice, however, has significantly died down since the Fon's claim as landlord has been challenged by the state administration.²¹³

With the introduction of the 1974 Land Ordinance, graziers, on the advice of local administrators were persuaded not to pay tribute to the Fon of Kom, which meant that a valuable source of income to the palace was lost.²¹⁴ In a bid to challenge the administration over the right to administer land and to assert that they still own and control native land, some traditional authorities, including the Fon of Kom, sold off unoccupied land to graziers. In an interview with the Fon of Kom, he recounted that his predecessor Jinabo II was served several warning notes by the D.O. for Fundong Central for 'dabbling with land matters'.²¹⁵ This was based on the claim that all land matters were reserved for the Land Consultative Board under the supervision of the D.O. When I asked why he was selling land, which was contrary to the customs of the people of Kom, the Fon retorted:

*Why should we not sell it? Why keep it and for who when the government now claims ownership of the whole land including where we are sitting. Even if we do not sell it, the D.O and his people will eventually sell it to the Fulani and swallow the money or buy their big jeeps. So, I think between me, my colleagues and the government people, it is not a question of selling it, it is rather a problem of who sells it first.*²¹⁶

The above quote highlights the fact that traditional leaders (as a contesting form of local authority) see themselves in direct competition with the state for management prerogatives and control over land and the benefits they get from it. Traditional rulers have long seen cattle graziers in the North-West as a source of revenue through the payment of tributes. Similarly, state bureaucrats also view Fulani graziers as a reliable source of revenue for self-enrichment (Goheen 1988; Fisiy 1995). That is, Fulani graziers are both a source of revenue,

²¹³ Interview with a kom elite 4th of May 2015 Belo Kom.

²¹⁴ Interview with Kom business elite 3rd July 2015 Fundong.

²¹⁵ Interview with the Fon of Kom 19th March 2015, Liakom palace.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

where taxes formally collected by the state and also a source of income for corrupt government officials, who illegally taxed them for their personal gains. Both the fons and state bureaucrats extort money and other material resources from graziers in promise of land, with each claiming to be having absolute control over native land. They lay these claims, ostensibly drawing from different legal orders that inform their actions.

The Fulani are thus subjected to a kind of double taxation in the form of tribute²¹⁷ to the traditional leaders and taxes or extortion²¹⁸ in the form of bribes²¹⁹ to the state and the state bureaucrats respectively. This only goes to suggest the struggle of authority and control over people and resources at the local levels, especially with regard to ownership and control over native land. Another community member I talked to in the field observed that the switch in Fulani loyalty from traditional leaders to state bureaucrats accounts largely for the farmer grazier tensions in Kom.²²⁰ Other informants including the Fon of Kom accused the state bureaucrats of taking sides with richer graziers in exchange for bribes²²¹ in form of cash and cattle.²²² This is usually against the interest of poor farmers who see themselves as bona-fide sons of the soil.

9.4 The paradox of conflict mediators: State and non-state actors in conflict management

This section highlights how mediators - both state and traditional authorities - operate at the grassroots to carve out their roles and influence, while simultaneously defending their interests in the way they engage with local conflicts. Whereas there is no significant difference between the Fons of Kom and Bali on how they see their control over land (given that the overarching approach is driven by the legislative authority of the state), the two Fons use different approaches to violate the legislative authority to seek direct control over land governance. The concern here is how well they do this which relates to their legitimacy. The extent to which they may directly have an impact on land conflicts is also

²¹⁷ A Fulani grazier (FGD) 5th May 2015 Fujua- Kom.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Interview with female elite 5th May 2015 Fujua- Kom.

²²¹ A female councillor (FGD) 4th of June 2015 Njinikom.

²²² Ibid.

related to the kinds of legitimacy that they have built for themselves as I demonstrated in Chapter Eight.

9.4.1 Local state bureaucrats- mediators or vectors of conflicts?

Examining bureaucrats' actual behaviour in the exercise of their functions and power at the grassroots level helps to expand our understanding of the relationship between the state and traditional leaders. Such an examination helps in understanding the limitations that the state sometimes faces when it tries to cooperate with traditional authorities and the subsequent failure in their ability to manage conflicts where they occur. This is because the actions of state representatives have, in some cases, influenced the ways that traditional leaders relate with the state on issues of local governance. The D.O.s, in the views of many interviewees for this thesis, are the principal cause of conflict because of their role as administrators over national land. One of the interviewees in Kom recounted how D.O.s contribute to the local conflicts in the North-West:

We had a case that was reported in our council between the graziers and the farmers here in Fundong. This case had been reported also to the D.O. for Fundong at the time. The D.O. ruled that the farmers were supposed to protect their food crops from the grazing cattle. In fact, the D.O. even advised the Fulani people to bring their cattle next to the farms without having to worry about any destruction. He said this although these groups were already fighting in the past.²²³

The above administrative decision from the D.O. asking graziers to bring their cattle close to farming land was an implicit call for the farmers and graziers to remain in a ceaseless conflict. Despite several visits to the conflict site by the government as the informants recounted, each time there was a clash between farmers and graziers, the main goal was to pass judgement over the disputed territory in such a way that maintained the status quo so that

²²³ Interview with Kom business elite 3rd July 2015 Fundong.

they could continue to demand bribes in the form of money or cattle from the graziers.²²⁴ One way the authorities make land conflict relevant to them in the Grassfield of Cameroon is by exploiting adversaries with varying interests over natural resources to create, mediate, and perpetuate local conflicts. The limited nature of arable land in a region that depends largely on farming has meant an increase in conflict between groups that officers exploit for their personal gains. However, Fisiy (1995) asserts that these strategies to sustain conflict are not always transparent or clear. Externally, the authorities appear to follow the official judiciary process enshrined within the legal framework of the state. In other instances, they appear to draw from local cultures as they try to resolve such conflicts. State officials draw from the different legal frameworks that suit their specific interest at any given time.

Tamanaha (2008) asserts that actors/mediators pursuing their personal interest in situations of legal pluralism will not consistently invoke or support the same official legal system or normative system over time. Depending on the circumstances, for example; the same party may in one situation support customs in a contest with state law, while in another situation invoke state law against customs. The D.O. in mediating over such conflicts like the one between the farmers and the graziers followed the state protocol. They conscientiously organise delegations to conflict sites together with traditional leaders and interview all actors concerned,²²⁵ though motivation is always required from the disputants for this to be done.²²⁶ The administrators refer to official laws and policies in their decisions.²²⁷ There is always pretence of bureaucratic practices that intend to resolve local conflicts, however little or no actions always accompanies the decision and the result is always the persistence of such conflicts.²²⁸ Saying that farmers ought to protect their farm products against the grazing cattle gave more rights to the graziers to destroy food crops since they already had the support of the administration. The administrators do this because in most cases, the stand to gain more by the continuation of the conflict than attempting to resolve it. To be able to

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ A village head in Kom (FGD) 22nd May 2015 Fundong.

²²⁶ Interview with a Bali notable, 28th of May 2015, Bali.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

achieve this, they impose their supremacy as controllers of national land over traditional leaders to pose as the ultimate solution to such land related conflicts. As one informant states:

*They collect huge sums of money from rich cattle grazers who usually want to continue judicial processes to gain access to disputed grazing land and from farmers who wish to slow the process to avoid eviction.*²²⁹

The above quote resonates with the assertion by Von Benda and Beckmann (1981 p.7) that it is not always in the party's interest to get their disputes settled quickly. Some would prefer protracted litigation especially when they still can get the material benefit from the disputed territory. 'They will exhaust all shopping possibilities in the village and then perhaps go to the state courts just to postpone the final decision' (Beckmanns 1981). Rather than resolving the conflict, the conflicting groups continue in conflict with each trying to protect its interest. Such an approach of handling conflicts corroborates Fisher's (1995) assertion that mediators are perceived to be most effective in managing conflicts if they are seen to be impartial. Young (1967 p.81) further argues that, 'the existence of a meaningful role for a third party will depend on the party's being perceived as an impartial participant'. The argument here is that mediators should be seen to gain nothing from facilitating the process between the protagonists.

The actions of state bureaucrats such as the D.O. further corroborate the assertion by Brien, Dunn, and Rathbone (1989) and Bayart (1989) that authorities in the neo-patrimonial state derive their power and income partly from the arbitrage between different groups of networks. It is thus in their interest to create or perpetuate conflicts between these groups (Berry 1993 p. 130). Peters (2004) notes that one should see accumulation to refer not only to the material benefits of landed resources but also to the symbolic capital that links for example, political authority with control over land and patronage. While bureaucrats try to assert their power over land control for their own benefits, graziers and farmers are left at

²²⁹ Interview with the Fon of Achain, 7th June at Achain-Kom.

the mercy of the tensions between traditional authority and the state. One other interviewee noted that:

The government divides our people, sometimes deliberately. Communities who traditionally would pay allegiance to one fondom are administratively placed under another fon in a different administrative subdivision. This arrangement alters traditional boundaries between most villages and this brings about conflict. Government does not even explain these changes to our people who are not well educated to understand what is happening. In their ignorance, they continue to violate the customs [going to the farm on days like country Sunday and respecting and imposing practices that are not accepted within their new communities] of their new communities [fons] in which they administratively belong. Local administrators exploit such situations when conflict arises by setting commission of inquiries and asking the people to pay the charges in the name of visiting delegations. These commissions are immediately dissolved each time the administrator is replaced and a new one constituted. This then becomes cyclical from one administration to the other as a way of making money.²³⁰

From the above quote, we see the lack of will among state bureaucrats to end conflicts especially when the government intentionally alters ethnic boundaries under different administrative arrangements without properly educating them on the implications of such arrangements. These communities are often unaware that such administrative arrangements require them to pay traditional allegiance to the fon of the new administrative unit to which they belong. The setting up of commissions of enquiries as a way of tapping resources from the parties or communities in conflict links with what Bayart (1993) has referred to as the politics of the 'belly' in Cameroon. In other words, the extraction of

²³⁰ Interview with a Bali elite, 7th July 2015 Bamenda.

resources from community members by D.O.s denotes personal accumulation of wealth through tenure of political power (Bayart 1993).

The conflicts engendered by these political dynamics as people and territories are displaced while the state bureaucrats exploit such loopholes for personal gains corroborates the assertion by Van de Walle (2001) on African states. He sees African states as regimes in which personal rule and multiple political orders coexist with a modern bureaucracy. This is because extortion and much corruption require that the state set rules that are generally followed. Such rules then create avenues for abuse that could be exploited by local state agents for their own interest. Commenting on the significance of rules Hyden notes that:

Rules matter to most people, but not all the time. Rules are typically stable, and as long as they serve their purpose, people, including politicians, do not care much about them. But if circumstances in the society change and rules get interpreted as constraining or outdated, they become targets of political mobilisation. Since much of the legitimacy of those in power rests with how well they make use of existing rules, they have vested interest in paying attention to them. If they overlook them, however, civil society responds through the activation of organised groups demanding change (Hyden 1992 pp.7-8).

As clearly expressed by the interviewee above, state bureaucrats achieve success in their interests by playing with the formal and informal rules of the game, that is, through trickery. This not only breeds violent local conflicts as I have demonstrated with the dynamics of the Bali-Bawock conflict and the succession dispute in Kom (see Chapters Six and Seven), but also weakens the ability of the state to respond in mitigating violence. This weakness is because individual aggrandisement (politics of the belly) is the dominant mode of government and the logic that guides the behaviour of the state bureaucrats under such circumstances (Bayart 1989). The constant rotation of these state bureaucrats in the form of transfers which is often done randomly by the president of the country or the minister of territorial administration gives room for such temporal and exploitative commissions of enquiries set by such state bureaucrats. This is because the D.O.s are often aware that their stay within a given region can only last for a given period. What happens after they are gone usually does not constitute any of their worries.

9.4.2 Traditional leaders and strategies of reasserting control over land in Kom and Bali

One of the ways in which traditional authorities have always tried to gain legitimacy and power has been to assert their authority and control over land. The clash between the state and traditional authorities on access to and control over land affects the moral legitimacy of chiefs as custodians of their ancestral land. To survive, the Fons of Kom and Bali have come up with different strategies to rival the legislative authority of the state over local land. One informant in Kom captured the Fon's authority over land stating that:

*The Fon of Kom has been there before the coming of the government [D.O.] and will still be Fon when the government leaves... Kom people belong to the Fon and not the D.O. and he should not interfere with rights that accrue only to the palace alone.*²³¹

Another informant from Bawock questioned that:

*How can we say we have a Fon or that he is our ruler when he does not control land? How can the government share land to who it chooses while the Fon and we his children die of starvation for lack of farm land?*²³²

The above doubts expressed by members of local communities about the institutional continuity and claims of ownership and control of local land are indicative of the tensions between the two modes of authority over land control. The argument for institutional continuity is aptly made here when the Kom people support the traditional institutions and also the argument that the D.O. comes and goes but the Kom people will always have their Fon. The statement provides some powerful insights into different local perceptions of the state when we look at the relationship between the state and traditional authority. The state as represented by the D.O. is seen as transient and unreliable, while the local ruler is a symbol of continuity.

²³¹ A village head in Kom (FGD) 22nd May 2015 Fundong.

²³² Interview with Bawock elite 7th June 2015 Bamenda.

In dealing with the state, traditional authorities tend to internalise what they see as useful and refuse to comply with what they differ from or do not benefit them. For example, traditional leaders even under the customary system, use the 1974 Land Ordinance to obtain concrete land boundary markers. Though the markers confer no formal rights, community members have accepted them as evidence of the applicant's effective occupancy of such lands. This practice of legitimating ownership and control over land in Cameroon by using both tenure systems corroborate the assertion by Moore (1973) that there exist multiple legitimacies across Africa and that state actors in many cases conflict with other non-state actors especially where the state is weak or absent. Moore (1973) writes about this in what she describes as semi-autonomous political spaces that function between official state laws and informal local rules. She asserts that it is not feasible for the state normative system of governance to have total control. Moore notes that:

We are dealing with a partial order and a partial control of social life by rules reglementary processes at work in the society at once. (Moore 1973 p.3)

Such reglementary processes are all conscious efforts, according to Moore, by political actors to build and re-establish social and symbolic orders and to build their moral legitimacy. Moore also acknowledges the fact that these competing political actors are not static given that they are autonomous but also connected at some points which brings to the fore the fluidity of institutions within the state that claim multiple legitimacies. The explicit idea of Moore is the fact that there can be within the state multiple authorities with rule making powers which are less complex than the state.

The prevailing situation of traditional authorities wanting to sustain control over land (in competition with the state) is particularly marked in communities in the North-West where grazing is practiced. In Bali, traditional leaders within these communities have devised new ways of exerting control over local lands. One Bali interviewee recounted how traditional leaders who are part of the land commission set up by the state require that parties in dispute over a given land or applicants applying for land certificate should first stop at the palace with a gift in cash or kind (usually drinks or 5000 frs). This is to recognise the authority of the

Fon over local land. Failure to do so will result in the said traditional authority boycotting the session.²³³ Although the powers of traditional leaders seem diminished within the 1974 Land Ordinance, their effort to make community members pay a token gift to the Fon is a realistic way to maintain some form of political control and to build their moral and material legitimacy as they struggle with the state over the management of the people and resources.

This brings to the fore concerns about the strength of local embeddedness as a guarantee of legitimate informal governance represented by the Fon. According to Renders and Terlinden (2010 p. 727), informal political orders can lead to socially illegitimate as well as socially legitimate forms of governance. They contend that positive outcomes of grassroots governance are sensitive to the balance between legitimate and unstable informal institutions and are threatened by external tensions and pressures. Such tensions are witnessed between the fon and the state over the struggle to control local land. The imposition by the Fon, to collect fees before attending the Land Consultation Board shows that the Fon's claim to have local control over land is achieved by force, rather than through local legitimacy from the community. Similarly, the ability of the Fon to defy the state as the legislative authority over local land is derived from a combination of ethnic manipulation from below which Meagher qualifies as predatory in nature (Meagher 2012). The fact that informal political orders and their outcomes can be illegitimate as well as legitimate in the eyes of local people, suggests a review of such institutional histories and how their actions could be predatory in nature to the local people.

Similarly, the Fon of Kom has also created new strategies to remain relevant. The Fon unscrupulously allocates national or communal land to family members or sells it to investors for his material gains. The Fon also collects a form of taxes from the Fulani grazers who are required to give him cattle annually or at least each time the Fon has a major occasion at the palace.²³⁴ These actions have both performative and material dimensions of legitimacy. Through such acts, the Fon exercises his moral authority through a show of power,

²³³ Interview with Bali female elite 25th July 2015, Bali.

²³⁴ Ibid.

demonstrating his materiality in that he can still collect taxes without necessarily having legislative authority over land. The Fon gains moral legitimacy through these acts by demonstrating his power and control over land. The Fon's approach is pre-emptive given he does not necessarily wait for land disputes to demonstrate his moral authority over land. However, from the above evidence highlighted in Kom, we also see significant level of ethnic manipulation, predatory modes of accumulation by the Fon rather than local support from the grassroots community. Such predatory accumulation of wealth through the sale of land sits outside popular grassroots support (cf. Meagher 2012) as well as any formal state approval. We notice considerable regulatory similarity between informal political actors with regards to control over land, represented by the Fon, and the predation of the state actors represented by the D.O. which they claim to fight against.

What we notice from both the Kom and Bali is that even though the overarching approach of land governance in Cameroon is driven by the legislative authority, the two communities have devised different strategies through which they engage in 'activist'-like behaviour to secure or expand their spheres of influence by ruling across jurisdictional boundaries. The two Fons have in the process undoubtedly gained some form of performative and material dimensions of legitimacy which reinforce their moral legitimacy because through such acts (such collecting taxes or forcing community members to pay a fee before they attend Land Dispute Commissions) the communities continue to see them as the real custodians of their ancestral land. They both use these strategies to challenge the legislative authority that the state has over land and by so doing, they build and reinforce their moral authority by gaining greater access and control of native land. There is however a variation in the extent to which the Fons of Bali and Kom have successfully used these strategies to gain access and control to land or to have a significant impact on land conflicts within their communities. This has to do with the kind of legitimacy that these Fons have largely based their authority on.

As earlier discussed in Chapter Eight, the Fon of Bali has built his authority by expanding into material and performative (political realm) legitimacy. He has achieved this by building

coalitions with political elites and state bureaucrats by actively engaging in party politics. Through these networks, the Bali Fon can access resources for local development through which he gains his political legitimacy. These ways of gaining legitimacy I have also argued in chapter eight is temporal and contingent on the success of the project. The Fon's reliance on the state to build his material legitimacy (the top-down approach) compromises his claims of moral legitimacy which traditional leaders build their authority on (bottom-up approach) based on the perception of the local communities regarding how fons execute their responsibilities as custodians of local customs and values. This is because the state could and does have goals which may be incompatible with local customs, values and/or expectations of those at the grassroots (Williams 2010).

In Bali, the Fon's overreliance on the state to gain political legitimacy affects his ability to act on land governance where his authority comes in direct conflict with the state. Like all other fons in Cameroon, we notice that the authority of the Fon of Bali over land is put to question by the state representative-the D.O. This challenge affects the Fon's moral legitimacy with the grassroots communities because they perceive him as weak due to his inability to control or protect their native land from the predatory tendencies of the state. Even though the Fon tries to enforce different strategies to rebuild his moral authority over land as we see above, the impact is less felt, and his authority is less respected by sub-communities like Bawock that question his moral authority over what they claim to be their sovereign land (see Chapter Six and Seven). The Fon's political engagement significantly affects his moral basis of legitimacy such as his ability to control contested local land. His relational legitimacy is also questioned by members of the opposition who feel excluded from village affairs because of their political affiliation.

What this implies is that although the Fon of Bali has gained his legitimacy by building coalitions with political elites and the state (political legitimacy) such legitimacy becomes irrelevant in the context of land governance because the state itself is a protagonist and challenges the Fon's authority over native land. His efforts and ability to regain some form of moral authority over land is significantly undermined on the one hand by sub-groups like

Bawock that seek to gain their autonomy from Bali and is doubted on the other by those in opposition who think the Fon's political activities have forced the Fon to discriminate against them and no longer represent their interest. What this implies is that the Fon's legitimacy derived from building coalitions of interest with the state and political elites affect the moral basis of his legitimacy which is needed in land governance. It also impacts on the extent to which he can have influence over land disputes that involve members from outside the mainstream Bali Nyonga community.

That the D.O. can challenge the Fon of Bali also implies that the Fon of Kom is not immune to such challenge given that the law is the same on land governance in Cameroon. However, the Fon of Kom in contrast to that of Bali (as I have demonstrated in Chapter Eight) has mostly gained his legitimacy by opting for complementarity with other figures like political elites and kept his own role strictly to the moral sphere. The Fon of Kom has chosen to eschew any active role in national politics. He therefore limits his interaction with the government just within the provisions of the law as an auxiliary of the government. Although his actions are largely acclaimed by the majority in Kom as a way of safeguarding the sacredness and respect for Kom tradition, there are some people; mostly state and Kom political elites who are of the view that his action has limited the Kom's national budget allocation hence development for Kom.

Because the Fon has restricted his role to that of protecting Kom culture and opting out of politics, allowing it for political elite, he has succeeded in consolidating his authority over the entire Kom. As such, when the Fon adopts a pre-emptive approach by compelling Fulani graziers to give some cattle as a form of taxation which is a way of performing his power over land, he only reaffirms his moral authority over land and land-related conflicts. In this way, he reasserts his power to control local land without necessarily having the legislative authority to do so. Unlike the situation in Bali, where some of the fon's 'subjects' feel discriminated against because of their political views, this is not the case with the Fon of Kom. This is not to say the Fon Kom has no opposition to his authority within his community. While the Fon is criticised by the political elites who have aligned with the state to challenge

the apolitical nature of the Fon, their challenge has little impact on land governance. The Fon has survived the pressure from the political elites because he enjoys communal solidarity from the grassroots who appreciate the role of the Fon in relation to his ability to protect ancestral land. The Fon himself reiterated his position of authority over land when he stated that:

*What qualifies land as mine? Is it that government book you people call land title or the fact that I am the legitimate ruler of Kom? My son, as far as we are concerned it is not a question of whether we need to register Kom land with the government before claiming total ownership. Kom is mine, the grazing land is mine and it does not matter what the government thinks.*²³⁵

This implies that the form of legitimacy that matters for traditional authorities depends on the different audiences or the issue at stake in any given community. In the context of land governance in Bali and Kom, three audiences are at play; the state, the political elite and the grassroots community members. To maintain peace, traditional authorities who exercise influence in the relevant policy field, should have multiple sources of legitimacy among the grassroots and political elites. However, this is always dominated by the expectations at the grassroots as clearly is the case in Kom. While the Fon of Bali is respected when it comes to local development which he achieves through his ability to build coalitions with political elites and the state, this is not the case when it comes to land conflict. This is because the Fon's ability to mediate land conflicts depends largely on how the grassroot communities feel about him. The people need to feel that their fon has the moral authority and is capable to protect the land from the predation of the state. Once that perception is doubted, the Fons ability to rule over land conflicts becomes severely compromised. What this implies is that in the policy field of land governance, moral legitimacy is what matters and the Fon of Bali in comparison to the Fon of Kom has severely compromised his moral legitimacy by way of his role in national politics.

²³⁵ Ibid.

From the above discussion, moral legitimacy is an absolute necessary for traditional authorities in resolving discrete conflict such as land disputes. However, when such conflicts become intertwined with competition between political orders as we see in the Bali-Bawock conflict (discussed in Chapters Six and Seven), the role that fons play or could in managing such conflicts becomes dependent on how they relate with state institutions and state politics. When a traditional leader chooses to take an active role in national politics like the Fon of Bali has done partly out of necessity, it becomes difficult to play a meaningful role in managing complex conflicts like the one described between Bali and Bawock in Chapter Six. It also becomes difficult to manage other dimension of conflict such as territorial disputes, land conflicts and tensions of ethnic belonging. Although not in the same scale as the Bali- Bawock conflict, they however overlap with state politics which makes them complex to manage. Traditional leaders become unable to manage such conflicts because they lose their moral legitimacy when they get too close to party politics as we see with both fons of Bali- Bawock during the conflict.

The above understanding about fons and their choices regarding national politics has a broader implication in how their different types of legitimacy affect the extent to which they can mediate discrete land conflict like the one discussed above and complex conflicts like the Bali-Bawock conflict discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. In both Kom and Bali, people expressed concerns about development and the need for their fons to have access and control over native land. Both the Fons have used different strategies in this regard to build such forms of legitimacy for themselves, (with the Fon of Bali doing well, by building more of performance and material legitimacy for himself as shown in Chapter Eight) even if some of the strategies used as discussed above were predatory. Such concerns from the grassroots communities about local development and access to native land highlight the importance of performance and material dimensions of the legitimation process. However, the crucial difference between the Fon of Kom Bali regarding the role they can play in complex conflicts was not really dependent on the material or the performance dimension of their legitimacy. Rather, it was more about their role in national politics which made the difference on how these fons could manage complex conflicts. This is because their political choices of whether

to engage not to engage in national politics determined the sustainability of the different types of legitimacy that they build for themselves. Assuming an active political role like the Fon of Bali has done, was interpreted as promoting disunity and division and compromising on the material and performance dimensions of legitimacy that he has built for himself. Looking at the Bali Bawock conflict, what proved detrimental to the role of the Fons as mediators was that villagers linked their inability to mediate over the conflict to the moral dimension of legitimacy, which was based on the importance of promoting unity among the groups beyond party politics. I therefore argue that where there is high degree of material and performance dimensions of legitimacy, but where the moral and relational legitimacy is lost, traditional leaders not only become ineffective in managing discrete land disputes, but also complex conflicts like the Bali- Bawock one, where issues of power, land boundaries and identity crisis were intertwined with national politics and rivalry between competing political orders.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described the everyday encounters between traditional authorities, the local communities and state bureaucrats to explain how legitimacy is built and how it is appreciated by the local communities especially with regard to land governance. In the process, traditional authorities, the state and the local population become engaged in an ongoing process where specific aspects of the different sources of legitimacy are borrowed, reproduced, altered and /or co-opted. It is easier, through these local interactions that I have argued, to understand legitimacy because one learns what traditional authorities do and what their actions mean to their communities. It shows that different sources of legitimacy will matter depending on the policy field in question. The Fon of Bali has gained political legitimacy by building a stronger coalition with the state and political elites. Such coalitions (a top-down approach of gaining legitimacy) gives the Fon access to state resources for local development which enables him to gain a form of legitimacy which is performative and material in character. It however affects his relational and moral legitimacy (bottom-up approach) which emphasise the cultural dimension of authority and the local beliefs that

communities construct about their leaders (Tyler 1997). Although the promise to foster local development may in the short term generate trust on rulers as I demonstrated in Chapter Eight; such trust is always short-lived (Alagappa 1995). In the long term, legitimacy should be built on something more than performative or material dimensions.

While both Fons of Bali and Kom have used different strategies to gain different forms of legitimacy, I have argued that moral legitimacy is always an absolute necessity for traditional rulers to gain among the grassroots population especially when it comes to land governance. Once a fon loses that, he loses his ability to control local dynamics. Traditional leaders who are faced with multiple audiences and who want to exercise control over land should build more moral legitimacy with the grassroots. Although the Fon of Bali has tried different strategies to build his moral authority over land, his political engagements have compromised the extent to which his subjects trust him in this regard. I have argued that once a leader loses his moral legitimacy with the grassroots, he not only undermines his power, he also creates a situation of conflict. For power to be exercised however, traditional leaders also require gaining some form of material and performative legitimacy which strengthens their authority over their subjects. Both Fons try to do this through the different strategies that they adopt but the impact is different because of the different perceptions that these communities hold about their Fons.

This chapter also shows that although both the state and traditional authorities seek to exert exclusive control in grassroots governance they can hardly function in isolation. To have any meaningful impact in the way each executes its responsibilities, both the state bureaucrats and traditional leaders require sharing sovereignty and complementing each other within such communities where they function (Moe 2011). Such collaboration would obscure the distinction between citizens and subjects as intimated by Mamdani (1996). Instead of a bifurcated state as Mamdani insinuates, I support William's (2010) argument that the relation between the state and traditional authority reveals a combination of authorities with different sources of legitimacy that overlap in ways that are 'ambiguous, contradictory, competing and mutually transforming' (p.19).

The emerging problem is one of scepticism as some chiefs (informal state actors) are not often perceived as reliable intermediaries between their people and the state (See Meagher 2012). Similarly, state bureaucrats do not totally work in the interest of the state. They perpetuate a network of patronage relationships which facilitates the acquisition of resources for their own interest. While the basic instinct of traditional leaders may be to protect their own welfare, and not that of their subjects and their institutions, they still attempt to mediate between the past and the present as a way of building the basis of their moral and political legitimacy. They do this by presenting themselves as custodians of traditional values and cultures while simultaneously striving to serve as an agency for the modern state. I therefore agree with Geschiere (1993 P.152) that the structures and institutional frameworks for 'inventing the future' are not solely reserved for the post-colonial state elites since other institutional sources like the traditional leaders also scramble for political space within local polities on the basis of multiple legitimacies.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

10.0 Introduction

This thesis examined traditional authority, its relationship with multiparty politics, and the role it plays in local conflict management in two localities in the North-West of Cameroon: the Kom and the Bali communities. The idea of resilience and the issues of authority and legitimacy of traditional leaders were central to this thesis. The question of how traditional authorities derive their legitimacy and how that affects their popularity and impact on local conflicts has constituted the core of this thesis. This thesis has offered an explanation on why there are differential conflict outcomes in Kom and Bali, how this is in part explained by the changing role of traditional authorities in both the wider political order in Cameroon (national and subnational levels) and how this shape and is shaped by their perceived legitimacy from the different audiences. The explanation of this variation in conflict escalation between Kom and Bali, I have argued in this thesis, has to do with the ways that fons in Kom and Bali relate with state institutions and state politics.

The interrelation between national politics and state governance with fons limits the extent to which fons, like that of Bali (who are close to national politics), can intervene and manage complex conflicts like the Bali- Bawock conflict. It also affects the extent to which they can intervene and manage small scale conflicts like land and boundary issues. While such discrete conflicts like land conflicts are not in the same scale as the Bali-Bawock conflict, the involvement of fons in national politics like the Fon of Bali has nonetheless affected his ability to manage conflicts because his moral legitimacy has become compromised by his role in national politics. While such political engagement as in the case of the Fon of Bali (which is less so in Kom) appear to be a deliberate decision, I have argued that it is not entirely the agency of the fons in Bali to decide whether they wish to engage actively in national politics. There are complex historical legacies within the Bali fondom which oblige the Bali fons to rely on the state to manage conflicts as well as development within their lands of responsibility which is not the same case in Kom. Thus, although this thesis focussed mainly on the post-colonial dynamics to explain the variation in conflict escalation between Bali and Kom, this

variation has a background which is historically embedded, without claiming that history explains everything that accounts for the difference between Bali and Kom. Historically, the emergence of sub-groups asking for self-autonomy in Bali today reflects the historical realities of how different groups were merged into Bali which I have argued was significantly different in Kom. While ethnic identities are not static but are instead being constantly re-negotiated, in Bali, historical legacies helped to shape the contemporary dynamics.

The political organisation of Bali, in comparison with Kom, allowed for a greater crystallisation of ethnic identities that are politically more salient than Kom. This pattern continued in the colonial period and is ongoing in the post-colonial era as different groups in Bali today attempt to consolidate their unique identities within the Bali polity. Bali is thus emerged as a heterogeneous society comprised of several distinct groups with different histories that have crystallised and competed over the years. This kind of ethnic group crystallisation is not evident in Kom.

This conclusion is divided into three main sections; the first section focusses on how the research questions have been answered within the scope of this thesis. While I have explicitly answered the questions mainly in relation to the empirics (although I do make a few theoretical points), the broader discussion also answers the questions but more constitutes a cross-cutting discussion of the wider theoretical contributions of the thesis. The second section considers how we should understand legitimacy in a hybrid political order and how that impacts on the abilities of these different forms of authority to mediate local conflicts. It shows how this thesis contributes to our understanding of legitimacy beyond the current literature. The third section examines how we understand the construction of ethnic and identity politics in Kom and Bali and what that contributes to our understanding of conflicts framed on ethnic terms. The section ends by proposing a political settlement for the conflict in Bali. Here, I suggest, the politics of conviviality as way forward in building sustainable peace in Bali.

10.1 Answering the research questions

This research has sought to provide answers to the research questions that were set at the beginning of this thesis. The first question I asked was: **what is the basis of power that is exercised by traditional authorities in Cameroon?** Here I have demonstrated how pre-colonial histories of formation have shaped the extent to which fons can wield power and authority over their subjects (see Chapters Four and Five). These historical realities and colonial interventions have in some ways strengthened, but also simultaneously weakened in other ways, the authority of fons. I have reviewed Law No. 77/245 of July 1977 which defines traditional authorities and delineates their powers vis-à-vis the state. The decree 1977 (20-21) empowers traditional authorities with judicial powers and responsibilities in conflict management. The law, by this provision, implicitly delegates an ambiguous role in governance to traditional authorities in Cameroon. However, while the law seems to make constitutional provisions for traditional authorities to adjudicate conflicts among their subjects in conformity with the customary laws, the lack of a clear scope of what falls under customary laws within the decentralised structures of governance in Cameroon seriously impedes their ability to fulfil this obligation. I have equally shown (see Chapters Eight and Nine) how traditional authorities exercise power based on the moral authority that they enjoy over their subjects. Because of this, the decisions of the Fon are wilfully followed by most of his subjects. Some fons sustain their power and authority mostly by aligning with the state in collaboration with political elites who see the political activities of such fons as appropriate. I have also shown how the undertaking of political roles for fons have created other challenges especially among the grassroots which limits the extents to which their orders are wilfully obeyed.

Research question two was: **how do traditional authorities gain and sustain legitimacy?** I answered the question by demonstrating (see Chapter Eight) that legitimacy is primarily derived from the values, interests and expectations of the communities the fons represent, and varies significantly across time and space and between actors and contexts. I have demonstrated that traditional leaders can be engaged with what Black (2008) calls multiple

legitimacy claims, many of which may be in conflict with each other. This is because different groups can, and do, hold different perceptions about their leaders and what they expect of them, and these perceptions on whether a leader is legitimate are not necessarily based on commensurable evaluations. Those who govern in informal political orders like fons may as a result seek to build legitimacy for themselves by conforming to the claims of all or a selective group of legitimacy community. I have argued that the Fon of Kom holds a greater relational and moral legitimacy than performative and material legitimacy, particularly due to his weak connection with the state due to his lack of interest in party politics. The Fon of Bali, in contrast, has strong connections with the state through his political affiliation with the CPDM which gives him material and performative legitimacy, but which also undermines his moral legitimacy with the grassroots population.

Research question three was: **what is the relationship between traditional authorities and the modern state, and how does this affect their legitimacy?** The finding of this thesis (see Chapter Nine) reveals that although both the state and traditional authorities seek to exert exclusive control in grassroots governance, they do not function in isolation. Through their interactions with the state and local populations, traditional authorities, become engaged in an ongoing process where specific aspects of the different sources of legitimacy are borrowed, reproduced, altered and or co-opted. Both the state and traditional leaders share sovereignty and complement each other in many instances at the grassroots where they function, especially on issues of land governance and conflicts that have cultural implications. Such collaboration obscures the distinction between citizens and subjects as intimated by Mamdani (1996). Instead of a bifurcated state on which Mamdani focusses, the relation between the state and traditional authority reveals a combination of authorities with different sources of legitimacy that overlap in ways that are ambiguous, contradictory, competing and mutually transformative.

Lastly, research question four was: **what role do traditional authorities in Cameroon play in conflict prevention and management at the local level?** In this thesis I demonstrated (see Chapter Six and Nine) that although traditional authorities are largely involved in resolving

community disputes among their 'subjects,' there are some instances where they promote or aggravate existing ethnic politics to achieve their personal gains. This, I have argued, affects the relationship between the groups involved and this partly contributes to conflict (cf. the Bali-Bawock conflict in Chapter Six). Their effort to resolve conflicts is a collaborative approach in many respects which has enabled the state to adopt indigenous ideas embedded in cultural rituals that foster collective 'healing'. This thesis also showed that the crucial difference between fons regarding the role they can play in complex conflicts does not depend on the material or the performance dimension of their legitimacy per-se. Rather, it is more about the role they play in national politics and their ability to draw from moral and relational legitimacy which makes the difference on how fons manage complex conflicts.

The decision to take up an active role in national politics, like the Fon of Bali has done, has at times been interpreted by community members as promoting disunity and division as well as compromising the material and performance dimensions of legitimacy that he has built for himself. When we look at the Bali-Bawock conflict, what proved detrimental to the role of the fons as mediators was that villagers linked their inability to mediate over the conflict to the moral dimension of legitimacy, which was based on the importance of promoting unity among the groups beyond party politics. I therefore argue that where there is a high degree of material and performance dimensions of legitimacy, but where the moral and relational legitimacy is lost, traditional leaders become ineffective in managing not only discrete land disputes but also complex conflicts like the Bali-Bawock conflict where issues of power, land boundaries and identity crisis were intertwined with national politics and rivalry between competing political orders.

10.2 Rethinking legitimacy within hybrid political order

The crux of this thesis is about legitimacy and adds to the ongoing debate on traditional authorities and the construction of legitimacy across Africa. The debate is ongoing among scholars as they try to account for why and how traditional authorities continue to survive in post-colonial African states. Central to this debate is the question of legitimacy where scholars interrogate the types of legitimacy that underpin traditional governance. Mamdani

(1995) and Maloka (1995) contend that the authority of traditional leaders is derived from the central state because traditional authorities lack an autonomous source of legitimacy to survive on their own. Others like Ntsebeza (2005) think traditional authorities remain relevant only because of the role that they play in land allocation which, in his view, does not impute legitimate power because their power over land is derived from the state.

Traditional leaders, like other informal state actors, need to be analysed based on both their relationship with the state and the social legitimacy and sources of power that drive their governance agenda (Meagher 2012). The scholarship so far has not offered a nuanced account to how traditional authorities may or may not generate legitimacy at the local level. The claim that chiefs can only gain legitimacy by aligning with the state is pushed to the fore because of the claim that post-colonial African states are declining or lack the necessary state capacity which pushes such states to give some limited sovereignty to traditional authorities.

Within the context of Bali and Kom, this thesis helps us to understand how grassroots communities make sense of, and give meaning to, the competing sources of authority that prevail in local communities. In Cameroon, we see how these multiple sources of authority were perceived by the local communities after multiparty politics was reintroduced in the 1990s. At some points, fons were expected to exclude themselves from national politics to remain relevant. In other cases, depending on the aspiration of the people, some traditional leaders gained local support by aligning with the ruling party even if such legitimisation could only be temporal contingent on what the people stood to gain by allowing their fon to participate in national politics.

The legitimisation process for traditional authorities can thus be both contradictory in terms of the demands for both continuity and change and is also mutually transforming. I have argued that to grasp why traditional leaders may or may not continue to wield power and authority in their communities requires an understanding of what these institutions do to people and what that means to such communities. Whether traditional authorities build and sustain political legitimacy is contingent on the extent to which they exercise their functions in a manner that promotes the cultural values of the region over which they rule. That is, the

authority of traditional leaders just like that of the state must be derived from the society it is said to represent if their orders are to be respected voluntarily.

As such, the legitimation process would require that traditional leaders should balance the contradictory demands for both continuity and change which comes from both the state and the local communities. Even though the abilities of local groups to ensure their leaders behave in a way may be limited, it is erroneous to assume that these groups are indifferent in the ways their leaders operate. Communities make inputs and such inputs shape the way traditional institutions function. Understanding and taking seriously these local perceptions is important if one needs to capture the implication that the existence of multiple authorities and multiple legitimacies have for grassroots governance in Africa (cf. Williams 2010). I have thus situated the struggle for legitimacy within the context of Bali and Kom. In Bali, I have shown how various external factors (predominantly from the state) have created new opportunities and challenges for traditional leaders. We notice within the context of Bali how the Fon uses strong connection with the state through his political affiliation with the CPDM to gain material and performative legitimacy which also simultaneously undermines his moral legitimacy among the grassroots population. Legitimacy through external support from the state, I have argued, is often contested by the people when they feel the fon is acting against their interests. This form of external support is not new to Bali. This thesis has demonstrated that Bali historically relied on their extensive colonial and now post-colonial support to enforce their political legitimacy over internal sub groups and even sovereign neighbours (see Chapter Four).

That the Fon of Bali lacks moral or relational legitimacy does not imply he is totally illegitimate in this regard. The audience matters, and it is my assertion that the Fon of Bali has sustained his power and authority mostly by aligning with the state in collaboration with Bali political elites who see his political activities as appropriate. The political elites thus constitute, one of the many legitimacy communities in Bali, and do not think the Fon's moral and relational legitimacy is compromised by his political activities. To most of the Bali grassroots population, their relationship with the Fon and his moral legitimacy waxes and

wanes depending on the Fon's ability to deliver on his promises or on the issue at stake at a given time. For example, the Fon's moral legitimacy is heavily compromised among the members of the opposition who feel the Fon does not act in their best interest given his partisan affiliation with the CPDM. So, we see in Bali that traditional authority that is based on material sources of legitimacy becomes seriously compromised when this is dependent on external providers like the state. Failure to deliver on an expected outcome at any given time seriously affects the legitimacy of the Fon and hence his ability to have any influence on local dynamics.

In Kom, I have argued that the political neutrality of the Fon of Kom has enabled him to accommodate multiple audiences within the system that reduces the political aspect of inequalities. He gains support as a result mostly from the grassroots through which he builds his moral legitimacy. While his political stands remain unpopular among the political elites who question even his relational legitimacy with them, the Fon has tried to gain popularity among the political elites by creating space for them to connect with the state to canvas proposals for local development. The Fon of Kom has therefore gained greater relational and moral legitimacy than performative and material legitimacy because of his weak connection with the state due to his lack of interest in party politics. The emphasis on legitimacy is premised on the traditional role of the Fon as a custodian of Kom cultural values.

Even though traditional authorities are seen as being in competition with the state, Kom people continue to see their fon as the corner stone of their political landscape. Traditional institutions in Kom remain the moral centrepiece in a changing and unpredictable political environment in Cameroon. For most Kom people, it is more about the institution of traditional rule than the individual leaders themselves that gives a sense of unity and communal spirit and hence moral legitimacy for fons. In Kom, it is the political elites and not the Fon that should mediate for local development. The failure on the part of the Fon to connect with the state in a patronage relationship implies that the Fon's role in Kom is not perceived as a development provisioner. His legitimacy is also not contingent on the success of such projects as often may be the case in Bali where we see the Fon praised, criticised, accepted or rejected depending on whether a development project succeeds or fails.

What these observations in Kom and Bali mean is that community perceptions and interpretations of whether traditional leaders should participate in national politics or not in part inform their legitimacy in different ways. Traditional institutions are therefore a lens through which these communities try to imagine and understand contemporary political realities which makes them indispensable within such areas. This view holds through in Kom as well as Bali where the Fon has in some instances lost public respect from groups that differ with his political philosophy. Even under such circumstances in Bali, there is still a consensus that traditional institutions should continue to survive.

10.2.1 Contribution to the legitimacy and chieftaincy literature

The findings of this thesis expand on the understanding of legitimacy and chieftaincy discourses in two ways. Firstly, it supports the argument by both Mamdani (1995) and Maloka (1995) that the authority of traditional leaders is derived partly from the central state. Secondly, this thesis also expands on their view and offers greater nuance to our understanding of chieftaincy discourse. Although some fons may depend on the state for legitimacy, the findings of this thesis also demonstrate that it varies in context and scope. By using the case of the Fon of Kom, I show that not all traditional authorities anchor their legitimacy largely in collaboration with the state. Rather, traditional authorities are evaluated on the basis of what they do for their community and what they represent to their local population which varies both in context and even with the different audiences within such communities.

This thesis also, in part, supports the work of Ntsebeza (2005) and his argument that traditional authorities have remained relevant because of the role that they play in land governance. However, the findings of thesis have shown that the relevance of land to traditional authorities is not because the state empowers them to control land under their custody as Ntsebeza (2005) suggests in the context of South Africa. Rather, I have highlighted the symbolic importance of land to chiefs which they use for rituals of libation. Such acts give them some form of moral legitimacy because their responsibilities are seen by their subjects to be attached to land. And, also, attached to their ancestors from whom they inherited the land as articulated in the act of libations.

In fact, contrary to Ntsebeza (2005), the findings of this thesis reveal that there is intense competition between the state and traditional authorities in terms of authority and legitimacy over land governance. While the state claims to be exercising legislated authority as the owners of national land, traditional authorities claim moral authority over native land. We see that even though land is a national property and generally controlled by the state, fons like that of Bali devise strategies to hold their control over land. In Bali, the Fon gets his subjects in land disputes to pay a token at the palace if the Fon must participate in the Land Commission Board as required. The Fon does this knowing fully well that any decision from the commission without his participation is null and void. He therefore twists the understanding of the Land Commission Board rules to maintain his control on land and hence authority over his subjects.

In Kom, we see the Fon selling and distributing land to his relatives and requiring the ethnically different (i.e. non-Kom) Fulani cattle grazers every year to each offer him cattle as a sign of appreciation to the Fon as the landlord. The Fon imposes such taxes knowing very well that his ownership over such land under the customary land tenure is now contested by the private property land tenure which gives the state the power to control unused land classified as national land. By so doing, fons try to expand their authority over varying issues which normally will be seen to be directly under the control of the state. This approach by traditional leaders to meddle with or twist the law with regards to land control and ownership is one of the predatory strategies that they deploy to maintain their authority and legitimacy within the local communities. In the process of contestation, traditional authorities, the state and the local population become engaged in an ongoing process where specific aspects of the different sources of legitimacy are borrowed, reproduced, altered and or co-opted.

The crux of this thesis is the finding that different sources of legitimacy will matter depending on the policy field in question. While both Fons of Bali and Kom have used different strategies to gain different forms of legitimacy, I have demonstrated that moral legitimacy is always an absolute necessity for traditional rulers to gain among the grassroots population especially when it comes to land governance. Once a fon loses that, he loses his ability to control local dynamics. Traditional leaders who are faced with multiple audiences and who want to exercise control over land should focus more attention to building moral legitimacy with the grassroots. Although the Fon of Bali has tried different strategies to build his moral authority over land, his political engagements have compromised the extent to which his subjects trust him in this regard. I have argued that once a leader loses his moral legitimacy with the grassroots, he not only undermines his power, but he also creates a situation of conflict. For power to be exercised however traditional leaders also require gaining some form of material and performative legitimacy which strengthens their authority over their subjects. When a traditional leader chooses to take an active role in national politics like the Fon of Bali has done partly out of necessity, it becomes difficult to play a meaningful role in managing complex conflicts like the kind of conflict described between Bali and Bawock (see Chapter Six). It also becomes difficult to manage other dimension of conflict such as territorial disputes, land conflicts and tensions of ethnic belonging. Although not in the same scale as the Bali- Bawock conflict, the above-mentioned conflicts however overlap with state politics which makes them complex to manage.

10.3 Rethinking conflicts framed in ethnic terms

The two case studies in this thesis (Kom and Bali) capture the ways in which ethnic politics can have serious, violent consequences when directed against an assumed ethnic group or category. More importantly, an engagement with the case studies (see Chapters Six and Seven) shows that a thorough analysis of conflict that is triggered and endorsed by political elites in the face of weak or illegitimate institutions must take into consideration the historical processes of mobilisation and the impact on local perceptions, justification and motivations which can fuel excessive ethnic sentiments. One of the findings of this thesis is that the construction of local identities is embedded in real and lived historical past, but that has been instrumentally motivated by those who stand to benefit from the polarisation of local

identities. In the process, sub-group identities emerge capable of asserting their difference from one another. What this implies is that ethnic categories are not definitive, they are fluid and always being re/constructed depending on the issues and interest at stake. For example, an inclusive sense of a distinct Bawock identity has been consolidated by a perception of relative economic and political exclusion by the dominant Bali Nyonga group. Claims of exclusive territoriality distinct from Bali have also helped to develop and continue to shape the narrative of a Bawock identity.

In other words, it is a discursive narrative that portrays Bawock as a marginalised minority in Bali that deepens ethnic divides and gives greater salience to particular dimensions of identity and informs popular political processes of mobilisation and support. A similar discursive narrative, which portrays Bali as a people hated within the North-West Region who must stand up to defend themselves, is also being used by political elites to build a sentiment of 'us and them' for their political interests. These discursive narratives are like what Lynch (2011) observed amongst the Kalenjin in Kenya where she captured how the language of ethnic identity is used to foster intra- and inter- ethnic competition and conflict through a rumination on history and political intrigue.

My thesis has foregrounded the importance of how the understanding of the past can help to inform perceptions of threat and a perceived way forward that is often exclusive from each other, while also being subject to internal contestations and debates. This is not to say that it is solely these memories and perceptions that account for political events within communities like we see in Bali and Bawock. There are also the ongoing processes of ethnic politicisation within these communities. However, the point I make in this thesis (see Chapters Six and Seven) is that underlying aspects, such as community grievances and local perceptions of difference between groups should be duly considered alongside elite mobilisation and the socio-economic context. Understood this way, I hold the view that this holistic approach of understanding ethnic tensions is not necessarily case specific. In contrast, and from a broader perspective, the evidence in Bali and Bawock suggests that each community has a shared historical past which is or could be interpreted in ways that affects and justifies the basis of a collective action when deemed necessary by conflict entrepreneurs. It is this shared historical past that give political elites opportunities to politicise issues of identity, by using traditional

institutions as a way of mobilising political support and reasserting control of local communities.

It is important therefore to understand the basis of group construction and how such narratives evolve overtime as based in the realities of internal division and contestations (Lynch 2011). Equally important is to understand the ways in which ethnic sentiments influence political perceptions of the grassroots and the approach by political elites. Through the cases of Kom and Bali, and with regards to the Bali- Bawock conflict, we see how these are shaped by, and shape, elite behaviour, political institutions and political culture. That is, we see through these case studies how collective understandings of the past and present adds up with political patronage to produce discursive ethnic narratives that perpetuate ethnic rivalries and conflict.

This thesis has demonstrated through the Bali-Bawock conflict how political elites incite local communities to revolt against equally marginalised and needy groups to foster their political interest. In the process, the provision of assistance and display of generosity becomes a way through which political elites, cater for those who support their political ambitions. Such an approach encourages a perception of leadership that is ethnically biased, corrupt and reinforces a circle of expectations between the communities and political elites (Schatzberg 2001). In other words, supporting a member of one's ethnic community through voting for example becomes the right way of doing things in a system that is driven by ethnicity. Ethnicity becomes a major determinant of social behaviour and encourages community members to support their local big men (Bayart 1989). The logic of ethnic competition becomes institutionalised on claims that if one group fails to maximise rewards then another faction will (Szeffel 2000). Thus, politics in local expression within these communities is captured as 'eating' (Bayart 1989) while the state is perceived as the 'national cake' (Lynch

2011). The use of these expressions shows how political mobilisation is often driven by material gains (Tambiah 1996).

We also see that in an ethnically construed conflict like the Bali–Bawock conflict, (see Chapter Six) the importance of ethnicity is amplified by each group through an ethnically marked language of solidarity and an interpretation of their collective past. This is because the existence of ethnic groups as both historic and moral communities offers the foundations for strong arguments that both communities use to bargain for their interest and the political interest of the elites. In Bali, for example, the remembered communal past of each sub group, together with colonial histories of displacement that was perpetuated through acts of invasion by Bali against its neighbours, account partly for the grievances and competition that Bali has both within its territory (intra-ethnic conflicts) and with its neighbours (inter- ethnic conflicts) (Folwer & Zeitlyn 1996).

This thesis found that the patterns of framing narratives in ethnic terms in Kom and Bali was significantly different. While the narrative of ethnic exclusion is not unique to the Bali and Bawock context, Kom does not engage in an entrenched politics of ethnic belonging which legitimises the ejection of other ethnic categories/sub-groups who are perceived as strangers. In Kom, the framing of ethnic ‘others’ was less salient than Bali. However, we see local political elites attempting to co-opt people with questionable royalty/‘Komness’ into the Kom royal compounds to ensure control of the traditional system. In situations of contested identities and belonging for example, politicians in Kom in collusion with the state have deployed rituals of coronation and inauguration to put into royal compounds persons whose relations with the royal family in Kom is contested. This, I have argued, constitutes a strategy to separate those who see themselves as true Kom or royally eligible and those whose ‘Komness’ or royalty is questionable.

Given that ethnicity is less salient in Kom, political elites lack the basis through which they can mobilise ethnic sentiments as we see in Bali. There is not enough material suited for myth making and no previous commemorative traditions to build on. The effort to enthrone people considered by the majority of Kom people as outsiders into royal compounds has only succeeded thus far in discrediting appeals made by politicians in Kom to revolutionise the

Kom traditional political order. This is not however to say these categories cannot emerge over time. Rather, the point I make in this thesis is that the limited ability on the part of the political elites to mobilise the Kom people along ethnic lines accounts partly for why the clashes in Kom have not so far degenerated into violent conflict. There is no strong sense of inequalities among the Kom communities which limits the extent to which political elites can use such claims of inequalities between the different communities as a base for mobilisation. The politicisation of ethnicity by politicians and traditional leaders as we see in Bali and Bawock case has so far failed to achieve the same level of prominence in Kom. Kom political elites also demonstrate a weaker cohesion with the society and traditional leaders. This disconnection has cost them that intermediary role that elites play between the state and local communities elsewhere in Cameroon. Similarly, these political elites have also failed to build greater ties with the state. This is because of their failure to obtain the grassroots support which the government needs to stay in power.

10.3.1 Contribution to the literature on ethnicity and ethnic conflicts

By partly positioning this thesis at the intersection of ethnicity and ethnic conflict scholarship, this study has made a notable contribution to literature in this regard. This study supports Cohen (1994) and Le Vine (1997) in their conceptualisation of ethnicity where they both emphasise the importance to understand that the construction and politicisation of ethnic identities are instrumental in motivation. However, I have also expanded on their views through the cases of Kom, Bali and Bawock to show that ethnic identities are also built on linguistic cultural commonalities and collective encounters and representations of injustices and marginalisation.

First, the findings of this thesis support but also expand on the views of Brubaker (2006). Brubaker (2006) suggests a break away from the simplistic, uncontroversial assumption that ethnic conflicts involve conflicts between ethnic groups. Ethnicity should not be seen simply as given, discrete, concrete and tangible groups. From the Kom example, we see ethnicity in terms of 'practical categories, situated actions, cultural idioms cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organisational routines, institutional forms, political projects and contingent events' (Brubaker 2006 p.11). I have also expanded on this view by detailing the micro level processes

within the context of Kom and Bali to demonstrate how local state or other political actors may do things within categories (the elites and traditional leaders in this case) which bring to the fore an understanding of the processes through which certain practices become institutionalised and established in administrative routines.

For example, the SDO required the KRSC to endorse and legitimatise all palace correspondences with the state; a condition that is in aberration with Kom culture. These practices are those that could become implanted in culturally powerful and symbolical myth, memories and narratives in future. In this context, the strong desire by political elites to influence traditional leaders in Kom is indicative of the micro level politics that favours the emergence of categories that represent the interests of those that Brubaker (2002) calls ethno-political entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the findings of this thesis support the views of Brass (1997) and Tambiah (1996) by emphasising the need to review the incidence of violence, ethnicity and the role of the state by studying and interrogating how specific local tensions often achieve multiple forms of interpretations and mobilisation. Tambiah (1996) although writing about a South Asian context, situates collective violence in a broader political economic and even religious context bringing to the fore the connections between politics and violence. Like Brass, this thesis demonstrates how some relatively minor conflict situations with no ethnic connotation are often given a communal dimension by party elites which assist them to mobilise their followers. For example, we see in Chapter Six how the struggle for power between the Fons of Bali and Bawock is interpreted to mean total disrespect to the whole Bali Nyonga community. This becomes one of the bases through which the community is mobilised to invade the Bawock community.

This thesis has, however, also argued against the reductionist perspective on African politics and conflicts in the literature, which fails to capture the complex socio-cultural and political dynamics that shape the relationships between local communities and their chiefs on the one hand, and with political elites on the other. Contrary to the prevalent interpretation, patrimonial authority or legitimacy does not necessarily result in corruption, bad governance or weak state institutions. I have argued that this way of understanding African politics is too

simplistic.

The findings of this thesis add to conflict and mobilisation literature by showing that community aspiration and expectations may also put pressure and limit the extent to which political elites can influence local dynamics. Both Brass (1997) and Tambiah (1996) are less vocal on the bottom up pressure that may limit the extent to which political elites may mobilise the grassroots for their selfish gains. I have demonstrated in this thesis that the Kom community has shown resistance towards elite manipulation of traditional institutions. This has so far worked for Kom and has reduced the level at which elites can incite local tension to escalate for their political gains.

What this means is that while a top down process of mobilisation and incitement from political elites is critical, the availability and success of such strategies should be regarded through a comprehensive analysis that recognises the potential morality of bottom up pressure. Such an analysis should also consider the fact that there may be an absence of a base for mobilisation given that people do not just get involved in violence conflict with each other simply because they are told to do so by some political elites. This demonstrates that the understanding of how communities get mobilised to engage in violent ethnic conflicts should be examined in the context of intra- and inter-community power dynamics. These communities incorporate, and often cement, conservative community views and local social values to make meaning of the external influence that comes from political elites who may want to use them to achieve political gains.

10.3.2 From a political settlement to a politics of conviviality: Bali and the way forward

While actual fighting between Bali and Bawock had come to an end in 2007, the true challenge for sustainable peace within these communities is whether a polity such as Bali based on diverse ethnicity could bring together, rather than separate, the constituent members of such a union. This has been evident in the discursive narrative that emerged in the Bali-Bawock conflict between those who saw themselves as sons/daughters of the soil and the others as strangers. Two facets of the politics of belonging can be deduced from the Bali-Bawock conflict; political ethnicity and moral ethnicity. According to Lonsdale (1992), political ethnicity flows down from high political intrigue; it constitutes groups through external competition. Moral

ethnicity on the other hand creates communities from within through domestic controversy over civic virtue (Lonsdale 1992 p.466).

In addition, strong competition between the SDF and the CPDM, and between the CPDM members themselves, in the region has helped to shape and sustain a patronage system that has penetrated all levels of government and undermines the country's weak institutions. There is undoubtedly a substantive deficit in the governance in Cameroon characterised by weak checks and balances (Nymanjoh 2002). There is the lack of effective devolution of authority to local government which has hindered Cameroon's political, social and economic development (Jua 1995). Power is largely in the hands of the ruling party's elites, membership of which offers access to rents and wide spread patronage opportunities and networks (Nyamnjoh 2002).

The competitive clientelism in Cameroon thus obtains its underpinnings from deep structural roots. This includes what Khan (2010) describes as the absence of a formal economy large enough to displace informal economy. As a result, intense inter- and intra- party competition has characterised the struggle for party leadership as elites struggle to hold on to power by controlling the grassroots. This has invariably necessitated the coalescing of elites and grassroots interests and the different communities behind certain individuals. This elite competition for political power and bloc forming has made elites open to clientelist interest and has also contributed to the kinds of ethnic conflict we see in the region.

I suggest the idea of a strong and viable political settlement in Bali complemented by moral conviviality is necessary to build sustainable peace both within Bali and around the Mezam Division. Political settlement here would mean the forging of a common understanding between political elites where their interest and or beliefs are served through and acquiescent to a framework for administering political power (John & Putzel 2009). Political settlement in this sense will imply the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes, on which any state is founded (Khan 2010). Using the concept of political settlement to manage the Bali-Bawock conflict would mean focussing attention on intra-/inter-elite contention within Bali/Bawock and within the Mezam region of the North-West. This will include contention and bargaining among political and economic elites, religious elites

and traditional elites. This would also include contention and bargaining between elite and non-elites either within groups or across them.

Such a political settlement must also consider intergroup contention and bargaining (regional, ethnic/linguistic categories and gender). According Khan (2010) this settlement can take the form of a coalition to produce results that are sustainable and beneficial to all groups. However, Khan contends that if a group is excluded from a ruling coalition that eventually becomes more powerful than the ruling coalition then any peace settlement from the coalition is not likely to survive. The inclusion of all the different groups is important in the Bali-Bawock conflict given that the analysis of the Bali-Bawock conflict in Chapters Six and Seven shows that the different groups (traditional leaders, youth, political elites and the state) had either direct or indirect roles in the events that led to the conflict. Given that the Bali-Bawock conflict had contending groups and classes with different interest, an inclusive and sustainable peace would have to be built in the redistribution of rights and entitlements to the groups involved. I have attributed the Bali-Bawock conflict largely to the role of both traditional and political elites which is linked to national politics in Cameroon. The region therefore requires a political elite bargain that supports a political settlement which is durable and adaptable to challenges overtime.

10.4 Conclusion

Evidence presented in this thesis opens a new window to critically reflect on the compatibility between traditional authorities and multiparty politics specifically within the Cameroonian context as well as more broadly within the African continent. While scholars like Ntsebeza (2005) think that democracy is compromised by the resilience of traditional institutions, I have differed with such a stance. Both institutions can co-exist and cooperate in a way that does not necessarily conform to liberal democratic practices. They can function in ways that resonate with the local political cultures and the aspirations of those they seek to govern. Both the state and traditional authorities can complement each other in a hybrid political order. However, for them to function in a synergy and be effective in service, traditional leaders must enter such negotiations with the state as neutral mediators without any political affinity.

These is because traditional authorities playing any active political role in national politics can affect and undermine their moral authority as judged by their community in the long run. It affects the ability of traditional leaders to mediate local conflicts creating space for local conflicts to escalate given that such leaders are not perceived as neutral players. Some groups will have total disregard for a fon and his authority if they perceive the fon to hold and support a political agenda that may put different factions of the community against each other. This affects the legitimacy of such a fon to speak on behalf of his entire community. Local communities want both the state and traditional authorities to co-exist. They are not happy with the idea which requires them to choose to be either citizens or subjects. The existence of these hybrid political orders only ensures that fons can draw from different legitimacy logics to consolidate their rule.

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