

The Neo-Patrimonial Elites and the Sacrosanct of the Chieftaincy Institution in Cameroon.

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ABSTRACT

Since independence, the generation of political elites that took over the management of Cameroon after the end of formal colonial rule have continued to dominate and control the political scene till today. The dominance has been consolidated by several varied factors among which the support they received from old socio-political institutions incarnated by traditional leaders and today known as the chieftaincy institution. The pre-colonial, colonial experience and the legitimacy they wield make them indispensable for political control in Cameroon. The neopatrimonial elite in Cameroon since independence and particularly following the advent of partisan party politics in Cameroon has made the chieftaincy institution a Trojan horse to monopolize and control the political space. In as much as neopatrimonial elites have maneuvered to exploit the chieftaincy institution for its own gains, traditional authorities in Cameroon have also some self-benefits from this exploitation to grab some economic and political compensation at the expense of their traditional role and the people they represent. This paper unearths that the neopatrimonial elite in Cameroon have not only neutralized chieftaincy as a potential socio-political and institutional rival, but has also exploited chieftaincy to consolidate their already monopolized power using state resources. However, despite these influences, chieftaincy continues to survive and to adapt itself with the vicissitude of times.

Keywords: chieftaincy; neopatrimonial elites; political control; and resilience

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the advent of colonial rule and eventually, independence, traditional rulers occupied key positions and played a major role in the socio-political and economic life of the various ethnic and tribal communities that make up modern Cameroon today. In reality, the various colonial administrations that administered Cameroon from 1884 till independence made traditional rulers and the chieftaincy institution an important organ for the implementation of their colonial policies.

During the German protectorate in Cameroon, the Germans recognized and made chiefs part and parcel of their administration. In the today English speaking regions of Cameroon (North West and South West Regions), that is the former British Southern Cameroons which was under the mandate and subsequently to the Trusteeship of Britain, chiefs were given an important role through the Indirect Rule Policy. In French Cameroon, the French authorities also went further fixing through an ordinance in 1933 the status and limits of collaboration between the chiefs and the colonial administration.

The implication of chiefs in colonial politics and administration necessarily gave them the aptitude to face a more modern socio-political administrative set-up that emerged at independence. It is worth noting that the political success of some elites in Cameroon notably in British Cameroon was partly due to the support they received from chiefs. This was the case John Ngu Foncha who with the support Grass fields chiefs defeated

E.M.L Endeley in the 1959 elections to become the first Premier of British Southern Cameroons[1].

Furthermore, British Southern Cameroon chiefs before independence had created the House of chiefs, a strong institution that exercise pressure on the government and participated in the decision making. In French Cameroon, chiefs also played an important especially by offering their support to independent fighters for independence. This was the case with support offered to Union des Population du Cameroon[2] leaders by some chiefs such as chief Kandeh Ninine and Djoumessi Mathias in the Bamileke land. Also Ahmadou Ahidjo, the first Cameroonian president benefitted from the political support from the Sultan of Fouban and the entire royal family[3].

It has been generally asserted by several African scholars that chieftaincy was and is still a strong, influential and respected institution. The reverence accorded to it by the local population partly explains why the colonial masters preferred to collaborate with the in the consolidation of their administration in Cameroon. At independence it was hoped that chiefs were going to continue to play the same political role and exercise the same influence they had had during the colonial period. Unfortunately for them, the new political elite emerged at independence and did not only monopolize power, but used chiefs to consolidate their authority. This situation however put chieftaincy at a crossroad as chiefs were caught between the harmer and the anvil, either they stay off politics as requested by their subjects gain the legitimacy with the local people or play to the tune of neo-patrimonial elites in other to gain pecuniary and political advantages[4].

The main objective in this paper is to delineate to what extent, and in what specific mechanisms has the neopatrimonial elite instrumentalise the chieftaincy institution in Cameroon? What have been the consequences of this instrumentalization of the chieftaincy institution in Cameroon by the neopatrimonial elite? Why has chieftaincy been able to resist this influence till date? To do so, we start by conceptualizing neopatrimonial elite, we develop a multidimensional measure of neopatrimonialism that enables us to explore the various mechanism deployed by the neopatrimonial elites and how they are manifested both in public and private space. Lastly, the consequences and the capacity of resilience of the chieftaincy institution at the mercy of the neopatrimonial elite have manage to survive.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study adopted the historical methodology which comprised of field preparation, data collection and analysis.

Fieldwork preparation

To carry out this study, initial contacts were established with some traditional authorities, administrative officers and politicians through emails with follow up phone calls. The initial emails and phone calls shall explain the objectives of the study. In this initial correspondence, we ask for permission to conduct the interviews with the representatives of the traditional authorities and local government authorities. We profited from this to enlist their support in having access to other key informants for the interviews.

Data collection

The research was predominantly a desk study one and therefore entailed the review of the existing literature in the form of books and journal articles around issues of chieftaincy in Cameroon and their resilience throughout the various historical periods in Cameroon while taking into account the change of attitude towards traditional authorities since colonial times to the present. Instances of the dynamic nature of the relationship between the institution, civil society and the state in the context of electoral competition,

conflict and violence were also examined. Moreover, the bases on which the institution is a legitimate force to be used in promoting the peace in grassroots communities and achieving local development was explored by consulting historical and modern records.

Besides the review of existing literature, we also made use of face-to-face interviews with traditional authority or their representatives; local government, government authorities, politicians and civil society organizations. 35 face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 traditional rulers (1st class, 2nd class and 3rd class traditional authorities, 5 local government officials (mayor and his councilors), 5 government authorities (Governor, senior divisional officer and Divisional officers and 5 civil society personnel (NGOs, and Cultural associations) and 10 politicians.

In these interviews, informants were prompted, through an interview guide, to provide information about such issues as on the motivation for the increase interest politicians and the modern state has developed for chieftaincy for a few decades now.; why some traditional rulers have engaged themselves in partisan politics and finally why has the chieftaincy institution continue to be resilient despite the forces of modernism in Cameroon. A quantitative data approach was applied to gather and analyze information on the population's attitudes or degree of legitimacy and trust on the chieftaincy institution.

Data analysis

All the interviews were transcribed through a content analysis approach and thematically based on the objectives of the study. The interviews were complemented the existing literature on chieftaincy studies in Cameroon.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

The critical and cross examination of the diverse of primary and secondary sources on the chieftaincy institution and the political elite in Cameroon permitted us to better craft out the research findings and its relations with other previous researches. To better present these results we started by conceptualizing the chieftaincy institution and the neopatrimonial elite in Cameroon. This was followed by what this study unearth in terms of results and findings which include the mechanism the neopatrimonial elite in Cameroon have used in mobilizing the chieftaincy institution for their interest at the detriment of the latter.

Conceptualizing chieftaincy and the neopatrimonial elites in Cameroon.

In this paper, a better understanding of the instrumentalisation of the chieftaincy institution in Cameroon by the neopatrimonial elite to consolidate their grip on power necessitates a clarification of the concepts of Neopatrimonialism and chieftaincy and neopatrimonial elite. The term chieftaincy is derived from the word chief and refers to the office and the institution of which the chief is the principal operator and stakeholder [5]. It is worth mentioning that the term chief did not exist in the socio-political lexicon of pre-colonial African societies [6]. It was coined and used administratively by the European colonizers to designate African indigenous rulers and collaborators [7].

An Overview of the Chieftaincy institution in Cameroon

During the pre-colonial times in Cameroon, each ethnic or tribal community had its own term to designate the occupant of the chieftain position, for instance, the appellation, *Fon, nfor, fo'o, mbe or mfor* was used in the Grassfields area (Present North-West and part of the West and South West regions of Cameroon), *Lamido* or *Sultan* among people of the Sahel (present day Adamawa, North, Far-North and part of West regions of Cameroon). It is worth noting here that peoples of the forest region (present day Center, South and East) and people of the Coastal area (present day littoral region) did not have possess a chieftaincy str

uctured headed by a chief as in other regions of Cameroon. Rather their traditional societies were structured around politico-family lineages with a fundamental rite variously known as the *s'oo, ngwe or mbok* among the Beti and Bassa people respectively[8].

However, these local pre-colonial appellations were later denaturalized from its content and substance following colonial intrusion into African traditional political systems, thus traditional rulers came to be addressed simply as chiefs[9]. To D.O. Omagu, the chieftaincy institution designates all those forms of social and political authority which have their historical origin in the “pre-colonial” states and societies, and which were incorporated by colonial rule into what is now the modern state[10]. In the same vein, Earle Timothy maintains that chieftaincy is the chief’s political body, a personalized network of supporters, who act as agents for his or her rule; they are the chief’s warriors, priests, managers, and others involved in the collection of revenues and support for power strategies[11].

Making reference to the Bamenda Grass fields of Cameroon M.T. Aletum maintains chieftaincy the designates the sum of traditional organs, institutions, bodies, agents and personalities whose source of strength emanated directly from a system of governance, which had as goal the maintenance of law and order, the wellbeing of the society and its external relations with other societies[12].

The law in Cameroon define chieftaincy i as; lineage societies of the Center, South and East whose chiefs were installed by colonial authorities and relative sacrosanct[13]. It also refers to the lamidates of the Northern or sahelian area where Fulani chiefs and lamidos remain feudal potentates. This sahelian model is the same in the Grass fields area whose particularity is that of their sacred ritual legitimacy stemming from the pre-colonial epoch (decree n°77/245 of 15 July 1977).

From a general perspective chieftaincy in Cameroon and particularly those of the Grass fields area were and are still to an extend very revered institution. Most Cameroonians of diversified ethnic and tribal origins as belief in their chiefs as mystical persons with extra-ordinary powers. In the Grass fields for example, chiefs are considered and believed by majority of their subjects as the link between the ancestors (spirits) and the living[14]. The chief is considered the spiritual symbol of his people and the representatives of the ancestor as they propitiate the spirits of the land by offering sacrifices to the gods and ancestors. The sacrifice he offered and the rituals he performed were believed to nourish the people’s relation with the gods and assured continuity. Owing to his divine function, the chief was looked upon with reverence and respected as such.

With all these attributes, chiefs and the chieftaincy have a strong influence on the people. It is common place in some chieftaindom in Cameroon for the population to disobey administrative orders from a state authority and listen rather to their chief. A threat or disrespect on the chieftaincy institution by a politician or administrative authority could have serious political and social impacts.

For instance, during the 24 January 1959 elections to enlarge the national assembly following the dissolution of the latter on recommendation of by the then Prime Minister EML Endeley on December 24th same year. The main contenders in these elections were John Ngu Foncha of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) and the former Prime Minister E.M.L. Endeley leader of the Kamerun National Congress party (KNC).

Following the votes the KNDP capture 14 seats thereby narrowly defeating the KNC which won a total of 12 seats despite its alliance with the Kamerun People’s Party[15]. Some studies on the history of British Southern are all of the opinion that the victory of the KNDP and its leader was party as a result of the support the received from the chiefs[16].

In reality chiefs of the Grass fields, the home town of Foncha through their influence massively mobilized the population to vote for the KNDP.

In the same perspective, in 1985, the traditional ruler of Nso chieftaindom in the North West Region of Cameroon, the fon of Nso was summoned to the Senior Divisional office for challenging his authority. In reality, the fon of Nso had installed a Fulani Chief *in his palace*, an event that had never happened before. Sources had it that this was an attempt by the Fon to maintain his political control over Fulani graziers and extract a tribute from them. The Fon was sharply rebuked and instructed to stop meddling with the administration of the land. The attempt to install a Fulani chief represented a new strategy to maintain the Fon's powers over his wealthy Fulani clients.

There exist several such examples in Cameroon and this justifies the strong influence of chiefs on the population. The post-colonial period in Cameroon witnessed the emergence of a new political, economic and social groups as well as the putting in place of modern state institutions notably an institution like MINATD that was to manage chiefs. As a matter of fact, in many African countries including Cameroon, political power was largely transferred from the chieftaincy institution to a new class of leaders emerging from the political leadership, the military, religious and professional groups as well as civil society organizations. The new elite group mainly made of wealthy businessmen, professionals, high ranking security officials and top civil and public servants[17]. These new classes of post independent leaders have been qualified as the neopatrimonial elite.

Delineating neopatrimonial elites

Neopatrimonialism is a universal concept which its proponents perceive to have particular value for explaining Africa's state weaknesses, democratic deficiencies and economic crisis. Mamoudou Gazibo maintains that Patrimonialism is essentially characterized by the absence of a distinction between public and private domains, since "the patrimonial chief treats all political, administrative or judicial matters as if they were personal affairs, in the same way as he exploits his estate as if it were private property. Neopatrimonialism leads to the personalization of power and thus to a lack of institutionalization, but also to arbitrariness and the tendency to authoritarianism[18].

Von Soest is of the opinion that the term neopatrimonialism denotes the simultaneous operation of the two Weberian ideal types of patrimonial and rational-legal domination[19]. Patrimonialism connotes that a patron in a certain social and political order bestows gifts from own resources on followers in order to secure their loyalty and support[20]. Clients, in turn, obtain material benefits and protection. In a neopatrimonial system, patrons typically are office-holders in state institutions who misuse public funds or office in order to stay in power. Social practice as a result is fundamentally different compared to the impersonal formal rules which are supposed to guide official action. Taking the case of the chieftaincy institution, it can be hypothesized that Neopatrimonialism in other to consolidate its dominance and existence relies on institutions like chieftaincy who in turn obtain pecuniary and political benefits from the neopatrimonial elite.

Elites

According Luis Garrido Vergara, An élite is a selected and small group of citizens and/or organizations that controls a large amount of power based on the social distinction with regard to other groups of lower strata [21], most of these selected groups are constantly searching differentiation as well as separation from the rest of society[22]. From a sociological, perspective, the concept "elite" is generally applied when it has to do the groups that either control or are situated at the top of societies. In most cases like in Cameroon, these groups are fashioned by the historical process. For instance, the fact that the colonial administrators in British Southern Cameroon preferred chiefs than the educated elite for the administrative management of the territory created a bad relation between the chiefs and the elites at independence. In fact at independence, some elites accused chiefs of collaborating with the colonial authorities to retard the

development of the territory. On the other hand, the French colonial authorities in French Cameroon through their policy of assimilation encourage the educated elite and even permitted some to travel and study in France. Upon their return, most of them occupied most of the politico-administrative and top military positions in Cameroon at independence.

Influence of Neopatrimonial Elites on Chieftaincy: Technics and Deployment

The Neopatrimonial Elite has essentially utilized three methods to transform chiefs and the chieftaincy institution to a political tool for their interest and consolidation of the state. These methods include; judicial and administrative ties, party politics and quest for legitimacy.

Juridical-Administrative ties

The first acts posed by the neopatrimonial elites geared at fragalising and utilizing traditional rulers for their own personal interest was as early as 1960. In British Southern Cameroons for example, the political scene in before independence was essentially animated by traditional authorities. This was visible with collaboration between the German and British colonial administration to govern the territory under their country. Logically at independence, traditional authorities were to be considered as an integral part of the modern state given their colonial experience. In reality and with a visionary perspective, chiefs had actually armed themselves by creating the House of chiefs to prevent themselves from being engulfed by the neopatrimonial elite at independence.

In French Cameroon, chiefs before the advent independence were already made auxiliaries of the administration as per Order No. 244 of February 4, 1933, determining the status of native chiefs and its subsequent procedures. By auxiliary of the administration they became part and parcel of the administrative machinery and under the supervision of the colonial authorities. Chiefs in French Cameroon represented the administration in their villages and rendered account to the colonial authorities. In fact, they become more of administrative chiefs than traditional authorities[23]. This situation was perpetuated by the emasculation of traditional authorities at independence by the new political and administrative elite. The even went as far as enlisted traditional authorities in one party system[24].

With the evolution of the socio-political and administrative situation in Cameroon, notably with the unification in 1961 and subsequently the reunification on the 20th May 1972, law regulating chieftaincy in Cameroon was harmonized by the political authorities. The influential House of chiefs in British Southern Cameroon was abolished. It worth noting here that, Amadou Ahidjo who was then the President by then dreaded the influence of the chiefs especially the house of the chiefs. Also, he needed the support of the chiefs to fight the radical UPC group that constituted a threat to his power. To completely control the chieftaincy institution Decree No. 77 / 245 of July 15, 1977 on the organization of the traditional chiefdoms and its subsequent amendments were passed. Henceforth the chieftaincy institution was placed under the supervision of the Ministry of territorial administration.

In the modern Cameroon administration and according to constitutional backings, the appointment of any individual stems from the discretionary power of the authority appointing. As a matter of fact, the appointment of a chief by an administrative authority is a “government act” and cannot be contested even in the court. This was clearly spelled out in ordinance no.72/6 of August 26th 1972 on the reorganization of the Supreme Court. This in other words means that once the administrative authority appoints a chief be him legitimate or not, so far as the act is legal, such a decision cannot be contested. What happens when an administratively appointed chief dies and has to be replaced?

In Cameroon, Decree No. 77/245 of 1977 turned all traditional leaders into auxiliaries of the government. The chief’s installation has to be ratified by an express note of administrative recognition before he can

officially exercise any active role. He is now accountable to the Senior Divisional Officer of his area and might suffer disciplinary sanction from low level bureaucrats[25].

In return, the chiefs received a small monthly salary from the state in addition to a small commission from tax collections. The bureaucratization of chieftaincy has demystified the sacred nature of royalty and seriously curtailed the powers of the chiefs as even non royal persons because of wealth and political influence can influence the choice of a chief in his Fandom[26]. That explains why the link between chiefs and the political elites and chiefs is ever strong. As a matter fact, the post independent state did everything possible to manipulate chieftaincy to its favor[27].

Evidence that the modern state has consistently sought not only to capture but undermine the office of the chief can be seen in the way in which it has been manipulated[28]. Article 2 of the decree sets out a threefold classification of chiefs[29]. First class Chiefs were to be those with two Second class chiefs under their jurisdiction and within the territorial limits of a divisional unit. Second class chiefs had to have the allegiance of two Third class chiefs and their jurisdiction could not be larger than a sub-division. The jurisdiction of Third class chiefs was limited to a village or a “quarter” in a rural or urban area. However, intent on manipulating these chiefs, Article 4 gave discretionary powers to the administrative authority of the post-colonial state to classify a Fandom as first, second or third degree basis of the nebulous concepts of demographic or economic importance.

According to Nantang Ben Jua, the post independent state has manipulated traditional authority by seeking to convert chiefs to clients[30]. Relations between the two have taken on the semblance of parasitism, than symbiosis as was the case in the colonial state. The ability of the state to manipulate and control the chiefs was increased by the fact that they depended on the state for financial needs and some of them power thirsty for political offices. All these advantages increased the scramble for the position of chieftaincy and thus the outcome has been a chieftaincy succession disputes[31].

In some chieftaindom in Cameroon, notably those of the Grass fields, access to the chiefly position was through a systematic mechanisms and criterion at the basis of which the candidate for chieftaincy among several criteria must have been born on the tiger skin. It is the process of designating a chief and installing a chief in the Bamenda Grass fields that gives chieftaincy its traditional, customary and legitimate characteristics. While the colonial state in the Bamenda Grass fields had sought to borrow legitimacy from traditional chiefs, the post- colonial state through statutory provisions eventually reversed this order and Decree no. 77/245 of 15 July 1977; Article 20 stipulated that recognized chiefs were to act as auxiliaries of the administration[32].

Chiefs as political sentinels for center based neopatrimonial elite at the local level

The political liberalization process in Cameroon in the 1990s favored the opening of the political space and the unleashing of opportunities which traditional rulers were quick to seize to demonstrate their relevance. This did only permit traditional rulers to rejuvenate traditional rulership[33] but also led the “retraditionalisation” of the African State. That is to say, reconstructing African states based on African values and heritage such as the chieftaincy institution.

Some traditional authorities in Cameroon, notably those of the Grass fields taking the advantage of their status as the representatives of grassroots people, sought to impose themselves in this new era of liberalization in Cameroon. A number of factors within the democratization process in Cameroon that contributed significantly in inciting and fueling chieftaincy succession conflicts. These factors include; the liberalization of the political scene that witnessed the militancy of traditional rulers in Party Politics, financial advantages of chieftaincy, and the emergence of a Neo-traditionalist class of chiefs[34].

As Jude Fokwang indicates, the introduction of democracy in Cameroon in 1990 created conditions for the return of old political actors such as chiefs to the “national political scene”, despite the popular demand for “actors” of a new kind[35]. This was because in the days of the single party state, Paul Biya had prohibited chiefs from participating in national politics[36]. Nevertheless, pluralism prompted by the demand for “Jacobin democracy”, compelled Paul Biya to backtrack from this position as he needed chiefs to consolidate his powers and the dissemination of the party[37]. For example, Fon of Mankon was co-opted as the first Vice President of the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM). At the same time, the Fons of Bali and Bafut fondoms in the North west region of Cameroon became alternate members of the Central Committee of the CPDM.

In this situation many chiefs in the Bamenda Grass fields who until then had been sidelined from national politics became full time militants and opted to collaborate with the ruling party. According to Ibrahim Mouiche , the choice to collaborate with the state was a rational choice that permitted them to get more access to the state apparatus and obtain advantages in exchange for their collaboration and also to pledge for bureaucratic recognition, security and autonomy[38]. In this coalition of interests, traditional authorities and the state participated in the same capacity to some extent in consolidating authoritarian nature of the state [39].

In the Bamenda Grass fields, Francis Nyamnjoh noted that some Fons like that of Mankon, Bafut, and Balikumbat that joined party politics saw their legitimacy and Authority being contested[40]. In the 1992 presidential election, Fon Angwafo’s residence was burnt by his people claimed to be militants from the Social Democratic Front [41]. Fon Ganyonga was one of such chiefs whose political career gained prominence in 1990 following his co-optation into the ranks of the ruling CPDM. He was one of the “old actors” clad in “new clothes”[42].

But the government’s claim to legitimacy, owing to its introduction of political pluralism, was soon brought into question[43]. It followed that similar claims made by “old- new actors” such as Ganyonga also came into question. This was because the government and the CPDM party in particular were perceived as obstacles towards genuine democratic transformation in Cameroon. The people and the opposition expected chiefs to be ‘neutral’ mediators in the on-going struggle between civil society and the state, but this was not the case.

In all important official ceremonies organized by public authorities, the presence of traditional rulers is constantly visible. In some instances, the some palaces have often been used as a gathering ground for political meetings. In fact, the increase implication of chiefs in administrative and political rallies by the neopatrimonial elite is a strong indication of the role chiefs play in the legitimation and consolidation of their authority. The question that merits serious analysis is finding out why the strong interest in chieftaincy institution by the neopatrimonial elites given that they have all the political, economic and military authority at their disposal.

Factors underlying the Patrimonialisation of chieftaincy

From our findings, a number of determinants explain why the neopatrimonial elite in Cameroon at the wake of multiparty politics decided to use the chieftaincy for the consolidation of their power and interest. These factors include among other factors, Socio-cultural significance of chieftaincy, sacredness of chieftaincy and traditional legitimacy.

Socio-cultural significance of chieftaincy

The chief, or the “royal family,” literally embodies the name that gives the village its collective identity.

In Cameroon, the village does not exist as a village except insofar as it has a chief. In this sense, the chief is something like a Durkheimian totem^[44], symbolically embodying in his (or occasionally her) own person the very existence of the community. In other words, it is a system of belief in which humans are said to have kinship or a mystical relationship with a spirit-being, such as an animal or plant. The entity, or totem, is thought to interact with a given kin group or an individual and to serve as their emblem or symbol.

In Cameroon almost every individual before being a Cameroonian is an indigene of a particular village or tribe or ethnic group which are generally the smallest administrative units. The most influential head of any village or tribe in Cameroon is the traditional rulers incarnated by the chieftaincy institution. As a matter of fact, nobody can enter any village in Cameroon and carry out any activity without the prior consent of the traditional authority. Many a times each any major state project is about to be launched in any local, the traditional authority is generally consulted to seek his opinion. This explains why chiefs and the chieftaincy institution have continued to survive because of the reverence and respect the people still have for the institution. People might challenge the chief incarnating chieftaincy, but not the chieftaincy institution that carries a people's history, tradition and culture.

Sacredness of chieftaincy

Another element that explains the resilient nature of chieftaincy despite the threats of the neopatrimonial elites lies with the sacred nature of the institution. J. Clyde Mitchell argues that Chiefs also store up and in some sense embody- sacred power^[45]. Their sacred power is connected to what are, or were, at least in the indigenous systems, specific ritual roles in communicating with the ancestors or ensuring the fertility of land, animals, and people. It is difficult, however, to distinguish a chief's prestige, which comes in part from traditional cultural roles, from his sacred or spiritual powers, which in turn both reflect and protect the strength and health of his community^[46]. Chiefs' prestige in turn depends on their ability to access and contain sacred powers. This sacred of chieftaincy has thus played to their advantage each any person attempts at adulterating the institution. This sacred nature of chieftaincy gives it a magico-mystical dimension that scares away any external physical force.

Traditional Legitimacy

According to Jing Chen, legitimacy is a value whereby something or someone is recognized and accepted as right and proper^[47]. In political science, legitimacy usually is understood as the popular acceptance and recognition by the public of the authority of a governing régime, whereby authority has political power through consent and mutual understandings, not coercion. The three types of political legitimacy described by German sociologist Max Weber are traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal; traditional legitimacy derives from societal custom and habit that emphasize the history of the authority of tradition. Traditionalists understand this form of rule as historically accepted, hence its continuity, because it is the way society has always been.

In all villages and communities in Cameroon, the chieftaincy is recognized by each and every indigene. Some might hold grudges with the person incarnating the institution, but the institution itself does not suffer from any form of contestation. That is why in most grassroots communities in Cameroon pay more reverence and attention to the orders of the chief than the state administrators. This situation has often created conflict between the administrative authorities and chiefs.

This only further justifies why chieftaincy has continue to survive and to remind a rival to modern state legitimacy. Charismatic legitimacy derives from the ideas and personal charisma of the leader, a person whose authoritative persona charms and psychologically dominates the people of the society to agreement with the government's régime and rule. Traditional rulers in Cameroon are generally very charismatic persons. In fact, charisma is one of the main features of selection of chiefs in some communities, notably in

the western Grassfields of Cameroon.

CONCLUSION

The chieftaincy in Cameroon just like elsewhere in Africa is the oldest and most resilient socio-political institution that has continued to survive despite multiple challenges. As a matter of fact, historical challenges in the form of succession conflicts, colonial rule attempted in vain to sidestep the institution. Again the immediate post independent government in collaboration with political efforts to subjugate and divest chieftaincy from its socio-political, cultural and traditional strength through the patrimonialisation and the auxiliarization has never cowed the institution. Rather prophets of doom that had seen in the immediate future the disappearances of the institution are astonished on the capacity of adaption and survival of chieftaincy. Ironically, the institution has even become an instrument for the consolidation of state authority and in some instances a trojan horse for some political elites.

The resilience of the chieftaincy institution in Cameroon could rather serve as an example to the modern state which only after sixty years of existence is faced with all sorts of challenges. In fact, the success of the modern state to meet up with its challenges lies in finding the secrets that have militated for the survival of chieftaincy institution for centuries. The historical role of chieftaincy in the economic, socio-cultural and political domains can be exploited positively by the modern state and neopatrimonial elite by constitutionalizing the institution, accompanied with necessary resources.

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FOOT NOTES

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