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## Bah and Traditional Governance in Babungo, Cameroon

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### Abstract:

*Traditional governance in Babungo, a Tikar Chiefdom in Cameroon is embedded with a consensual decision-making process, checks and balances that have provided good governance and political stability in the fendom for many decades. This paper investigates the Bah institution which represented the values of democracy within the traditional political system. In the process of construction or nation-building in Babungo, the people established the Bah institution which regulated the power of the traditional ruler. This institution symbolised dual leadership which guaranteed stable governance. The Bah institution was however not without challenges. In spite of this, the institution remains very relevant in governance of the kingdom of Babungo in Cameroon and from it the government can learn the lessons of governance and leadership.*

**Keywords:** Bah, Traditional governance, consensus, dual leadership, Babungo

### 1. Introduction

This paper examines the Bah institution and traditional governance in Babungo. It focuses on the importance of understanding the nature of the traditional authority system of this Grass fields chiefdom as well as the institutional components of its traditional political system. Its importance in the construction of the traditional governance mechanism and the control of power and authority within the traditional political system cannot be exaggerated. The function of the political organisation is to bring some kind of conformity to the ideals and goals of governance in the traditional society. The Bah was an ensemble of institutions enshrined in values and mechanisms of governance such as checks and balances, democracy, social justice, legality and legitimacy. The traditional authority system in Babungo, besides the Bah involved other political institutions and actors, all of which were principal and essential elements in traditional governance. In the establishment of the traditional authority system and political institutions, it laid the ground work for instruments of traditional governance. The Bah b "constitutional" dispensation was enshrined with the responsibility of articulating a durable and widely accepted traditional administration capable of fulfilling the aspirations of the Babungo people.

### 2. Origin of Bahas Governance Institution

Oral sources hold that, dual traditional authority governance system in Babungo was established at Ngineh, the first settlement and later palace of the Babungo people. Sainggi I, the first Fon of Babungo was the youngest of Mange's sons, who migrated alongside Fuanje and the Bah, in the company of Tiefe Tifuan. Before the group left Mbenje, Fuanje asked Bah to take care of Sainggi as they migrated. Tiefe Tifuan had the tiger skin which was the symbol of power and authority of a fon. Bah did not subscribe to some other person ruling them when they were more in numbers. He then conspired against Tiefe Tifuan and seized the tiger skin from him which he gave to his younger brother. Upon return, Tiefe Tifuan met Sainggi comfortably seated on the tiger skin and venerated by his brother, Bah and his retainers as Fon. Bah made Sainggi Fon of Babungo.<sup>1</sup> Tiefe Tifuan was given the name Chinje which means a dreamer to be Fon. Faced with this kind of coup d'etat, he left the group and settled far off from them.

Sainggi as Fon was not versed with the power and authority that goes with it. He therefore relied on the Bah for advice in governance. He would ask him "Now that you have made me Fon, how will I rule the people?"<sup>2</sup> The Bah therefore became very influencing in enacting the laws with assistance from Fon's retainers. He reinforced the authority of the Fon by making his palace sacred. In addition, he developed the customs and tradition, and also the rituals to be performed. Sainggi told Bah that as Fon he was doing nothing he would not be able to take care of his family. In response, Bah took steps to ensure that the Fon and himself would be provided with the means of survival. According to the measures put in place by Bah:

The Fon would receive the bride price of all female twins in the land. Also, anyone who would desire to be a member of the traditional institutions such as Tifuan, the regulatory society, would offer the bride price of their daughters, land and other valuables to the Fon who will have to share these with the Bah.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Godwill Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority System in Babungo 1900-1990", Masters Thesis in History, University of Yaounde I, 2013, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority System in Babungo", p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 26.

The Fon and Bah earned their living from these collections. In addition, people gave their daughters for marriage to Bah and the Fon for they were symbols of power, authority and prestige in the land.<sup>4</sup> It was realised that political institutions were necessary to help the Fon and Bah exert real power. The ruling authorities saw that if they governed through institutions that looked like the basis of power, sharing absolute power could be exercised without much opposition.<sup>5</sup> This led to the introduction of democratic concepts of checks and balances as an essential principle of governance in Babungo. This helped to re-enforce the position of the Bah within the traditional administration. Thus, Bah laid down the practical modalities of rulership at the palace at Ngineh. After that, he left and founded his own palace at Moukang quarter not too far from the Fon's palace. Fon Sainggi was succeeded by his descendants and Bah continued to act as a regulating force to the power of the Fon.

### 3.The Bah and“Constitutional Ordering”

The role of the Bah in traditional governance is the main subject of discussion here. Bah was the second son of Mange, senior brother of the Fon and junior brother to Fuanje. The present Bah of Babungo John Guiyui succeeded his father, Bah Kometa Gewai, who reigned from 1947 to 2001.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that many Bahs had existed before these ones under discussion. Bah Wehlayeh was enthroned during the reign of Fon Nyifuan. By political sovereignty the Fon and the Bah were in full control of the socio-political, administrative and economic components of what was their “world.” The chieftdom over which the Fon presided was a “mini-state” which was administratively sovereign. The components of the traditional authority systems were the pillars of the sovereign “state” as it instilled in the people of the different families a sense of oneness in a single territory under the control of the Fon.<sup>7</sup> Tifuan had agents of traditional administration, who maintained law and order and were responsible for the mobilisation of human and material resources for the realisation of communal goals and the proper functioning of traditional governance as enshrined in the customs and tradition, under the dual authority of the Fon and the Bah.

The traditional political institutions and structures had as a basic political function within the traditional governance model in Babungo, the distribution of certain public rights and prerogatives among its various leaders in their social, ritual and governance activities. As expressed by Ruel, (1969: xv), “constitutional ordering” is used here to analyse the functioning of traditional governance in the Babungo chieftdom as units with constitutional structures where the leaders and their institutions maintained their positions vis-à-vis each other.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in the “constitutional ordering” of the Babungo fondon, various institutions and structures of the polity incarnated by the Bah and the Fon maintained their mutual positions. On different occasions and ritual activities, these institutions and structures of traditional governance held tight on their rights and prestige symbols, rules of etiquette meant more than rituals and prestige; they expressed the place of every individual in the community within the socio-political and governance hierarchy. Thus, controlling the distribution of these rights and privileges of the institutions and structures of traditional governance as inscribed in the customs and traditions was a means of insuring the permanence of balance of power amongst the structures of authority

Bah exercised divine powers and was seen as the spiritual leader. He commanded respect and authority among the Babungo people. Among his objects were the throne, staff, cap, necklace, royal bed, stool, and pipes.<sup>9</sup> These objects were all symbols of power, authority and prestige. The Bahs under study were charismatic, energetic and intelligent with plenty of wisdom and a sense of foresight. The powers were gotten not only from the role they played during the migration and settlement of Babungo people, the enthronement of the Fon, but above all, powers given to them by their mothers.<sup>10</sup> Oral evidence points to the fact that the first Bah who built these structures did not die. His passing on is shrouded in a myth. It is told that he disappeared into Nkai Ybo'o, a little forest besides his palace leaving behind his walking stick as he promised his people.<sup>11</sup>

The Bah is quarter head of Mouakang. The quarter was established when the Bah moved from Ngineh. Unlike the Fon's palace that had been moved from place to place, the palace of Bah has never been moved. The Bah is above quarter heads in Babungo, as all the other quarter heads pay tribute to the Fon and the Bah.<sup>12</sup> While they answer Nsthave fuan meaning “He is above all Kings” to the Fon, the Bah calls him “Sa'nchi”. The Fon and Bah presided over traditional administrative meetings in the presence of the entire Babungo notables.<sup>13</sup> The Bah lead the Mouakang quarter to open the Nikai annual dance that takes place in the Fon's palace.

The Bah is custodian of the custom and tradition and guarantor of the “constitutional ordering” of Babungo. The Bah represents the institution of control and checks on the Fon and the proper respect and application of the customs and tradition, as per the constitutional dispensations. He made an enormous contribution in enacting the laws, for example, the bride price payment for all female twins to the Fon. He is thus an influential law maker of the land.<sup>14</sup> He has a frontline position and an important role within the traditional administration. For anyone admitted into the traditional institutions,

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Kometa Soteh, 90 years, Farmer, Mouakang, Babungo, 7 August 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Abraham Akrong, “Religion and Traditional Leadership in Ghana,” in *Chieftaincy in Ghana*, Sub-Sahara Publishers, Accra, Ghana, 2006, 206, p.197.

<sup>8</sup> J.P. Warnier, “Pre-Colonial Makon: The Development of a Cameroon Chieftdom in its Regional settings”, Ph.D. Thesis in Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, 1975, p.260.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Godlove Bah, 55 years, farmer, Mouakang, Babungo, 13 August 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Tita Ngwitwi.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Tita Ngwitwi.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Tita Tifumbalai.

Bah is the first to be served before any other member (including the Fon), with part of everything brought by the individual.<sup>15</sup>

The Bah has his royal fraternal adjutants called, Mumaa.<sup>16</sup> Each Bah that came to the throne appointed his Mumaa, who for most of the time was one of his junior brothers. The Mumaa represented the Bah in some ceremonies. The Bah sometimes delegated some non-essential powers to his Mumaa.<sup>17</sup> His palace was a major converging point for the Babungo people and he earned the respect of the people. The Bah is chief celebrant during the presentation of the Fon's first children delivered after his enthronement as Fon. At Bah's request, the Fon would offer jugs of palm oil, palm wine and food to Tifuan.<sup>18</sup> He would appreciate the food and does the sharing and take the rest which is usually much, to his compound. When this takes place, it is said that "Tifuan has celebrated the children of the Fon."<sup>19</sup> In the same vein, the Bah in the name of Tifuan gave princesses to male children of different families in the chiefdom. Since it is the Bah- Tifuan authorising, they all accepted.<sup>20</sup>

In Babungo, the fon had social power while the political and spiritual power was vested in the Bah. The fon was allowed to direct the activities of the chiefdom, settle disputes, mainly by arbitration and punish some offences committed by members of the chiefdom.<sup>21</sup> The social powers of the fon were largely functional and limited to the obedience of the people. The conditions for obedience, on the part of the people, marked the social power of the fon which was guaranteed by rightful succession, coordinated by the Bah and supervised by Tifuan.<sup>22</sup> Since the power of the fon was generated from the rightful source, popular consent was guaranteed and good social order established. Such a social order was backed by the political and spiritual powers of the Bah. He had established rights within the social order to determine policies, acted as leader and guided the traditional political system in Babungo.<sup>23</sup> Maclver on traditional authority feud points contends that:

The whole institutional order tends to confirm the authority of those who rule within it, not only because the value attached to institutions is reflected upon the authority-holder but also because the authority-holder is concerned to guard the myth that elevates his own power and accordingly operates the institutions themselves so as to check any assault upon them, to subordinate or discourage all opposing claims and to assure the favourable indoctrination of those who schooled under the prevailing system.<sup>24</sup>

The nature of traditional authority in Babungo gave room for checks and balances within the traditional political system. The actions of the fon were expected to be in line with the custom and traditions of the chiefdom. The fon was not there to execute just his will for his personal pleasure.<sup>25</sup> The Bah protected both his position as the political and spiritual authority in the chiefdom and the institutions he incarnated. He was a major political force and a structure of control that guaranteed checks and balances within the traditional authority system in Babungo.<sup>26</sup> The Bah as head of Tifuan could influence the decisions of the Fon, check and call the Fon to order if found guilty of violating the laws, custom and tradition of the Babungo people. Such moments of control were done within the traditional political institutions and mostly at night. This is confirmed by Ian Fowler "that the Fon rules during the day and the Bah rules at Night."<sup>27</sup> The Fon managed the affairs of the village as the head, during the day and the Bah at night met with the fon for consultation and discussion on matters affecting the village. Thus, the conflict within the traditional authority system originated from the nature of traditional authority in Babungo.

The interactions between the Fon, the central institutions of the chiefdom and other vital structures created various forms of allegiance which brought about competition between the different elements of the social and political structures of the fondon. Conflicts within the traditional authority system arose as power was unevenly distributed among the institutions, while they tried to maintain the balance of power. In achieving this balance of power, lines along which competition took place were clearly visible from the structures and the nature of the traditional authority system itself.

#### 4. Political Power Transition at the Summit of the Traditional "State"

The transfer of power at the helm of Babungochiefdom obeys specified procedures and proceedings that pertain to the "constitutional ordering" in her traditional authority governance system. During these occasions, each of these institutions involved in the process show their force, their rights and prerogatives exclusive to each group and individuals within the traditional authority system. It is also when the traditional government and state functionaries in their rank and file show "the who is who," in the chiefdom. Finally, political power transition exhibits the democratic culture (balance of power, checks and balances, legitimacy and legality) of the authorities (the Fon, the Bah and the hereditary notables) as the case may be.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Chilver and Kaberry, *Traditional Bamenda*, p. 122.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Tita Tifuambalai.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> I gathered from my informants that this practice was abandoned because of the authority feud between the Fon and the Bah in Babungo.

<sup>21</sup> Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority System in Babungo", p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> T.M. Aletum, "The use of Legitimate Force in Traditional Political Institutions", *Revue Science et Technique, Series Science Humaines*, vol VI, pp. 88-89.

<sup>25</sup> Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority System in Babungo", p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>27</sup> I. Fowler, "Babungo a study of Iron Production, Trade and Power in a Nineteen century Ndop Plain Chiefdom", Ph. D. thesis in History, London, 1990, P. 25.

In discussing the practice of traditional governance and democratic power transition in Babungo, a dual traditional authority governance system, the royal funeral of the Fon and the Bah is used to illustrate the existence of balance of power between the Fon and the Bah, and the development of the authority feud in the traditional authority system of the chiefdom. The importance of the Bah is seenduring the funeral and enthronement of the Fon in Babungo. It is a singular event which portrays the power and authority of the Bah within the traditional administration and the Babungo community at large, an important element of democracy, checks and balances, power and control, and conflict within the traditional political system of Babungo.

The royal funeral and the enthronement of a fon in Babungo presents an opportunity to examine in detail aspects of governance and traditional politics and the roles of the key actors (the Fon and the Bah), according to the custom and tradition of the Babungo people. The procedures and processes evaluate in real terms the degree of respect, prestige and influence the Fon and the Bah have within the traditional political institutions. The event of the funeral and enthronement of the Fon justify the dual command political system, the legality and legitimacy of the Fon and the Bah emanating from the custom and tradition of Babungo.

At the death of the Fon, popularly referred to as "the sun has set," wise nduine,<sup>28</sup> the Bah left for the palace from where he dispatched two important notables to look for the heir apparent with whom the Bah supervised the secret burial of the fuan. The burial was done by tomb priests Vetitefum who were selected from among members of Tifuan. The burial was highly ritualised and a lot of traditional religious ideas surrounded it. Unlike an ordinary grave which is dug horizontally, that of the Fon and the Bah was conceived to be vertical, with a compartment carefully carved out at the bottom. The final work had an L- shape. It was so, because they were buried in a sitting position as it was often the case when they sat on the throne on important ceremonials during their reign.<sup>29</sup> This position represents the unique identity of the office and a distinguishing feature of kingship as an institution in its own right. The walls of the grave were specially decorated with an imported cotton cloth with blue and white undyed strips. This large cloth was thickly stained with camwood and on it some white cowries (veguih) were skilfully stitched. These cowries were important symbols of the material wealth, associated with chieftainship in Babungo. The grave was embellished with fresh leaves of wild banana plant, Ngomekee.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, a leopard belt was laid on the well levelled and earthen floor of the grave. This was another element of royal monopoly and signified the power and authority which the Fon and the Bah controlled as the two most important individuals in the chiefdom. Then, two sets of smelted iron gong, Fingeur were put separately on the animal skin to permit the departed dignitary to rest on it. The gongs were royal prestigious objects. They were a symbol of the religious authority and an identification of the people's belief that after dying, they joined their predecessors in the eternal world as new ancestors.<sup>31</sup> Also, a magnificent stool was placed in the grave. On to it were carved royal animals such as lions, leopards, tigers which were emblems of rank. They represented the prestigious nature of the office of the Fon and Bah. The royal graves were known as Yefung.<sup>32</sup>

The dressing of the Fon and the Bah involved a lavish display of royal treasures and regalia.<sup>33</sup> Special cap woven with black and white threads and decorated with nine Turaco red feathers, tingbai and nine porcupine quills, Nsangong were evenly distributed and fitted on the right and left sides of the cap and worn on the late fon's head. The late Bah was decorated in the same way, but with seven Turaco red feathers, tingbai and seven porcupine quills, Nsangong.<sup>34</sup>As one of the heirlooms of the fuan and the Bah, a necklace made principally of bulges of dark –blue and white beads were thrown around their necks. Then some fresh leaves of a fetish medicine called Lui, were artistically woven into a light bundle and thrown over the neck of the late Fon and the Bah through the neck. These ornaments were symbols of nobility, prestige and components of religious powers and authority of the fuan and the Bah.<sup>35</sup>

The final stages of dressing included the wearing of ivory made bracelets<sup>36</sup> on the right arm, a large pipe on which were engraved symbols of royalty forced in the right hand and the low over-lapping dress Nkui was worn on the waist line. Also, a kingly drinking cup, Ndaubong, was made to fit in the right hand. All the material items described in these last two paragraphs were symbols of rank and the unchallenged authority of the Fon and the Bah in Babungo. The people believed that death was not an obstacle for the subjects to continue offering gifts of value to the Fuan and the Bah as a sign of their confidence and high esteem.<sup>37</sup>

Shortly after the burial preparations were completed, in the case of the Fon, the Bah who directed burial operations and the heir apparent escorted the corps to the burial place within the inner bowls of the fon's palace. The Bah received and fixed the corpse in the right position in the tomb. The Bah asked the heir apparent to give a helping hand by a

<sup>28</sup> Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority System in Babungo", p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority", p. 89

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>36</sup> It must be recalled that such relatively modern articles were first introduced in Babungo following her participation in the extensive trade which was flourishing in the Grassfield region even before the arrival of Europeans. In Elisabeth M. Chilver, "Nineteenth Century Trade in Bamenda Grassfields, Southern Cameroons", Afrika and Ubersee, Band XLV14, 1961, pp. 233-258.

<sup>37</sup> Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority", p. 74. Tita Bah and the new Fon Ndofoa Zofoa III in 1999, sat in the regal palace bedroom. As one of the heirlooms of the Fuan, a necklace made principally of bulges of dark –blue and white beads were worn around his neck. Then some fresh leaves of a fetish medicine called Lui, was worn over the neck of the Fon through the neck. Before coming into the room, the Bah had commissioned Sorgho to go and make fire in the fon's fire-place, to keep the unventilated room warm and comfortable for the new fon.

ritual holding of the late ruler's head as the corps was being lowered. This was an important action that marked the end of one reign and another was about to begin.<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that the heir apparent or future king could not enjoy the rights and prerogatives reserved for the person who holds this title, simply because he had not yet been enthroned.

This similarity in the funeral rites of the Fon and the Bah was in line with the "constitutional dispensations" of the chieftdom, showing the duality in its political configuration at the helm of the "state", with the Fon (having the power to rule the people) and the Bah (having the right to check and control the actions and decisions of the Fon), two separate independent political institutions. To boost the respect of the Bah and in line with tradition, the Bah gave food (palm oil, cow meat) to Tifuan as entertainment after the burial of the Fon. This is said that Bah is celebrating the death of the Fon, Bah di-Yiku-Fuan.<sup>39</sup> In the funeral of the Bah, Tifuan carried out the burial and enthroned the new Bah and left without asking anything from anybody. In this case "Tifuan celebrated the death of its father,"<sup>40</sup>

The royal enthronement rites in Babungo were an event which had great political and symbolic dimensions in the process of political power transitions and the practice of traditional governance. The enthronement rites of the Fon and the Bah are used to illustrate traditional legitimacy and legality in these traditional political institutions, their power influence and their relationship in Babungo. The enthronement rites pertain only to the Fon and the Bah in Babungo. It gives the Fon and the Bah power, authority and leadership positions within the community. The succession of the Fon and the Bah in Babungo was maintained in that only the children of the Fon and the Bah succeeded them in case of death.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the funeral rites of the fon, the enthronement rite of the Bah enshrined in the custom and tradition portrays the Bah as an autonomous structure with rights and authority over the Fon in Babungo's traditional political system.

The heir apparent to the throne of the Fon of Babungo was the final decision and monopoly of the ailing or dying ruler who discreetly confided in the Bah the names of the next king and future Queen mother.<sup>42</sup> The enthronement rites of the Fon involved a spiritual transformation, which included ritual bathing over the grave of the immediate predecessor. The Bah initiated the new Fon with all the magical powers of the kingdom and on his body poured magical substances which were insignia of power and authority.<sup>43</sup> These rituals were done in a special room in the palace. The rituals performed were brief but of much significance for the future leadership of the fonom. As the heir apparent stood with the Bah anxiously waiting for the memorable moment of his life to be fon, the Bah's first act consisted of shaking a set of locally made royal gongs, mba, nine conservative times, used it to touch an elaborate kingly stool Kene Ntoh, placed at the centre of the room.<sup>44</sup> At the last time the Bah used the instrument to direct the heir apparent to the throne. While performing the enthronisation rite, the Bah said a brief but very significant prayer in the following words "... Here is your successor. It is the person whom you choose".<sup>45</sup> The Bah bowed in reverence to the new king and again made the following declarations;

I Gwejui Bah Tifuan have given you his country today, what you have received is like palm oil. If you hold it in the sun, it will melt down, but if you preserve it in cool place, it will remain hardened up. Nobody should be your enemy. The fuan does not bother if any one says evil things about him. He considers all that as rubbish talks and forgives the culprits.<sup>46</sup>

The Bah in saying this took a lump of palm oil and put it on the palms of the newly enthroned king and allowed it to melt. This was a symbol of chaos that could likely befall the chieftdom if the fon poorly governed his people. The implication of the metaphor cited above indicated the effective transfer of leadership of the village to the new Fon.<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that from the death of the Fon to the enthronement of a new one, only the Bah wore his cap, amongst all the male folk in the chieftdom. This portrays the Bah as a distinguished personality. Making a closer observation of the enthronement rite of the Fon, there is no indication as to when exactly political power and authority were officially transferred to the next ruler.<sup>48</sup>

The new Fon assumed verbal authority, while the Bah kept real political power and authority.<sup>49</sup> The new Fon was then taken to his spiritual father, Tifuan, for further introduction. He was introduced to his new functions, his seat and was decorated to his rank. Note should be taken that before this moment, he had never been to these places. After initiations and decorations, the new Fon came out from Tifuan's compound to the palace prior to his official presentation to the Babungo people.<sup>50</sup> On this day, the Babungo people were gathered outside the palace anxiously waiting to see the new Fon. The new Fon was then presented to the public by Tita Bah as captured in these words:

The Bah grasped the new fon by the left hand and holding the special ancestral spear (wouleuh)<sup>51</sup> with a jingle in his right hand, accompanied by Fuanje (the elder brother of the Bah and the Fon).

<sup>38</sup> Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority",

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> J. A. Mope Simo, "Royal Funeral Celebration in Babungo" Scientific and Technical Review, Social Science Series, vol VI, no 1-2, Yaounde of Yaounde, January- June 1989, Pp, 99-100.

<sup>43</sup> Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority", p. 83. The new fon has been crowned and decorated to his rank. A special cap woven with black and white threads and decorated with nine Turaco red feathers (Tingbai) and nine porcupine quills (Nsangong) were evenly distributed and fitted on the right and left sides of the cap and worn on the fon's head.

<sup>44</sup> Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority".

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Mope, "Royal Funeral Celebration in Babungo", Pp, 99-100.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, Pp, 99-100.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, Pp, 99-113.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, Pp, 99-118.

<sup>50</sup> Prior to his presentation to the people, the proceedings in the Tifuan's compound guarantee his legality as the ruler of the land.

<sup>51</sup> Symbols of the Bahs authority and leadership within the traditional authority system of Babungo.

While the Babungo people remained silent and attentive, the Bah emerged and solemnly declared "Vengo, Vengo, Vengo! (the people of Babungo), see that your light which Tifuan has brought back today."<sup>52</sup>

The new Fon became "a man", "a new father" and "a new fire" to the Babungo people.<sup>53</sup> The Babungo people responded by saying "we have seen our new moon", and then they picked objects and threw at the new Fon.<sup>54</sup> The symbolic stoning was an expression of the population's unequivocal approval of the new Fon and this act legitimized him. The enthronement rite of the Fon ended when the Bah led the crowd to the podium to honour the Fon. The Bah called him Sa'nchi, and the Fon responded by calling him Gwejui. This was intended to consolidate relations between the Fon and the Bah.<sup>55</sup> The enthronement of the Fon in Babungo showed the importance and frontline role of the Bah within the traditional politics of the chiefdom. During this moment, the symbols of the Bah's authority and leadership in the polity were manifested.<sup>56</sup>

The enthronement rite of the Bah as per the constitutional ordering in Babungo, underscores the institutionalisation of balance of power in traditional governance incarnated by the Bah within the traditional authority system, equality to the Fon and as a symbol of dual authority leadership in the chiefdom. The enthronement rite of the Bah is coordinated, supervised and executed by Tifuan (the constituted authority) and not the Fon.<sup>57</sup> Tifuan represented by an agent held the heir apparent to the throne into the Bah's Palace for initiation.<sup>58</sup>

Unlike the Fon, the new Bah is brought to the public by a masked agent holding him with two sticks. The major enthronement rite is being carried out by Tifuan.<sup>59</sup> The successor to the Bah is announced to Tifuan by the Fon. After the initiation, with a stick, the Fon points the man who is the new Bah to the Babungo people. The new Bah is sacred and becomes "a new man", "a new father" and "a new Bah Tifuan".<sup>60</sup> This was a symbol of sacredness of the Bah, as the Fon did not touch the Bah with his hands. This made the new Bah an institution of control in the practice of traditional governance in the chiefdom.<sup>61</sup> The Fon introduced the Bah to the gods at Forghai, Nginehand others.

The pillars of traditional governance in Babungo repose on the interaction between the structures of power represented by the Fon and that of control represented by the Bah and ritual head in Babungo. He commands the executives of state regulatory society (the Tifuan). The Bah and the Fon always sat to discuss and agree on the agenda and calendar of events in the village. In principle, these two inform the people to prepare for the period of rituals, death celebrations and other activities that are to be done.<sup>62</sup>

The Bah is referred to as "Tita Bah", kingmaker and the Fon's first assistance in Babungo. He is the executive head of Tifuan. Bah had the right to check the excesses of the Fon directly and indirectly. Directly, Bah met the Fon to discuss with or gave his opinion over matters in the chiefdom at any hour of the day to the Fon. Most of their encounters were secret (in the night), without the knowledge of anyone. Indirectly, the Bah used his position within the Tifuan to re-orientate traditional administration, most of the time to the dislike of the Fon.<sup>63</sup> The Bah and the Fon have been vested with power and authority, but this does not mean that there are two Fons in Babungo. There is only one Fon and one Bah in Babungo. Each has his place within the traditional political system of Babungo.

## 5. Government Action, Conflict and Resolution

The control of government actions to achieve good governance, and to check the abuse of power by the ruling authorities, have gained currency and become part of Africa's political lexicon. Before, the people of Babungo governed by their chiefs were very vigilant to hold tight and preserve their material, social, and spiritual conditions of life that guaranteed the political stability and survival of the political system. The activities and actions of the Fon and his government were checked by the institutions of control through different methods envisaged by the "constitutional ordering". Having been given powers and authority, through legitimized charters and accepted norms, such powers were not without effective checks, to achieve purposeful and positive leadership. Such checks were executed without fear and complacency.

In the practice of traditional governance in the politics of Babungo, there were violations of certain norms upheld in the "constitutional ordering" of the fonom. The Fon's progressive takeover of the functions of the Bah within the traditional administration, caused conflict between Fon and Tita Bah in Babungo. From around 1900, the Fons did not subscribe any longer to the ideas of "council of elders," which hitherto ruled the community. Fon Sainggi II openly contested the importance attached to Tifuan and the key position of the Bah.<sup>64</sup> Since Tifuan was a close arena for political debate operating on a strictly-inward flow of information and churning out decisions, the Fon may reach an agreement

<sup>52</sup>Mope, "Royal Funeral Celebration in Babungo", p. 100.

<sup>53</sup>Nkwi, *Traditional Government and Social Change: A Study of the Political Institutions among the Kom of the Cameroon Grassfields*, Studia Ethnographica Friburgensia, Switzerland, 1976, p. 49.

<sup>54</sup>Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority System in Babungo", p. 89.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>56</sup>Mope, "Royal Funeral Celebration in Babungo", p. 100

<sup>57</sup>Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority System in Babungo", p. 91.

<sup>58</sup> According to my informants, the initiation process of the Bah is very confidential and forbidden to be recounted to any one. What I had access to was the final stage of the enthronement rite, which was the presentation of the Bah to the public.

<sup>59</sup>Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority System in Babungo", p. 40.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>63</sup>Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority System in Babungo", p. 90.

<sup>64</sup> Kungso, "Conflict in Traditional Authority".

with the people, but made them know he did not have the final say. This was however, not the case as Fuan impressed on the people, prince and princesses that in Tifuan he decided. This sparked off tensions "as the notables considered the Fon to rule without any institutional backing."<sup>65</sup>

Tifuan, the main regulatory organ of traditional administration in Babungo has been the traditional institution that has been able to keep the political unity of the village and ending the crisis between the Fon and the Bah. Each time there was a power struggle between the two, Tifuan through the customs and tradition provided opportunities for the two to reconcile. One of the moments of reconciliation came when the Fon and the Bah had to perform rituals on the tomb of Mange, their mother.<sup>66</sup> Because it was incumbent on the Fon and the Bah to do the sacrifice, reconciliation was obligatory. Their reconciliation was never done in public or to the knowledge of the Babungo people, even the supporters of either opposing factions. "The reconciliation between the Fon and the Bah was usually done at night." The outcome of their reconciliation was noticed when the two jointly performed sacrificial rituals in the village, ending statements of hatred against the Bah and sudden deaths of notables who manipulated the conflict between the Fon and the Bah.

"The court yard of Tifuan is the place of truth, reconciliation and peace."<sup>67</sup> No matter where the Fon and the Bahtook the problem to, the solution to the problem remained with Tifuan<sup>68</sup> and in the end both the Fon and the Bah bowed to the structures created by tradition. No Divisional Officer, magistrate or any administration, be it colonial or post-colonial have found a veritable solution to the conflict within the traditional authority system. Only Tifuan has the solution.<sup>69</sup> Conflict resolution in the traditional African system was therefore an agreement intended to restore and preserve the social balance.<sup>70</sup> The traditional conflict management stressed the need to reconcile and to harmonise the interest of the conflicting parties to enable them share existing values of the community. The Fon-Bah conflict in Babungo was not a war, but a clash of personality and individual interest within a traditional authority system that was enshrined with the concept of checks and balances.

## 6. Conclusion

The history and development of governance within the traditional authority systems show that their secular and democratic values owe their origin and legitimacy to their institutional and religious roots. In their historical evolution, traditional political leadership is based on institutional and structural organisation which is webbed in elaborated political system of the polity. It is through such institutions that the political existence and identity of the polities in the region have expressed their perceptions on governance. The establishment of traditional authority system, its nature and institution of governance show a system of a political organisation in which authority was based on an uneven access to the sources of supernatural powers, God and the ancestors. This paper contends that the processes and procedures that ensured the establishment of the traditional authority systems of polities played a crucial role in the socio-political and institutional organisation by protecting vested interests, rights and prerogatives of traditional authorities in Babungo.

At some moments, it produced strong debates in its institutional pre-eminence and competitions which demonstrate the existence of democratic vitality in the traditional political systems of Babungo. These assured not only their independence, but also the interdependence of the political structures that make up for traditional authority governance in Babungo. The source of political power for the organs of government involved in the practice of traditional governance, their roles and functions are well defined in a "constitutional ordering." The rituals of installation as examined provide legality, legitimacy and roles of traditional leadership which is vested with spiritual, political power and authority. It contains within itself the procedures of legitimisation of the ruler, the terms and conditions under which rulership was performed as well as it provides avenues for the display of other political power centres, institutions and structures that coalesce to produce governance within the traditional authority systems. The sovereign polity of Babungo had functioning traditional political and governance systems with institutions and structures that accommodated it to produce exceptional democratic cultures such as balance of power, checks and balances, and the rule of law, to adapt itself to new situations from within and without. The traditional authority system has its ideology of Fonship, of authority and responsibility, and a set of "constitutional principles" which were applied and even reinterpreted to meet the new political demands and challenges at the dawn of colonialism in the polity.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, pp, 24-35

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pp, 97-107.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Eshenkeh, "Conflicts in Babungo", p, 69.

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