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Figure 1. Street signs in Bastos neighborhood of Yaoundé, Cameroon. Photo taken by author.

Chieftaincy Reimagined: Modernity and Tradition in the Chefferie of Batoufam, Cameroon

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*To all of the members of the Réunions
Who work for the development and wellbeing
Of the community and people of Batoufam.*



*Pour tous les membres des Réunions
Qui travaillent pour le développement et le bien-être
De la communauté et du peuple de Batoufam.*

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Abstract

This thesis uses chieftaincy in Cameroon, and specifically the *chefferie* (chieftainship) of Batoufam, as a lens through which to understand the complex tensions between modernity and tradition in postcolonial Africa. After presenting a historical study of Grassfield chiefs' role in the modern Cameroonian state, I analyze the relationship between tradition and modernity through the case study of the chief of Batoufam, Cameroon. My research drew upon several weeks of conducting over twenty-five interviews with village leaders, including the chief and several *notables*, in order to understand why traditional institutions in African nations are continually excluded from the global development industry. I argue that, not only can traditional institutions produce aspects of Western modernity, but these institutions in Cameroon also utilize liberal and neoliberal practices in the interest of community goals, mobilizing Western strategies for new and different purposes. I conclude that traditional institutions in Africa are not merely reproducing a Western model of modernity, but are in fact reshaping modernity itself through new conceptualizations, forms and applications. These traditional institutions thus present a critical resource for development, suggesting alternate strategies and future realities.

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Introduction

As I walked to school each morning in Yaoundé during my semester study abroad program in Cameroon, I passed a street corner in the Bastos neighborhood (see photo on frontispiece). This street corner was filled with directional signs, each pointing to a different international NGO or development agency. *UNAIDS, Doctors Without Borders, UNESCO, SAN-CAM (Global Water Partnership Central Africa), SOS Kinderdorf (SOS Children's Villages International), UN Women...* the names and acronyms seemed endless. These signs represented many of the organizations working for community development in Cameroon. Every time I passed by this corner, I would think: these foreign institutions constitute the reality of international development today.

Towards the end of my program, I had the opportunity to study and live in a traditional chieftainship in the West Region of Cameroon: a Bamiléké *chefferie* (chiefdom). Here I lived as a “daughter” of the chief of the village, conducting research for a final project on village development in Cameroon. My stay in the village of Batoufam opened my eyes to an entirely different reality than those acronym-laden signs I saw in Yaoundé had suggested. I learned there were over a hundred village organizations in Batoufam working for the wellbeing of their community. These organizations were locally led, community-focused, and culturally rooted in traditional values and structures such as the institution of the chief. They were also dynamic and complex: utilizing modern medicine, capitalist rotating loan systems, and private investment from the diaspora to tackle various development issues in the village. I saw a chief, a traditional ruler, mobilizing every resource he could to improve the wellbeing of his subjects and to address community problems such as lack of running water and access to education for children. None of

the community institutions had connections with or funding from any of those organizations whose signs proclaimed their engagement in Cameroonian community development.

After conducting my research in the chefferie, I returned to Yaoundé to finish my academic courses. Each morning I would again walk past those signs. Except now, every time I saw them, my mind would flash to my time in the chefferie. I would imagine the indigenous village organizations working persistently to better their community: to address issues of poverty, health, food insecurity and environmental conservation. I would picture the chief and everything that he is doing for his village, as well as his dreams for its future. I was left wondering: where was THAT in this picture of development? Where were the traditional village structures – institutions that appeared to be highly effective in developing their communities – in the work of the global development industry? Where was the chief, working diligently himself, upon whom those structures depended? Why were the realities I experienced in the chefferie excluded from this picture of the work of international development? In sum, where was the chefferie in the process of development?

In this thesis, I will seek to answer these questions. As I will show, the chefferie is not in the “development picture,” so to speak, because traditional structures and customary institutions are often perceived as antithetical to modernity and development, and, therefore, excluded from the global development industry. However, in this thesis I will argue, through the case study of chieftaincy in Cameroon, and specifically the chefferie of Batoufam, that customary institutions can both support and produce aspects of a Western modernity: namely democratic, liberal and even neoliberal projects. Furthermore, these customary institutions utilize liberal and neoliberal strategies in the interest of community and social goals, mobilizing “modern” methods for quite different purposes than those typically associated with such tactics. This dynamic integration of

traditions with modern liberal and neoliberal practices thus produces new realities that exist beyond Western and Euro-American modernity. Customary institutions in Africa are not merely reproducing a Western model of modernity, but in fact are reshaping modernity itself through new conceptualizations, forms and applications.

Methodology

Project Inspiration and Evolution

I conducted the primary research in this thesis in Batoufam, Cameroon, during my fall 2013 study abroad program with the School for International Training (SIT). For this original project, I lived in the village of Batoufam for two and a half weeks, under the care of one of the wives of the chief: Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT.¹ Although I interviewed many individuals in the village (*notables*, the chief, etc.), I focused my written project on three main village organizations: an organization of plant-based healers / traditional doctors (the Secret Society of Tradipraticiens KOUGANG); an agricultural cooperative (the Réunion Nectar Plus G.I.C.); and a women's economic association (KELOFI / MENOC). I have included all relevant interviews that I conducted in my primary research in Appendix 1 of this thesis.

In November 2014, I received a grant to travel to Washington D.C. to re-connect with the Chief of Batoufam, who serendipitously happened to be traveling in the United States at this time. I met and stayed with him and his wife Yvonne, rekindling our personal connection and continuing to discuss my research with him. At this point I decided to concentrate my thesis on chieftaincy in Cameroon and specifically the role of the chief of Batoufam in the village. I

¹ Various sources spell the name "Inocent" differently; I have included it here as the Chief of Batoufam wrote it himself during our interviews.

selected three specific organizations through which I could tell this story: the women's economic associations KELOFI and MENOC and the Association for the Development of Batoufam (ADEBAT).

Site Selection and Informant Population

Villages in the West Region of Cameroon like the Bamiléké chefferies are known to hold tightly to many customs. The village of Batoufam is located in the West Province of Cameroon, about 30km south of the region's political capital Bafoussam. It is located in the Bamiléké highlands, within the eastern Grassfields of Cameroon,² a high plateau region situated between the dry savanna and Sahel³ of the primarily Muslim north and the rain forest region of the predominately Christian south.⁴ Within the Bamiléké highlands, approximately 100 Bamiléké chefferies exist.⁵ The Bamiléké are one of over 250 ethnic groups that form Cameroon's diverse society, constituting between 25-30% of the country's total population.⁶ Generally, Bamiléké social organization focuses on hierarchy and respect for the chief and elders. This political and social hierarchy begins at the family unit and ascends through the *chefs de quartier* (neighborhood leaders), *notables* (village nobility), and to the *chef supérieur* (superior chief) of the village or kingdom.

The Batoufam people (which includes anyone born into the village of Batoufam) are estimated to total around 12,000, with about 50 percent of these individuals living outside the

² See Appendix 2 and Figure 2 for a map of the Grassfields within Cameroon, and Figure 3 for the 10 provinces of Cameroon and the relative position of the Bamiléké area.

³ Sahel is a term used to mean the narrow zone of semi-arid land below the Sahara.

⁴ Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg, *Plundered Kitchens, Empty Wombs: Threatened Reproduction and Identity in the Cameroon Grassfields* (University of Michigan Press, 1999) 43.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

actual village of Batoufam in major urban cities of Cameroon and abroad.⁷ Therefore the actual population of the village of Batoufam rests at approximately 6,000 individuals. The local residents occupy an area of about 27 square km (approximately 10.5 square mi), and are mostly subsistent farmers.⁸ The village is divided into 15 *quartiers* or neighborhoods, each governed by a *chef de quartier*, all of which follow the rule of the *chef supérieur* who lives at the heart of the village.⁹

Batoufam remains one of 17 chieftaincies featured as part of the national *Route des Chefferies* (Road of the Chiefdoms). This *Route des Chefferies* program aims to:

(1) Sensitize the Cameroonian population to its cultural values in order to achieve a re-appropriation of its tangible and intangible heritage; (2) Establish a program of inventory and protection of the cultural heritage of Bamiléké kingdoms; (3) Rely on the promotion of heritage to meet the needs of people's economic development initiatives to improve their social conditions, notably with the development of cultural tourism....¹⁰

This program has gathered around 40 traditional chefferies and mobilized them around the *Route des Chefferies* charter to develop and preserve the cultural heritage of West Cameroon. Over 100 domestic and international patrons sponsor this program, including: Orange (a phone company), AirFrance, *École du Patrimoine Africain* (School of African Heritage), West African Museums Program, *Délégation de l'Union Européen au Cameroun* (Delegation of the European Union in Cameroon), the World Bank, and *République Française* (the French Republic).¹¹ The *Route des Chefferies* has sponsored the creation of the Community Museum of Batoufam. At various spots

⁷ "Batoufam People and History," accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.batoufam.org/>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See Figure 4 in Appendix 2 for a map of the village of Batoufam.

¹⁰ "Sensibiliser la population camerounaise à ses valeurs culturelles afin d'aboutir à une réappropriation de son patrimoine matériel et immatériel; Mettre en place un programme de d'inventaire et de sécurisation du patrimoine des chefferies Bamiléké; S'appuyer sur la valorisation du patrimoine pour répondre aux attentes de développement économique émanant des populations afin d'améliorer leurs conditions sociales, notamment par le développement du tourisme culturel...." APLC, "La Route des Chefferies," *La Route des Chefferies*, accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.routedeschefferies.com/fr/>.; All translations by author.

¹¹ Ibid.

throughout the palace complex, wall placards describe cultural symbols, Batoufam traditions and celebrations, and the social and political organization of the chefferie.

Data Collection and Analysis

When I arrived at the chefferie of Batoufam, I first went to speak with a group of *notables*, the secretary of the chefferie, and the *chef supérieur*: Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT.¹² I informed community leaders about my research, in the process establishing rapport within the community. The community leaders gave me a general overview of the various structures and organizations that work for the wellbeing of Batoufam. In the course of this first meeting, I met leaders of three different organizations – Notable NZICKOTSE, Notable MBOOPOUO, and Mefo¹³ NGOUOMONEDJEF – which became a starting point for my research. NZICKOTSE, a member of the Secret Society of Tradipraticiens¹⁴ KOUGANG facilitated my research considerably, as he introduced me to other members of his organization; the President and Founder of an agricultural cooperative Nectar Plus, CHIMI Rene (NZICKOTSE's brother); and the President of the Women's Reunion KELOFI, Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF (NZICKOTSE's wife).

My research consisted primarily of interviews and observations. For this project, I conducted over 25 interviews (including informal ones): four with the *chef supérieur*¹⁵ of Batoufam (two in Washington D.C.), five with members and leaders of the Secret Society of Tradipraticiens KOUGANG, and three to four each with members and leaders of Nectar Plus and

¹² In Cameroon, individuals write their last name(s) in all capitals, followed by their first name in lowercase letters. I have replicated this practice here as this is how my participants wrote their names themselves in our interviews.

¹³ A word in the village for a type of queen.

¹⁴ *Tradipraticiens* is a word in the village that means a person who heals patients using plant-based methods.

¹⁵ *Chef supérieur* is a French word that signifies the supreme leader or chief of the Bamiléké village. From here on I will replace the title *chef supérieur* with chief (i.e. the chief of Batoufam), for ease of reading purposes.

KELOFI / MENOC. I observed a meeting of Tradipraticiens in NZICKOTSE's *quartier*, and one of the twice monthly meetings of the women's economic association MENOC. Most of my other interviews were with community leaders to provide an overview of the development structures of Batoufam. By conducting interviews (including follow-up meetings) with multiple members of the same organization, as well as observing organization meetings, I hoped to ensure the reliability of the data collected. I recorded and stored the interviews and their transcriptions on my computer, and later typed hand-written notes from observations on my computer as well. For the five informal interviews that I conducted (interviews that were not recorded for various reasons), I immediately typed up the hand-written notes from the interviews, supplemented with my memories of the conversations.

Throughout all of my research I tried my best to abide by ethical guidelines. I sought to respect consent, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Before each interview and observation I explained myself and my research, clarifying the research purpose and plans for the data. For interviews, I asked the permission of all informants before using a digital recorder and clarified their willingness to have names appear in the final product. At the end of interviews and observations, I gave the informant(s) an opportunity to pose questions, and left a paper with my contact information. Additionally, I left a final copy of my original SIT paper with the chief of Batoufam, allowing everyone who worked with me on this research to view the final product. One possible large ethical concern with this research relates to hierarchy in the chefferie. Because I had the chief's support along with that of other influential people in the chefferie, such as the leaders of these organizations, some informants might have felt slightly coerced into speaking with me. I tried my best to ensure that this was not the case, using oral consent and my

own impressions of informants' feelings as a way to gauge their agreement to participate in my research.

Strengths and Limitations

There are some limitations to this research study. I was conducting research as a foreigner, both to the community of Batoufam and to Cameroon. At times this status impeded me from gaining the trust of respondents. Additionally, I had to rely on others from the community to make introductions and to indicate the organizations and people with whom I should work. For example, NZICKOTSE was one of my most valuable partners in my research but he was also present at many of my other interviews, so that his voice and perspective may be over-weighted in my data and may have influenced the responses and data that I received from others.

Other limitations include time: I conducted my field research over a period of two and a half weeks in Batoufam. Due to this limited time, I did not have an exceptionally large sample population: only about 20-25 informants. Additionally, because I initially focused on three organizations, I was only able to complete four to five interviews with each. Lastly, at times differences in language and culture were a barrier. My comprehension of French and the cultural context somewhat hindered my understanding of informants' responses. Respondents struggled to understand some interview questions in French, and another person present (often NZICKOTSE) would have to speak with them in the local language to explain.

On the other hand, this research study also has many strengths. Throughout this study I interviewed some of the most significant leaders of Batoufam, including: the chief (whom I spoke with on four separate occasions), more than six *notables* (two of whom are members of the Council of Nine Notables who advise the chief), a mefo (a queen), and two *chefs de quartiers*

(neighborhood leaders).¹⁶ I spoke with the presidents of Nectar Plus and KELOFI multiple times, and with three of the four core leaders of KOUGANG. My informants were well informed, not only on the details of their respective organizations, but also on the most significant problems and largest development initiatives in Batoufam as a whole. Lastly, the variety of people with whom I was able to speak, as well as the combination of interviews and observations, provided an excellent way of receiving different perspectives and of verifying the data.

Thesis Overview

Chapter One of this thesis presents some touchstones in the literature on the relationship between tradition and modernity. The dominant discourse of modernity defines modernity as a capitalist, democratic, liberal and now neoliberal state. This discourse of modernity mandates tradition as its opposite, viewing the latter as static, fixed and a barrier to the achievement of a modern society. These discourses dominate the development industry, as development has been conceived as the achievement of this conceptualization of modernity. After presenting this dichotomization of tradition and modernity, I review the literature that critiques these dominant conceptualizations of modernity and tradition, showing that both are in fact invented and ideological concepts, contingent on particular histories and geographies of the Euro-American West.

Chapter Two lays the historical and sociological groundwork for the exploration of chieftaincy in Cameroon. I trace the history of the relationship between the institution of chieftaincy and the state in Cameroon from the independence era to today, in order to understand the role of traditional institutions and leaders in modern state-building projects. As an institution

¹⁶ Neighborhood chiefs

with customary and local authority, chieftaincy has always played an important role in the governance of Cameroon, although the exact nature of this role has changed over time. Despite attempts by the state to dominate and appropriate this institution, almost to the point of its erasure, the modern state has been unable to do away entirely with this institution. This chapter concludes that chieftaincy remains a relevant institution to many Cameroonians due to its ability to integrate modern strategies with traditional practices, thus defying the dichotomization of tradition and modernity presented in Chapter One.

Chapter Three presents my primary research data from the chefferie of Batoufam in order to show that traditional institutions are in fact utilizing strategies of Western modernity, yet mobilizing these practices in new ways and for new purposes. The role of the chief of Batoufam – in his village community and in the international sphere – provides evidence for this argument. The chief mobilizes customary institutions, which in turn integrate “modern” practices with a customary framework, in order to achieve goals that better the village community.

Chapter One: Rewriting “Modernity” and “Tradition”

Introduction

This chapter presents the history of prevalent and influential debates in economics and political theory that define *modernity* and *tradition* in specific ways. These definitions ground a “modernity discourse,” because these conceptualizations of modernity are dominant or hegemonic ideas that figure in discursive fields. Anthropologist Arturo Escobar explains how such discursive fields affect and control agency in relation to social projects such as development:

In sum, the system of relations establishes a discursive practice that sets the rules of the game: who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise; it sets the rules that must be followed for this or that problem, theory or object to emerge and be named, analysed, and eventually transformed into a policy or a plan.¹⁷

The interlocking concepts of modernity and tradition produce specific fields of historical and culturally located meaning, i.e. the use of these words “modern” or “traditional” invokes particular meanings based on a set of social power relations; they are not neutral terms. Additionally, this chapter will also investigate critiques of these discursive formulations of tradition and modernity. The goal of this chapter will be to unpack the implications of these terms in order, ultimately, to find a vocabulary suited to describing specific social formations in Bamiléké culture that resist definition in terms of “tradition” typically understood.

¹⁷ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 87.

Discourses of “Modernity” in Social Theory

Modernity, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, appeared in English as early as 1635, while *modernization* was used from 1770. But these initial usages tell us little about the history of these crucial concepts in social theory. Social theory developed as an attempt by Western European intellectuals of the nineteenth century to make sense of a changing society, and thus a changing conceptualization as to the meaning of modernity and what was considered modern. The parameters of the concept of modernity as we know it today can be understood by examining what these early modern theorists maintained as the central components in the history of modernity.¹⁸

Economic theorists Adam Smith and Karl Marx cited capitalism in the form of markets (Smith) or profit-oriented production (Marx) as the roots of modernity.¹⁹ Henri Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte argued for the rational, orderly direction of modernity through growth in scientific knowledge and technology.²⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville focused on the political aspects of modernity, namely the transition from aristocratic political organizations and elitist culture to representative democratic institutions and a culture founded on egalitarianism.²¹ Émile Durkheim emphasized the modern culture of individualism as well as of labor division.²² Although none of these aforementioned thinkers dealt centrally with the nation-state, most contemporary theorists of modernity add the nation-state and its various organs (military, social services, judicial and

¹⁸ Ira Cohen, “Modernity,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2006), http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX1311000404&v=2.1&u=duke_perkins&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w&asid=1aee0afe041b1e0f137d84192043b189, 389.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, 389-390.

²¹ Ibid, 390.

²² Ibid.

educational systems, sources of revenue)²³ to the previous factors to formulate today's mainstream version of modernity.

The power of these conceptualizations of the modern emerges by examining the changing meaning of the term modernity, highlighted once again in the Oxford English Dictionary. Although "modernity" was used in the English language as early as 1635 to mean "the quality or condition of being modern," its meaning greatly changed after the theorizations of the aforementioned thinkers. Post-1900, modernity was commonly defined as "An intellectual tendency or social perspective characterized by departure from or repudiation of traditional ideas, doctrines, and cultural values in favour of contemporary or radical values and beliefs (chiefly those of scientific rationalism and liberalism)." This definition of modernity, in use at the beginning of the twentieth century, highlights the power of the term to invoke dominant or hegemonic ideas based on specific historical and cultural contexts: modernity is the departure from traditional ideas and cultural values in favor of scientific rationalism and liberalism.

Post-World War II, as the United States emerged as a world power, the modernization paradigm became a new and dominant perspective in sociology and social science.²⁴ This paradigm saw societies around the world as a stable set of interconnected components that would change over time along similar paths: from traditional agricultural society to modern industrial state.²⁵ Modernization thus took the established discourse of modernity and added a time component: the process of transition from a traditional to modern society was conceived of as "modernization." Poor and underdeveloped traditional societies were thought to be in earlier stages of this transition, inhibited by their traditional cultural beliefs and practices from the

²³ Cohen, 390.

²⁴ Ibid, 394.

²⁵ Ibid.

industrialization and specialization needed for success.²⁶ Modernization was thus believed to be a common process to all societies, one based upon the experiences of the West. As countries transitioned from traditional agriculture societies to modern ones, they would shed their traditional cultural beliefs and practices in order to embrace the values and realities of modernity as it had occurred in North America and Western Europe.

Modernization Theory

These sociological ideas were eventually assimilated into modernization theory. Modernization theory is rooted in the post-war context of the late 1940s and 1950s. The 1949 inaugural address of President Truman promulgated his Four Point Plan, the last plank of which was “a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.”²⁷ With this speech, Truman laid the foundation for the idea that problems of developing nations could be solved by replicating features characterizing “advanced” or “modern” societies of the time. As Escobar enumerates, these features included:

high levels of industrialization and urbanization, technicalization of agriculture, rapid growth of material production and living standards, and the widespread adoption of modern education and cultural values. In Truman’s vision, capital, science and technology were the main ingredients that would make this massive revolution possible.²⁸

Truman’s ideas were eventually incorporated into “modernization theory,” an international theory of economics and politics in the 1950s and 1960s. Modernization theory was postulated against Marxism as the solution to aid the development of then under-developed

²⁶ Cohen, 394-395.

²⁷ Harry S. Truman, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1949, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13282>.

²⁸ Escobar, 4.

countries: already independent Latin America and states emerging from European colonization, specifically African nations post-1950.

One of the most influential proponents of modernization theory was W. W. Rostow, economist and political theorist at the US State Department. In 1960, Rostow presented what he saw as the process of modernization: the transformation of what he termed “the traditional society” to a modern one in “the age of high mass-consumption.”²⁹ As his diction implies, Rostow’s version of modernity involved three crucial elements. First, a social evolutionary approach: as societies manifest “the drive to maturity,” in Rostow’s words, they will become more developed. Historian Nick Cullather calls this tenet “the assumption of *convergence*, that there is one best form of political economy and all states are moving toward it.”³⁰ Rostow’s approach is termed by anthropologists Emma Crewe and Elizabeth Harrison as a “social evolutionist paradigm,” the idea that societies progress through set stages of development in the movement from tradition to modernity.³¹

The second element of Rostow’s theory was a corollary Eurocentric preconception: all developing nations will follow the same evolutionary path as defined by European and North American history. This history was one of industrialization, capitalist development, and scientific rationalism. This belief in turn influenced the third element according to Rostow: an ideal end-stage envisioned as robustly capitalistic. According to Rostow, underdeveloped societies achieve economic modernity with the transition to a high production and mass-consumption capitalist economy.³² This transition occurs through the improvement of technology and infrastructure,

²⁹ W. W. (Walt Whitman) Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth, a Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge, U.K.: University Press, 1960), 4.

³⁰ Nick Cullather, “Development? It’s History,” *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (January 1, 2000): 642, doi:10.1111/0145-2096.00242.

³¹ Emma Crewe and Elizabeth Harrison, *Whose Development?: An Ethnography of Aid* (London: Zed Books; distributed exclusively in the USA by St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 25.

³² Rostow, 5.

capital investment, industrialization, commercialization, and urbanization.³³ Furthermore, economies were to be modernized by adopting capitalist modern values. Transition to a capitalist modern economy included embracing the values of profit, accumulation of wealth, and a reinvestment in economic production.³⁴ It also included a focus on the individual and private property and ownership.

Rostow's evolutionary path of modernization grounds present day discourses of economic modernity. Increased savings and investment are crucial to the assumed evolution of modern societies, and thus a state should promote international trade according to its competitive advantage because such trade enables more efficient resource allocation and greater earnings.³⁵ An economically modern society, in short, successfully embraces capitalist values. Importantly, for Rostow, the state intervenes in the national economy to promote and secure the transition from traditional society to a modern one: "When independent modern nationhood is achieved, how should the national energies be disposed: in external aggression, to right old wrongs or to exploit newly created or perceived possibilities for enlarged national power; in completing and refining the political victory of the new national government over old regional interests; or in modernizing the economy?"³⁶

At this point, it is important to mention the connection between this discourse of modernity and the idea of development. Namely, the dominant paradigm in today's post-imperial world conceives of development as the achievement of modernity. Anthropologist James Ferguson writes:

³³ Suzanne Dansereau, "Les théories du développement: Histoires et trajectoires" [Development theories: histories and trajectories], in *Introduction au développement international : Approches, acteurs et enjeux*, ed. Pierre Beaudet, Paul Alexander Haslam, and Jessica Schafer (Ottawa: Presse de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2008), 42.

³⁴ Ibid, 41.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Rostow, 16.

At the end of empire, a story about the emergence of “new nations” via processes of “modernization” or “development” provided a new grid for interpreting and explaining the world’s inequalities. As the “backward nations” advanced, in this optic, a “modern” form of life encompassing a whole package of elements— including such things as industrial economy, scientific technology, liberal democratic politics, nuclear families, and secular worldviews— would become universalized. In the process, poor countries would overcome their poverty, share in the prosperity of the “developed” world, and take their place as equals in a worldwide family of nations.³⁷

A nation is thus considered to be “developed” because it has achieved the economic, political and social realities included in the mainstream ideology of modernity. Or, to reverse the equation, the end result of modernization will be the arrival at a state of development.

The development industry places institutions like the International Money Fund, World Bank, USAID and international NGOs, who support and reinforce the tenets of this modernity discourse, in a position of power over developing nations.³⁸ The subjugation of African states to this conceptualization of modernity through the development industry creates a tension between the modernizing African state and the seemingly traditional institutions and structures present in many communities in African nations. Due to their understanding of modernity, international development institutions implicitly reject seemingly traditional institutions like chieftaincy. Due to their subjection to these international institutions and their ideology of modernity, African states like Cameroon are also placed in a position of conflict with the traditions within their borders, and must grapple with their role in the modernizing state project.

The Rise of Neoliberalism

As its implicit anti-Marxism suggests, modernization theory was shaped in the context of the Cold War. In the 1980s, theorists began to re-think earlier conceptions of economic

³⁷ James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), Kindle Loc. 3039-3043, Kindle Edition.

³⁸ Escobar, 87.

modernity. The context of a decade of financial instability in Africa, Asia and Latin America; the accumulation of large quantities of international debt; and a series of oil shocks all prompted a theoretical re-evaluation.³⁹ The neoliberal macroeconomic theories that emerged during this time constitute both a further elaboration and an alteration of the theory of economic modernity traced here. Whereas in modernization theory the achievement of a modern economy was seen as the outcome of strategic state action, in neoliberal doctrine it was considered the result of market forces.

Neoliberalism, as its name suggests, has its roots in classical liberalism. Classical liberalism reached its high point during early nineteenth century when Europe and the United States underwent rapid industrialization. Liberalism incorporates, beyond economics, a wide range of social and political principles revolving around values and beliefs such as the importance of the individual, freedom, equality, reason, and capitalism.⁴⁰ These elements also ground modernization theory, which as we have seen relies on a presumption that adopting modern liberal values – such as capitalism, individualism, scientific rationality, democratic frameworks, etc. – provide the best means for economic development.

Classical liberalism subscribes to “egotistical individualism,” viewing an ideal society as a free one that “maximize[s] the realm of unconstrained individual action.”⁴¹ The ability of an individual to think or act as one wishes – individual liberty or freedom – is the supreme political and social value of liberalism.⁴² Classical liberalism particularly emphasizes negative freedom, the absence of external restrictions or constraints on the individual in order to allow freedom of

³⁹ Dansereau, 50.

⁴⁰ Andrew Heywood, “Liberalism,” in *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 43.

⁴¹ Ibid, 45, 25.

⁴² Ibid, 29.

choice.⁴³ This support of individual freedom is justified by the classic liberal faith in reason, which dictates that “to the extent that human beings are rational, thinking creatures, they are capable of defining and pursuing their own best interests.”⁴⁴ Reason, according to liberalism, “emancipates humankind from the grip of the past and from the weight of custom and tradition.”⁴⁵ This celebration of reason sets liberalism in opposition to paternalism as well as to customs and traditions that would seemingly impede rational outcomes.

Classical liberalism’s pursuit of individualism implies a commitment to foundational equality, the idea that individuals are born equal and should enjoy the same formal status in society, both legally and politically.⁴⁶ Liberalism thus disapproves of social hierarchies or privileges based upon any exterior characteristics, i.e. those not earned by hard work or individual merit. In liberalism, ideologies of Social Darwinism and individual responsibility explain inequalities in society, as the “fittest” (those with ability and willingness to work) “survive” and thus have the best social situations.⁴⁷

In regards to state functioning, classical liberalism sees a sovereign democratic state as the best form of governance. This state obtains its authority from the people, and in turn is expected to serve them.⁴⁸ This principle is protected in a constitutional government, one containing both internal constraints (e.g., separation of powers) and external ones (e.g., a written constitution, limited government, regular fair and free elections).⁴⁹

Lastly, classical liberalism embraces capitalist values, namely the belief in the self-regulating market economy, a principle based upon Adam Smith’s idea economy-as-market: “a

⁴³ Heywood, 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 32.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 33, 34.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 51.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 37.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 39-40.

system of commercial exchange between buyers and sellers, controlled by impersonal ‘market forces.’”⁵⁰ These market forces (e.g., supply and demand) are posited to tend naturally to the promotion of economic prosperity and well-being.⁵¹ Classical liberalism views the economy as a self-regulating mechanism tending without outside guidance toward the good of the community in which it is embedded: in essence a laissez-faire free market. Minimal state interference in the economy fits with other classically liberal ideas of the state: the state’s function should be limited to the maintenance of domestic order and personal security.⁵² These limitations ensure the state will not encroach on individuals’ freedom.

As we have seen, modernization theory, while embedded in many of the values of classical liberalism such as individualism, rationality, democracy, and capitalism, at the same time trusts the state to intervene to enlarge national power and to modernize the economy. Neoliberalism moves away from modernization theory and returns to the economic principles of classical liberalism, styling itself “a revival of economic liberalism.”⁵³ In doing so, neoliberalism has taken further many of the social and political values of liberalism, namely its emphasis on individual freedom and the governance model of the liberal democratic state. Neoliberalism’s proponents posited their philosophy as counter-revolutionary: “its aim is to halt, and if possible reverse, the trend towards ‘big’ government and state intervention that had characterized much of the twentieth century.”⁵⁴ American journalist Charles Peters highlights his own neoliberal view:

If neoconservatives are liberals who took a critical look at liberalism and decided to become conservatives, we are liberals who took the same look and decided to retain our goals but to abandon some of our prejudices. We still believe in liberty and justice and a fair chance for all, in mercy for the afflicted and help for the down and out. But we no

⁵⁰ Heywood, 49.

⁵¹ Ibid, 50.

⁵² Ibid, 45, 23.

⁵³ Ibid, 52.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

longer automatically favor unions and big government or oppose the military and big business.⁵⁵

Neoliberalism embraces market fundamentalism: the idea that the market offers solutions to all social and economic problems and that it is superior to government and political control.⁵⁶ Neoliberalism focuses on the failure to modernize as the result of too much governmental intervention and regulation of the economy. It centers on the value and importance of open economies, the free market, and privatization, particularly of inefficient public enterprises.⁵⁷ Markets should be freed from state control to allow capital, goods and services to move freely, along with a greater openness to international trade. Neoliberalism valorizes private enterprise and advocates for tariff elimination and currency deregulation.⁵⁸ Individual countries must integrate in a world market and participate in the globalization of the world economy through their “comparative advantage” (labor costs, natural resources, and so forth).⁵⁹

The advent of neoliberal doctrines and policies in the 1980s also led to a re-articulation of classically liberal ideas about what constitutes a modern political state. These ideas remain central to current conceptions of modernity. Along with the neoliberal belief limiting state involvement in economic regulation emerged a restructured role of the state: that of providing “good governance.” This emphasis arose after communism’s fall, confirmed by waves of democratization and the “liberal peace” that appeared to reign after the Cold War.⁶⁰ Good governance under neoliberalism consisted of political liberalization, regular and competitive elections, and the promotion of democratic institutions and forms of government.⁶¹ This idea of

⁵⁵ Charles Peters, “A Neoliberal’s Manifesto,” *The Washington Monthly*, May 1983, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/1983/8305_Neoliberalism.pdf.

⁵⁶ Heywood, 52.

⁵⁷ James Ferguson, “The Uses of Neoliberalism,” *Antipode* 41 (January 1, 2010): 170.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Dansereau, 50.

⁶⁰ Heywood, 61.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

good governance consolidated previous theories about the modern state to present a refashioned model for political modernization: that of the liberal democracy.

In 1989, political scientist Francis Fukuyama famously claimed that democracy constituted the natural *telos* of political modernization:

Recent developments in countries such as the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China [i.e., the fall of Communism] seem to suggest that the 20th century may end where it started – not with an “end of ideology” or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, but with the victory of economic and political liberalism. What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period in postwar history, but the end of history – that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.⁶²

Although Fukuyama has been heavily criticized for this claim about the “end of history,” the valorization of democracy as the last stage of political modernization remains a central tenet to the mainstream discourse of modernity today. Liberal democracy is seen as the endpoint of political modernization because it is the incarnation of the final form of the best governance of human society.⁶³ This view represents the tendency of modernity discourse, expressed by political economist Paul Cammack, to create a general theory of political development based on the political processes of Europeans and North Americans.⁶⁴

Flipping the teleology of modernization theory – i.e., if societies develop their economic bases the political form of democracy will follow – neoliberals hold that democracy is a *precondition* for a state’s economic development. Adrian Leftwich, South African anti-apartheid activist turned political scientist, describes this evolution: “Democratic good governance is not

⁶² Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, (Summer 1989).

⁶³ Célestin Tagou, “Les théories et politiques globales de développement: De Truman aux OMD” [Global development theories and policies: from Truman to the MDGs], in *Repenser le développement à partir de l’Afrique*, ed. Jean-Emmanuel PONDÉ (Yaoundé, Cameroun: Afrédit, 2011), 40.

⁶⁴ Paul A. Cammack, *Capitalism and Democracy in the Third World: The Doctrine for Political Development* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997).

an outcome or consequence of development, as was the old orthodoxy, but a necessary condition of development... political liberalization in the form of democratization [is] thus seen as a necessary condition for economic liberalization and growth.”⁶⁵ Leftwich describes this belief as “democratic conditionality.”

What “Tradition” Means in Discourses of Modernity

Today’s discourse of modernity, whether coming from a modernization theory perspective or a neoliberal one, mandates that development occurs through the transition of a “traditional” society, by definition behind and moribund, to a modern one.⁶⁶ According to Rostow, “A traditional society is one whose structure is developed within limited production functions, based on pre-Newtonian science and technology, and on pre-Newtonian attitudes towards the physical world.”⁶⁷ Traditional societies in this conception are those with fixed social hierarchies and agrarian economies. It thus becomes necessary to change the values, attitudes and practices of traditional societies as well as their economic and social institutions; all must move closer to the model of modern Europe and North America.

Such a discourse of modernity views traditional culture as a “collection of rituals and customs exhibited principally by the less evolved, at times to be celebrated and at other times to be overcome.”⁶⁸ The rituals and customs associated with traditional culture are placed in contrast with the characteristics of a modern society, described above to be capitalist, democratic, liberal and neoliberal. Values such as kinship, solidarity and community, as well as cultural rules concerning reciprocity, are seen in contrast to the modern values of capitalist accumulation and

⁶⁵ Adrian Leftwich, *States of Development: On the Primacy of Politics in Development* (Wiley, 2001), 4, 14.

⁶⁶ Dansereau, 41.

⁶⁷ Rostow, 4.

⁶⁸ Crewe and Harrison, 25.

individualism. Communalism is posited to be the opposite of individualism. Local cosmologies are seen to defy scientific rationalism. Cultural norms and taboos, social hierarchies and “traditional” approaches to social organization (i.e. chieftainship, inheritance systems, nobility, polygyny) seemingly conflict with a liberal, democratic, meritocratic social order. In short, traditional culture and its corresponding institutions and customs are branded by modernity discourse and modernization theory to be the opposite of “modern” society.

Furthermore, this modernity discourse views “traditional” culture and its associated institutions and customs as static and unchanging: as C. Kirk states, “preserved in the timeless aspect of tradition and custom.”⁶⁹ According to Crewe and Harrison, in this discourse, the values and structures of traditional cultures “are treated as fixed, often in relation to ‘modern’... flexible values.”⁷⁰ Tradition is viewed as a set of customs and institutions that have not changed in recent history, and that cannot change in the future with the incorporation of “modern” structures or strategies.

This view of tradition is the reason that progress to modern society in such a discourse, therefore, requires the abandonment of traditional social forms. Social evolutionists assume such progress to be linear and continual, facilitated by the implementation of science and rational thought. This “liberation” allows traditional societies, namely those in developing countries, the “Third (or Fourth) World,” to pass through the same stages of economic, social and political growth as those of modern Western countries.⁷¹ In order for a developing country to become a

⁶⁹ C. Kirk, “Pottering with Incorporation: Social Change and the Sinhalese Potters of Ratmalagahwewa,” in *Incorporation and Rural Development*, ed. H Heringa, U. L. Jayantha Perera, A. J Weeramunda, Stichting der Nederlandse Universiteiten en Hogescholen voor Internationale Samenwerking, University of Colombo, Department of Sociology, and International Conference on Incorporation and Rural Development (Colombo: Dept. of Sociology, University of Colombo, 1984), 32.

⁷⁰ Crewe and Harrison, 43.

⁷¹ Dansereau, 41; Colin Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 66.

modern nation-state, it must thus aspire to the most “civilized” model exemplified in Western capitalist societies: a triumph of modernity over tradition.⁷² In this way, social evolutionist paradigms of modernity discourse set up the traditional as the opposite of the modern. And in the process, “traditional culture” becomes the explanation for any failures of the modernization process as it acts as a barrier to the achievement of a “modern” society.

Due to its connection to modernity discourses, development discourse sees the seemingly traditional institutions and structures present in many communities in African nations as antithetical to development. As the opposite of the modern, tradition must be eliminated in a process of development. Political and social scientists Célestin Tagou describes this perceived conflict between tradition and development:

the other regions of the world need an intervention, a push, better yet, an exterior invasion to break the locks of traditional society and help them meet the starting preconditions in the goal of catching the western development train. Development is equal to modernity, to the western rational superiority, while under-development is equivalent to traditionalism and non-European savagery and in our case, to the primitive archaism and to the civilizational inferiority of Africans.⁷³

Tagou’s words exemplify a critique of modernity discourse that assumes many different forms, as the following section will show.

Critiques of Modernity Discourse

Thus far I have highlighted the central tenets of a certain discourse of modernity; I have also outlined how and what the term “tradition” signifies within it. Beginning in the late 1980s,

⁷² Crewe and Harrison, 29.

⁷³ “les autres contrées du monde ont besoin d’une intervention, d’une pression, mieux, d’une invasion extérieure devant faire sauter les verrous de la société traditionnelle et leur faire remplir les conditions préalables du démarrage dans le but de rattraper le train du développement à l’occidental. [D]éveloppement est égal à la modernité, à la supériorité rationnelle occidentale alors que le sous-développement équivaut à la traditionnalité et à la sauvagerie non européenne et dans notre cas, à l’archaïsme primitif et à l’infériorité civilisationnelle des africains.” ; Tagou, 30.

theorists began to challenge this conceptualization of the modern and to redefine it in ways that do not construe the traditional as antithetical to modernity.

Invented Traditions

The discursive pattern that dichotomizes tradition and modernity is upended by the view, famously proposed by historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in 1983, that some institutions and rituals understood as “traditions” are invented: that is, they are actually recent in origin and formulated in response to so-called modern institutions and values.⁷⁴ Hobsbawm and Ranger see traditions being created in the very context of modernity, in order to serve modern purposes such as nation building and consolidation of colonial power. Such invented practices seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by implying continuity with the past.⁷⁵

Ranger describes many such invented traditions in colonial Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As he points out, colonial administrators imported practices from their home countries and adapted them to new contexts. One example was the translation of traditions surrounding the British imperial monarchy into some of its African colonies, particularly in Northern Rhodesia: namely the ideology of the king as almost divine, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.⁷⁶ This importation attempted to unite local chiefs, headmen and elders under a shared ideology of empire through invoking allegiance to a supreme (British) king. Furthermore, Ranger observes that what the administrators took to be traditional in their colonies, they codified and promulgated, transforming flexible custom into hard prescription.⁷⁷ For instance,

⁷⁴ E.J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Hobsbawm and Ranger, 230.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 212.

the promulgation of a single “tribal” identity of individuals contrasted with the fact that in pre-colonial Africa, “most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as subject to this chief, at another moment as a member of that cult, at another moment as part of this clan....”⁷⁸ This defining and enforcing of “tradition” by colonial authorities acted in part to re-establish order, security and a sense of community.⁷⁹

Ranger’s and Hobsbawm’s work on tradition challenges many tenets of modernity discourse. First of all, it confronts the idea that tradition is static and timeless. As Ranger argues, older forms of community and authority structures and the traditions associated with them are in fact adaptable: “old uses in new conditions and using old models for new purposes.”⁸⁰ Social phenomena, such as the customs and institutions inherent in traditions, are continually re-created, negotiated and changeable.⁸¹ Even non-invented traditions (i.e. traditions that have genuine continuity with the past) are adaptable, responsive to contemporary situations. This view counters what modernity discourse describes as traditional. Secondly, the idea of invented traditions challenges the dichotomization of the traditional and the modern, as it shows that many traditions are formulated in response to, and thus created by, so-called modern institutions and values.

Finally, Hobsbawm’s and Ranger’s thesis allows for the situation in which traditions are mobilized either in modern processes or for Western modern goals. Genuine and invented traditions alike hold much power for their practitioners due to the normalization of these practices in the society and their connection (fictive or not) with the past. The power of tradition can be evoked or mobilized for quite “modern” projects. This situation, which Hobsbawm’s and

⁷⁸ Hobsbawm and Ranger, 248.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 249.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 5.

⁸¹ Crewe and Harrison, 46.

Ranger's theories account for, directly challenges modernity discourse's social evolutionist ideas, which mandate the abandonment of tradition to achieve modernity.

Multiple Modernities and Vernacular Modernities

In 2000, sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt presented an influential critique of a teleological notion of modernity by arguing for the existence of "multiple modernities." Eisenstadt observes that the pattern of Western modernity does not constitute modernity's only "authentic" conceptualization, despite what dominant discourse would argue.⁸² Eisenstadt writes:

practically from the beginning of modernity's expansion, multiple modernities developed, all within what may be defined as the Western civilizational framework ... in all these societies the basic model of the territorial state and later of the nation-state was adopted, as were the basic premises and symbols of Western modernity. So, too were the West's modern institutions.... But at the same time the encounter of modernity with non-Western societies brought about far-reaching transformations in the premises, symbols, and institutions of modernity.⁸³

Eisenstadt's multiple modernities concept, in short, allows for contact and resulting transformation among societies across the globe as Western states established and expanded their colonial projects.

In this way, Eisenstadt's argument directly builds on Hobsbawm and Ranger's concept of invented traditions, which can therefore be seen in retrospect as a foundational text for deconstructing concepts not only of "tradition" but also of "modernity." Eisenstadt's formulation enables an escape from the traditional / modern dichotomy of modernity discourse examined above. He writes, "The appropriation of themes of modernity made it possible for these [non-western] groups to incorporate some of the Western universalistic elements of modernity in the construction of their own new collective identities, without necessarily giving up specific

⁸² S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (January 1, 2000): 2-3.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 13-14.

components of their traditional identities....”⁸⁴ In this conceptualization of modernity, the cultural traditions and historical experiences of societies need not be abandoned when confronted with a Western modernity. According to Eisenstadt, a society can select, reinterpret and reformulate aspects of this modernity, integrating them with existing cultural traditions to create an alternative modernity.

Although Eisenstadt is credited with the formulation of the multiple modernities argument, other scholars around the same time engaged with similar ideas. Anthropologist Charles Piot used his case study of a Kabre village in Togo to articulate the argument that “apparently traditional African society is within, and has been shaped by, modernity.”⁸⁵ Such arguments unsettle and deconstruct what Piot terms the “orientalizing binarism ... that associates Europe with ‘modernity’ and Africa with ‘tradition.’”⁸⁶ According to Piot, the remote African village has long been defined as the site *par excellence* of so-called traditional culture, in opposition with modernity: “an outside, a place in which to locate the Other, a site of redemption at some remove from the metropole and the global system.”⁸⁷ However, Piot argues that modernity’s roots lie in Africa as much as Europe.⁸⁸ People such as the Kabre are today and have long been an integral part of the modern world.

Furthermore, Piot asserts,

I prefer to see the village as a site – and also, in many ways, an effect – of the modern, one that is as privileged as any other, one that has shaped the modern as much as it has been shaped by it, and one that brings to the modern – that always uneven, often discordant, ever refracting, forever incomplete cultural/political project – its own vernacular modernity.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Eisenstadt, 14-15.

⁸⁵ Charles Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 178.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 21.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 178.

This useful concept of “vernacular modernity” has been defined elsewhere as “the critical appropriation of Western modernity reproduced in indigenous form.”⁹⁰ In other words, alongside European importations and modifications of tradition à la Ranger, Africans themselves invented other traditions in critical response to their colonial encounters, or adapted pre-existing traditions. From independence to today, these traditions have been adapted and reinvented in response to and shaping modernity.

Scholars such as Eisenstadt and Piot thus seek to deconstruct modernity discourse and its implications for the meaning of tradition. They argue against the dichotomization of “tradition” and “modernity,” asserting that through complex histories of contact and conquest, societies, along with malleable cultural traditions, interact with Western modernity to create a reconstructed and reformulated modernity, an alternate path to the dominant Western model. In arguing for the existence of multiple or alternative modernities, these scholars challenge what have been taken to be the prescribed capitalist and liberal political, economic and social requirements of modernization.

Modernity and Global Inequalities

Although these various views of plural modernities allow for a way out of modernization theory’s opposition of tradition and modernity and promote the historicization of local cultural practices and customs (so-called “tradition”), they do not account for stark socioeconomic inequalities across the globe. Such socioeconomic inequalities are especially prevalent in those very African villages that plural modernities theories conceptualize as sites of modernity.

Anthropologist James Ferguson’s 2006 work *Global Shadows* problematizes these frameworks.

⁹⁰ Tabereh Ahmed Neyazi, “Cultural Imperialism or Vernacular Modernity? Hindi Newspapers in a Globalizing India,” *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no. 6 (November 1, 2010): 108, doi:10.1177/0163443710379664.

He interrogates all previous conceptions of modernity, both the singular modernity discourse as well as the multiple or alternative modernities conceptions postulated in response.

Before doing so, however, Ferguson acknowledges the benefits of alternative modernity thinking: namely, the description of African societies as “modern” works against “generations of exoticizing and primitivizing constructions of an essential and ‘traditional’ Africa” as antithetical to the modern.⁹¹ This scholarship attempts instead to place African societies in the same coeval time of the Western world and understand them not as ahistorically “traditional” but rather as displaying a set of contemporary practices that respond to “modern” contemporary forces such as the state, global capitalist economies, and neoliberal values.⁹²

Turning from this appreciation, however, Ferguson argues that plural modernities theories ignore global socioeconomic inequalities and conflict with ideas that Africans themselves have of their own modernity. Ferguson takes issue with Piot quite directly:

Indeed, if we consider modernity, as many Africans do, not simply as a shared historical present, but as a social status implying certain institutional and economic conditions of life, it becomes immediately evident that the Kabre do not inhabit a site that is “as privileged as any other”... Africa’s lack of modernity seems, to many people there, all too palpable in the conditions that surround them – in the bad roads, poor health care, crumbling buildings, and precariously improvised livelihoods that one cannot avoid encountering in the continent’s “less developed” countries. Where anthropologists proclaim Africa always already modern, local discourses on modernity more often insist on seeing a continuing lack ... a lack that is understood in terms not of a cultural inferiority but of a political-economic inequality.⁹³

In this way, Ferguson problematizes theories of modernity that uncritically embrace relativism, equating the lives of individuals in African villages to those living in Western, industrialized nations. There is a danger in such thinking: namely that “a culturalized and relativized notion of

⁹¹ Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, Kindle Loc. 2889.

⁹² Ibid, Kindle Loc. 642-646.

⁹³ Ibid, Kindle Loc. 2883-2896, 654-660.

modernity tends to allow the material and social inequalities that have long been at the heart of African aspirations to modernity to drop out of the picture.”⁹⁴

Ferguson’s intervention begs the question: what is modernity? If we diverge from a theory of singular modernity, and yet reject aspects of the idea of multiple modernities, what does it mean to be modern or non-modern? Can a society existing in pervasive structural poverty be considered as modern as an infrastructure-rich one? Ferguson seems to suggest a way forward, one that straddles the competing theories of singular modernity and multiple modernities.

Ferguson begins by first deconstructing the basic premises of modernization theory, namely the idea that societies exist along a history-development continuum that posits that under-developed societies will proceed progressively to a developed modernity over time. Ferguson disconnects the first variable of this continuum – historical time – from the second variable – level of development – to argue, “With the time axis now unhinged from questions of status, history is not a teleological unfolding or a gradual rise through a hierarchical progression but simply a movement through time (no longer a passage through various ‘stages of development’). Such a dedevelopmentalized notion of history no longer has modernity as its *telos*.”⁹⁵ Ferguson then unpacks the other variable of the continuum, that of hierarchy, or states of development. In splitting this axis of hierarchy from that of historical temporal sequence, Ferguson argues:

location in the hierarchy no longer indexes a “stage of advancement.” Instead, it marks simply a rank in a global political economic order. Insofar as such ranks have lost any necessary relation to developmental time, they become not stages to be passed through but non-serialized statuses that are separated from each other by exclusionary walls, not developmental stairways.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, Kindle Loc. 669-671.

⁹⁵ Ibid, Kindle Loc. 3214-3216.

⁹⁶ Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, Kindle Loc. 3219-3223.

Ferguson's conceptualization disconnects history from the idea of a linear progress towards modernity. A state of development, once separated from a modernization pathway, becomes a rank in the global political economic order.

Following Ferguson's arguments, modernity is thus a global status and a political-economic condition.⁹⁷ Modernity in this sense is no longer a singular end-point, nor plural, but rather a status: "a standard of living to which some have rights by birth and from which others are simply, but unequivocally, excluded."⁹⁸ In this conceptualization, traditional cultural practices – previously viewed as antithetical to the achievement of modernity – lose their oppositional status. According to Ferguson, this view fits with the conceptualizations of many Africans as to the relationship between tradition and modernity: "Africans who lament that their life circumstances are not modern enough are not talking about cultural practices. They are speaking instead about what they view as shamefully inadequate socioeconomic conditions and their low global rank in relation to other places."⁹⁹ Viewing modernity as "a privileged and desired socioeconomic condition"¹⁰⁰ does not mandate abandoning tradition in order to achieve it.

Conclusion

As this review of the key terms *modernity* and *tradition* has shown, these critical categories are contested. At the same time, tradition in particular remains a term with powerful pull. To avoid the reflexive use of *traditional*, the very term I have subjected to critical analysis,

⁹⁷ Ibid, Kindle Loc. 3177.

⁹⁸ Ibid, Kindle Loc. 3232-3233.

⁹⁹ Ibid, Kindle Loc. 3171-3172.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, Kindle Loc. 665-667.

I propose the word “customary” as a working replacement. The word’s roots are in the definition “commonly used or practiced; usual, habitual.”¹⁰¹ As such the term does not necessarily connote behavior with deep and unbroken roots in the past, but rather practices that are rooted only because they are familiar and repeated. Such behaviors can also be, in the right conditions, flexible, responsive to new contexts, issues, and requirements. *Customary* can therefore describe the everyday use of recognizable forms of village governance and social organization.

The formulations presented in this chapter show that, like tradition, the concept of modernity has contesting theoretical and practical conceptualizations. Dominant among these are the ideas posited originally in nineteenth century social theory and post-war modernization theory: the transition from a “traditional” society to a modern, democratic, liberal and even neoliberal state. However, other theorists have pushed back against this conceptualization to argue for multiple or alternative modernities, seeing these “traditional village societies” as modern as any other.

Going forward, I embrace the understanding of modernity put forth by Ferguson, who forges a new path between the two. In viewing modernity as a privileged and desired socioeconomic status, a standard of living, Ferguson eliminates the modern / traditional dichotomy explored in this chapter. Accepting Ferguson’s idea of modernity allows the inclusion of customs, previously viewed as “traditional,” as part of modernity (denied by mainstream discourses of modernity), while at the same time accounting for the stark differences in socioeconomic status across the globe (something multiple modernities theory fails to do). Accepting Ferguson’s modernity as a level of socio-economic status (a standard of living) permits the escape from modernization theory’s set trajectory of how to get there. In this case, customs and

¹⁰¹ Oxford English Dictionary.

customary institutions need not be antithetical to modernity, but can in fact be employed in modern liberal and neoliberal projects. In short, customs can be mobilized to reach a state of modernity.

Additionally, as development is considered to be the process of modernization to reach a state of modernity, breaking down the traditional / modern dichotomy also presents new opportunities for development practices. Customs and customary institutions – both shown now to be in fact compatible with modernity as well as possible catalysts of its achievement – can in reality be employed in a process of development. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate that while traditional structures are often perceived as antithetical to modernization and development and, therefore, excluded from the global development industry, customary institutions can both support and produce modern democratic, liberal and even neoliberal projects. In particular I will focus on the institution of chieftaincy, the root of many customary values and practices in Cameroon. The next chapter begins, accordingly, with a historical account of the relationship between the institution of chieftaincy and the state in Cameroon.

Chapter Two: The Role of Chieftaincy in the Modern State of Cameroon

Introduction

This chapter presents the historical relationship between the institution of Grassfields chieftaincy and the state in Cameroon. The Grassfields region in Cameroon straddles the former Anglo-French border of the colonial days, and is home to a multitude of ethnic groups, many of whom share common cultural and linguistic characteristics.¹⁰² The Grassfields region includes both the Francophone Bamiléké and the Anglophone chieftaincies. Chieftaincy in this region has a long history of political significance prior to colonial occupation, as nearly a hundred chieftaincies – each comprising between three hundred and six thousand subjects – existed at the time of colonial penetration.¹⁰³ Chiefs in the Grassfield areas were not colonial creations; they were based on a much longer tradition, their authority confirmed by powerful rituals.¹⁰⁴

This chapter focuses on the changing relationship between these Grassfield chiefs and the state, told through specific charged moments of clash, conflict, and cooptation, with attention to how so-called traditional leaders are folded into a modern political project of state-making. These moments are as follows: (1) the independence era of the British Cameroons and French Cameroun; (2) the early independent and reunified state of Cameroon; and (3) the new unitary state (post-1972), concluding with the 1996 constitution and the ways that chiefs remain relevant

¹⁰² Ndobegang M. Mbapndah, “Colonial Background to the Economic Empowerment and Political Mobilization of Africans: The Case of the Bamiléké of the Cameroon Grassfields, 1920-1950,” *Journal of Third World Studies* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 177.

¹⁰³ Meredith Terretta, “Chiefs, Traitors, and Representatives: The Construction of a Political Repertoire in Independence-Era Cameroun,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43, no. 2 (January 1, 2010): 227.; Paul Nchoji Nkwi, “Cameroon Grassfield Chiefs and Modern Politics,” *Paideuma* 25 (January 1, 1979): 99.

¹⁰⁴ Peter Geschiere, “Chiefs and Colonial Rule in Cameroon: Inventing Chieftaincy, French and British Style,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 63, no. 2 (January 1, 1993): 167. doi:10.2307/1160839.

and retain agency in a modern state that seeks to submit them to administrative authority. Based on this history, I contend that chieftaincy has both shaped and been shaped by the modern state in complex ways. As an institution with customary and local authority, chieftaincy has always played an important role in the governance of Cameroon, although the exact nature of this role has changed over time.

The Role of Chieftaincy in the Cameroon Independence Era

According to anthropologist Paul Nchoji Nkwi, “The erosion of traditional authority which began with European penetration and intensified in the 1940s, saw a positive attempt at a re-evaluation in the 1950s.”¹⁰⁵ This positive revitalization of customary authority and institutions in colonial Cameroon came from the incorporation of chieftaincy, particularly in the French and British Grassfields area, into nationalist movements and independence struggles. In fact, the institution of chieftaincy in the Grassfields was elemental in the fight for independence of both French Cameroun and the British Cameroons, as well as their eventual reunification in 1961. Customary values and institutions associated with Grassfields chieftaincy, as well as the actions of chiefs themselves in this region, essentially constituted the roots of the independence struggle of Cameroon.

The integration of chiefs and the mobilization of the institution of chieftaincy in independence movements in Cameroon is an example of cooperation between customs and modern state building projects. Customary institutions in both French Cameroun and the British Cameroons¹⁰⁶ were mobilized in decidedly modern nationalist and anti-colonial movements.

¹⁰⁵ Nkwi, 101.

¹⁰⁶ During World War I, the former German Kamerun was divided between France and Britain as League of Nations mandates (later United Nations trusts). The French portion was termed French Cameroun and the British portion the British Cameroons.

Chiefs, due to the powerful role in governance afforded them by custom, became essential individual actors in the independence struggle. Customary values and institutions associated with Grassfields chieftaincy, viewed by the populace as powerful traditions, thus became the repertoire through which nationalist Cameroonian politicians advocated for independence. These examples highlight the essential and foundational role of customs and customary institutions in the modern independence movements of Cameroon, directly challenging the idea that traditions institutions are antithetical to modern political and social movements.

The Case of French Cameroun

In the independence era in the Bamiléké Grassfields of French Cameroun, the nationalist movement greatly depended on Grassfield chiefs, both as the leaders of large numbers of the population and as a site for articulating the failings of French rule. As historian Meredith Terretta writes, “the symbolic sovereignty of chieftaincy began to constitute part of a political imaginary that conceptualized freedom from foreign rule.”¹⁰⁷ Chieftaincy, and restoring the pre-colonial authority to chiefs, became the means by which the Bamiléké articulated freedom from colonial French rule. In the later 1950s, this renewed conception of chieftaincy in the Bamiléké territory spilled over regional boundaries and into popular narratives in the greater French Cameroun.¹⁰⁸ In this way the authority of chieftaincy – both in the actions of individual chiefs as well as the mobilization of this customary institution – became an important means through which French Cameroonians advocated for independence from colonial rule and foreign domination.

One of the ways in which the independence struggle was articulated through the institution of chieftaincy was by the co-option of customary values and concepts into a modern

¹⁰⁷ Terretta, 240.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 243.

nationalist framework. One such example was the deployment of the term *lepue*, which historically signified the political sovereignty, autonomy, and independence of chieftaincies.¹⁰⁹ According to Terretta, “Bamiléké nationalists translated independence as *lepue*, connecting Cameroun’s independence to an essential facet of Grassfields political culture that denoted a refusal to submit to foreign dominance.”¹¹⁰ For Bamiléké populations in the Grassfields regions as well as émigrés in urban areas, independence came to signify the restoration of *lepue* to chieftaincies. This return of autonomy to chieftaincies meant the reclamation of the institution of chieftaincy from its current colonial function as a government auxiliary, as well as freeing it from any French rule. Thus, the customary meaning of *lepue* and the return of *lepue* to chieftaincies became the basis for articulating the creation of a modern independent state in French Cameroun.

Customary institutions were used to advocate for independence as exemplified in the creation of the organization *Kumzse*, known in French as the *Association Traditionnelle des Peuple Bamiléké* (Traditional Association of Bamiléké Peoples), in November 1947.¹¹¹ Chief Djoumessi Mathias, the Superior Chief of the city of Dschang, prompted *Kumzse*’s creation, which stood for “the respect of all our chiefs, our notables and our sub-chiefs.”¹¹² *Kumzse*’s initial aims were to better the quality of customary rule and to argue the importance of customary chieftaincy and Bamiléké institutions; as the association stated, “We want to build our chiefdoms because that is the tradition in our Bamiléké homeland.”¹¹³ In its creation and its aims, *Kumzse* is clearly based upon the revalorization and revitalization of Grassfields’ customs such as

¹⁰⁹ Terretta, 239.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 229.

¹¹¹ Mbapndah, 183.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

chieftaincy. The customary administrative structures and values at the root of *Kumzse* eased its spread to the populace, allowing it to become a base for nationalist movements. Furthermore, through *Kumzse*, chiefs soon took the lead in articulating socio-economic and political grievances, not only of the Bamiléké, but of all Cameroonians.¹¹⁴

The importance of *Kumzse* in the nationwide struggle for independence becomes clearer when one examines its close relationship with the UPC. The UPC, or *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (Union of the Populations of Cameroun), was founded in 1948 to promote independence from foreign rule and the reunification of French and British Cameroon.¹¹⁵ Despite being banned by the French in 1955, the UPC would come to shoulder the bulk of the French Cameroun struggle for independence.¹¹⁶ At its conception, the institution of chieftaincy, and particularly Grassfield chiefs, formed the base of the UPC. Chief Djoumessi Mathias, founder of *Kumzse*, became one of the first Presidents of the UPC party in 1949.¹¹⁷ Mathias thus functioned as customary chief while at the same time leading the greatest anti-colonial nationalist party in Cameroun. Furthermore, soon after its creation, *Kumzse* as an organization became a strong affiliate of the UPC.¹¹⁸ Through *Kumzse* – an organization rooted in custom – an alliance emerged between Bamiléké chiefs, their populace, and the UPC leadership. The examples of *Kumzse* and Chief Mathias highlight the dependency of the anti-colonial movement on customary values and institutions because of the community power these institutions held. Through chieftaincy the UPC nationalist movement gained traction in the Bamiléké region, and

¹¹⁴ Mbapndah, 184.

¹¹⁵ Terretta, 228.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 231.

¹¹⁸ Mbapndah, 184.

its struggle in this region then came to form the core of the independence fight in all of French Cameroun.

In addition to *Kumzse*, Bamiléké chiefs found further means of resisting French domination, and the fight for independence closely depended on the revitalization of chieftaincy and its function within the nation. Historian Ndobegang Mbapndah writes, “As loyal instruments for the execution of the colonial will in the rural milieu, it was to be expected that traditional chiefs would rally in support of colonial economic policy.”¹¹⁹ It was expected that chiefs would rally in support of all French policy and then disseminate this support to their people. In the 1950s, though, this was no longer the case. Debates centralized around two connected issues: refusal of taxation and the administration’s removal of chiefs.¹²⁰ Terretta writes:

A number of young Bamiléké chiefs who had recently inherited the seat of power broke with the French tradition of relying on African chiefs as auxiliaries of the administration. Beginning in 1956, the chiefs of Baham, Bandenkop, Bapa, Bamendjou, Balessing, Bangou, Fonkouakem, and others, cast off the role of administrative auxiliary, refused to collect taxes, and openly declared their nationalist sympathies.¹²¹

This action by Bamiléké chiefs highlights the ways in which the role of chiefs was changing in the independence era. No longer were chiefs acting as auxiliaries of the administration. They were restoring *lepue* (because chiefs who paid taxes were seen as impeding *lepue*¹²²) and reclaiming some of their pre-colonial power and functions. Thus they acted as leaders in the independence struggle.

In response to this taxation boycott, French administrators deposed the rebellious chiefs and notables, eventually sentencing them to imprisonment or exile.¹²³ Already a contentious

¹¹⁹ Mbapndah, 183.

¹²⁰ Terretta, 233.

¹²¹ Ibid, 229.

¹²² Ibid, 233.

¹²³ Ibid, 229.

issue, the deposition of chiefs for involvement in anti-colonial, pro-nationalist politics – which increased in 1956 – was reformulated as an attack on chieftaincies’ *lepue* status.¹²⁴ Argument for resisting chief deposition was first rooted in Bamiléké custom, and was then used to advocate for independence.

Furthermore, through these discussions of the French administration’s depositions of chiefs, the Bamiléké began to refashion the role of chiefs. During the late trusteeship era in the 1950s, the Bamiléké began to reformulate chieftaincy as an institution representing their political, economic and cultural interests.¹²⁵ Many Bamiléké began to view customary chieftaincy as a political institution that could satisfy a social obligation in a way the current colonial state – as well as French administrators in a future post-colonial system – could not.¹²⁶ In response, the Bamiléké sought to revitalize the institution of chieftaincy from the colonial policy of “auxiliaries within the administration” to a new system of chiefs as autonomous political representatives of the people: a mobilization of a customary institution to support modern political desires. The concept of *lepue* was thus expanded to mean the restitution of chieftaincy as a sovereign space and the chief as the “peoples’ representative,”¹²⁷ an idea that would later carry into the new independent nation-state. The expansion of *lepue*’s meaning and the articulation of the chief as the peoples’ representative reveal two important points. First, customs and thus tradition are in fact flexible. Second, customary institutions can be expanded to incorporate “modern” political ideas and systems; they may even be viewed by the people as a more effective means to satisfy political needs than the “modern” state representatives of the government.

¹²⁴ Terretta, 227, 228.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 230.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 242.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 239-240.

The Case of the British Southern Cameroons

During this time of turmoil in French Cameroun, the area of Cameroon governed by British trusteeship, termed the British Cameroons, was engaging in a similar independence struggle. While the French administered their mandate as a separate entity from other colonial holdings, the British attached their piece of the former German Kamerun to the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria.¹²⁸ Debates of the British Cameroons' independence differed from those of French Cameroun in that nationalists in this area had to decide between the fight for independence of the British Cameroons as a separate entity, or independence as the freedom from British rule and reunification with French Cameroun to form an independent nation-state. With the success of nationalist movements in French Cameroun to form the independent *République du Cameroun* in 1960,¹²⁹ the independence struggle in the British Cameroons took on a new dimension. As in the Bamiléké Grassfields, the chiefs in the British-governed Grassfields of the Southern Cameroons¹³⁰ took on a new role with the independence movement. As powerful customary authorities (even if marginalized by the colonial state), Anglophone Grassfield chiefs were elemental in garnering support for the nationalist movement. This highlights another example of the mobilization of customary institutions in modern state-building projects, contradicting the false dichotomy between the modern and the traditional.

In the British Cameroons, Cameroonian politicians involved in nationalist debates felt that independence could not be achieved without the active participation of chiefs. These

¹²⁸ Piet Konings, "The Anglophone Struggle for Federalism in Cameroon," in *Federalism and Decentralization in Africa: The Multicultural Challenge* (Fribourg: Institut du Fédéralisme, 1999), 2.

¹²⁹ *Constitution of the République du Cameroun* (1960).

¹³⁰ The British Cameroons were divided administratively into the Northern Cameroons (today part of Nigeria) and the Southern Cameroons (today part of Cameroon).

politicians saw chiefs as the people who controlled the populations, due to their customary authority and the organization of community life in villages around chieftaincies. Such a view was particularly true in the Grassfields region of the British Southern Cameroons: in 1957, fifty-seven percent of the total population was under the rule of Grassfield chiefs.¹³¹ Furthermore, the Grassfield region held strong political sway in the colonial state as a whole, as at this time fifty-five percent of electoral seats were assigned to constituencies in the Grassfields, which in 1961 increased to sixty percent.¹³² The success of nationalist politicians in their independence movement thus depended on the support of chiefs, especially the paramount *fons*,¹³³ because they could garner the support of the people and thus put pressure on the colonial administration. As a result, the Grassfield chiefs played a large role during the British Southern Cameroons independence struggle, both reasserting their precolonial power and newly integrating their customary authority into modern state processes.

As a result, the various nationalist political movements in the Southern Cameroons, such as the Kamerun National Congress (KNC), the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), and Kamerun People's Party (KPP) pushed for the active role of chiefs in independence. These political parties briefed chiefs on the major political issues of the day, such as secession from Nigeria and unification with then French Cameroun, or independence within the Nigeria Federation.¹³⁴ The KNDP in particular became the greatest avenue for the participation of chiefs in the independence struggle. The KNDP was the first party to be formed by Grassfield politicians, and it was perhaps due to this primacy that it promoted itself as a party upholding

¹³¹ Nkwi, 108.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ A local word that means the village chief, particularly in the Anglophone region.

¹³⁴ Nkwi, 105.

customary mores, symbols and institutions.¹³⁵ Such a promotional campaign highlights the importance of customs and traditions in the modern nationalist political project. The focus of the KNDP on customary structures caused most chiefs to support this party, and these leaders then became the party's mainstay. As a result, KNDP politicians concentrated on the demands of the chiefs. The relationship between the KNDP and the chiefs constituted the beginning of a deep history of political cooperation between the customary authority of chiefs and the modern political nationalist movement in the Southern Cameroons.

Anthropologist Peter Geschiere writes, "One of the first measures of the KNDP regime was to set up a House of Chiefs in order to satisfy the traditional chiefs, the backbone of KNDP support."¹³⁶ With this institution, the role of the Grassfield chiefs thus shifted from mere support of nationalist political parties to a separate political counseling body to the state. Such an enhanced role marks a clear difference between the integration of chiefs in the independence era in French Cameroun and the British Cameroons: French Cameroun chiefs were never granted their own political body within the government. The Chiefs' Conference, formed in 1956, acted as a vehicle for the chiefs to communicate their views on the independence struggle, particularly concerning their traditional status.¹³⁷ This body deliberated the central questions of independence: Should the Southern Cameroons join with Nigeria? Should they form their own independent state? Should they reunify with French Cameroun for independence? The creation of the Chiefs' Conference as a political counseling body to the state thus shows the role this customary institution played in modern political nationalist debates.

¹³⁵ Nkwi, 107.

¹³⁶ Geschiere, 164.

¹³⁷ Nkwi, 104.

In addition to deliberating the questions of independence, chiefs were preoccupied with the integration of customary authority into the modern state. As Nkwi writes, these questions included the following: “Would the new constitution grant them any measure of power? Would they be completely eclipsed by the new emerging indigenous leaders [nationalist politicians]?”¹³⁸ Several conferences of the Grassfield chiefs took place in March, April and December 1958, within which the chiefs called for the creation of a more powerful House of Chiefs with more legislative powers.¹³⁹ The High Commissioner signed these “Southern Cameroons House of Chiefs Regulations” on May 4, 1960.¹⁴⁰ Elections for the House of Chiefs took place in July 1960, and on September 5 of that year, the House of Chiefs sat for the first time in the city of Buea.¹⁴¹ The creation of the House of Chiefs demonstrates chiefs’ mobilization of modern political institutions in order to preserve their customary institution and ensure their continuing role in the changing state.

In addition to the elections, a number of conditions were created for the selection of members of the House of Chiefs, which excluded the following individuals: tax-defaulters, those who had been in prison for more than six months, those who did not possess specified moral and physical qualities, and those already part of state legislatures.¹⁴² All members of the House of Chiefs were salaried in addition to receiving financial benefits, including sitting allowances and subsidized travel and lodging; they were given the same protocol treatment as elected parliamentarians.¹⁴³ These protocols demonstrate the integration of customary institutions into a modern political system. Chiefs retained their ability to ascend to the chieftaincy through

¹³⁸ Nkwi, 105.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 106-108.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 109.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 109-110.

¹⁴² Ibid, 109.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 110.

customary processes. Yet among these customarily decided chiefs, a modern-day electoral process occurred to select those to participate in the state political body of the House of Chiefs. Additionally, once in the House of Chiefs, these customary leaders were treated in the same manner as elected parliamentarians.

Furthermore, the chiefs of the House of Chiefs were conceptualized as the true political representatives of their people. At its inaugural sitting, the High Commissioner addressed the House, saying:

You come here not as elected politicians to express the views of this or that political party but as the traditional leaders and spokesmen of your communities who are expected to rise above all party factions and in the light of your experience of men and affairs at large to give considered and disinterested advice on the many weighty problems that confront the government and people of the Southern Cameroons today.¹⁴⁴

In popular and political discourse, the chief's role was changing to the "peoples' representative."

Paralleling the way that French Cameroun chiefs came to be viewed as more effective and legitimate than French administrators, chiefs in the British Cameroons became community political spokespersons, understood as more effective popular representatives than elected partisan politicians. In this example, the customary institution of chieftaincy becomes more effective than "modern" political institutions of the colonial state.

To conclude, Grassfield chiefs in both French Cameroun and the British Southern Cameroons wielded significant power over their people through customary authority. Chiefs were thus instrumental in the independence struggle. In the Bamiléké area, chiefs themselves participated in societies such as *Kumzse*, the nationalist party the UPC, and organized acts of disobedience. In the British Grassfields, in addition to supporting nationalist political parties like the KNDP, chiefs were uniquely integrated into the modern nationalist process through the

¹⁴⁴ Nkwi, 110.

creation of their own advisory body in the House of Chiefs. In both areas, not only were chiefs themselves active in politics, but the institution of chieftaincy as a whole was mobilized to articulate a new “political repertoire”¹⁴⁵ by which Cameroonians conveyed their beliefs about independence, the role of the state and the changing political situation. In both of these areas, the independence struggle mobilized the customary institution of chieftaincy to suit its modern nationalist aims, and in turn reinvigorated the institution from its colonial prescriptions and proscriptions. The new role for chiefs in Cameroon reflected in a modern context the pre-colonial roles of chiefs, that of sovereign representatives of their people and powerful actors in governance.

For both the Bamiléké and Anglophone Grassfields, the independence era was the right time for chiefs to be involved in political activity. Collaborationists and nationalists alike wanted to preserve chieftaincy, although, according to Terretta, “they differed slightly on how to position the ‘traditional’ institution vis-à-vis the state.”¹⁴⁶ On both sides of the independence struggle, customary institutions were viewed as compatible with the process of modern state building. In regards to the Bamiléké nationalists in particular, Terretta writes:

The contrast between traditional and modern in the Cameroonian political imaginary was not as pronounced as in the minds of French administrators. For nationalists, inclusion in modernity was not contingent upon mimicry of the French, nor did it necessitate collaboration with the French Union. Tradition – whether in dress or in chieftaincy politics – was not incompatible with modernity in the minds of nationalists, although an accommodation of French rule was.¹⁴⁷

Terretta highlights the political imaginary regarding ideas of tradition and modernity that supported both British and French Cameroonian nationalism. The customary institution of chieftaincy remained at the heart of the modern nationalist project, and, with the evolving idea of

¹⁴⁵ Terretta, 230.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 239.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 252.

chiefs as the “peoples’ representative,” the customary institution of chieftaincy became an important site for a new representative democratic political modernity. This new role of chiefs formulated in the independence era set the stage for their integration into the newly independent and reunified state of Cameroon, as ideas about chieftaincy conceptualized during this time shaped the actions of the new state in its incorporation of this customary institution into modern state processes.

The Role of Chieftaincy in the Newly Independent State

In the 1960s, the role of chiefs in Cameroon was redefined once again within the framework of an independent nation-state. The former British Southern Cameroons and the former French République du Cameroun were united on October 1, 1961 as one federal state, under the title of the Federal Republic of Cameroon.¹⁴⁸ The former Francophone Republic of Cameroun was called the federated state of East Cameroon, and the former Anglophone Southern Cameroons was termed the federated state of West Cameroon.¹⁴⁹

As examples from the new Federal Republic will demonstrate, chiefs in Cameroon, and particularly the West Cameroon Grassfield region, were incorporated into the modern political evolution of the newly independent state. In 1964 the President of the new Federal Republic, Ahmadou Ahidjo, observed that “independently of their sentimental value, they [the chiefs] still constitute today and surely will tomorrow, by reason of the leadership which they give to the people, an instrument of action which the state cannot afford to do without at present.”¹⁵⁰ Due to their instrumental involvement in both independence movements, as well as their power as representatives of the people, chiefs remained essential to a newly independent and reunified

¹⁴⁸ Konings, 290-291.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 297.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Nkwi, 113.

nation state. As this state grew and its gains became established, chiefs were given place in the constitution and the selection of chiefs was folded into state processes, such as elections.

However, during this time tensions began to grow between this customary authority and that of the state. Some key actions taken by the new Federal Republic of Cameroon highlight the ways in which the new state grappled with the integration of a customary authority into a modern state system.

The 1961 Constitution – Unification of French and British Cameroon

Under section 38 of the Federal Constitution of Cameroon in 1961, the Southern Cameroons House of Chiefs was officially integrated into the new independent and reunified federal state.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, its powers were increased to include limited legislation. According to the 1961 Constitution, “in West Cameroon the House of Chiefs may exercise specified legislative powers to be defined together with the manner of their exercise, by a law of the Federated State in conformity with this Constitution.”¹⁵² Such roles reflected the continuing relevancy of chieftaincy to the population, as well as state institutions’ acknowledgement of the power held by the customary authority of chiefs.

On the other hand, the continuance of this institution in West Cameroon, but the lack of creation of a House of Chiefs in East Cameroon, highlighted the beginnings of tension between state authority and customary authority in chieftaincy. According to development sociologist Piet Konings:

Ahidjo only reluctantly agreed to the Southern Cameroons delegation’s demand for the preservation of the bicameral character of its state legislature, in recognition of the important role Anglophone chieftaincy had played in the coming about of reunification

¹⁵¹ *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon* (1961).

¹⁵² *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon* (1961), section 40.

(Konings, forthcoming), but he bluntly refused to create a House of Chiefs in East Cameroon, where none had existed before reunification.¹⁵³

As the 1950s and 60s saw building theories of modernity and modernization in the Western world (reviewed in Chapter One), developing and newly independent nations such as the Federal Republic of Cameroon were being pressured to adopt a particular social and political modernity, one that viewed customary or traditional institutions in their current form as antithetical to the modern state. The Cameroonian state thus sought to balance its continued dependency on chiefs (due to the role of this institution in the independence struggle), with these outside pressures to modernize.

The state attempted to resolve this tension between customary and state authority through the slow integration of chieftaincy into the state apparatus, a model of modern statehood built upon Western examples. The primary illustration of this integration was in the changes made to the House of Chiefs post-reunification. First, although elections were still the means by which chiefs ascended to the House of Chiefs, they were altered under the new federal state. Nkwi writes,

any chief who wished to stand for elections into the West Cameroon House of Chiefs had to submit his application through the Divisional Officer who transmitted it through the Minister of Local Government to the Prime Minister. The applications were then screened by a special committee which presented the final list for approval. The list was then gazetted before the elections.¹⁵⁴

The screening of applications by a state committee represents one of the ways in which the Cameroonian state sought to exercise some control over the West Cameroon House of Chiefs. It also shows the way the Cameroonian government sought to assimilate this customary institution, seen by Western nations as antithetical to a modern state, into official state processes.

¹⁵³ Konings, 301.

¹⁵⁴ Nkwi, 109.

Other changes made to the West Cameroon House of Chiefs show that the Cameroonian government grappled with the seemingly incompatibility of customary and state institutions, and yet the continued necessity for chiefs' power, through the invocation of European models. This is evident through the apparent modeling of the West Cameroon House of Chiefs on the British House of Lords, a modeling initiated in the pre-independence era with the British Southern Cameroons House of Chiefs and continued and expanded in the newly independent state. The West Cameroon House of Chiefs was conceived to function similarly as the British House of Lords, as a non-partisan body that would give advice and then assist the government in executing its legislation. The House of Chiefs in West Cameroon would consider proposed legislation and policy, and its resolutions would pass to the House of Assembly.¹⁵⁵ Members of the Executive Council could attend sessions of the House of Chiefs but were unable to vote in this body.¹⁵⁶ As Nkwi writes:

[The House of Chiefs] was to function like the British House of Lords. By the creation of the House of Chiefs, the chiefs of Southern Cameroons were given a unique place in the political structure of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. It had been established to enable traditional rulers to participate in the task of governing the state. As an advisory body, it could not initiate legislation nor could it deal with finance bills. It could postpone but could not prevent the adoption of a bill. It also considered the merits of the miscellaneous bills before they were approved by the legislative Assembly which transformed them into law. As an upper House it performed a useful and an essential duty towards the people....¹⁵⁷

The House of Chiefs thus integrated customary rulers into the new political structure. However, this incorporation was in a restricted role: a role that furthermore was seen as compatible with the dominant conceptualizations of modernity through the invoked comparison with the British House of Lords.

¹⁵⁵ Nkwi, 110.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

Under its mandate in the new Federal Republic of Cameroon, the House of Chiefs did review several matters of government legislation. According to the official Report of the West Cameroon House of Chiefs in 1962, the body examined the following bills: Appropriation Law (1962), Customary Courts Law (1962), Control of Farming and Grazing Law (1962), the West Cameroon Electricity Corporation, Constitutional Law (Amendment) and the Supplementary Appropriation Bill.¹⁵⁸ In these legislative actions the West Cameroon House of Chiefs retained much political power in the newly independent state. Additionally, as Nkwi explains, “The House of Chiefs did not only supervise the activities of Government but it also protected the interest of the chiefs.”¹⁵⁹ In 1962, the House prepared and approved a “Recognition of Chiefs” Law.¹⁶⁰ In doing so the House attempted to use the state to lessen chieftaincy succession disputes between potential heirs, as chiefs could appeal to the state to resolve such quarrels, in a process described by Nkwi:

On [receipt of payment by the plaintiff], the Divisional Officer should inform the Secretary of State that a dispute exists. The claimants shall appear before a committee appointed by the Prime Minister. In making such inquiry the committee shall amongst any other matters take into account the native law and customs that appear to them to be applicable in respect of the appointment of the chief in question and may for such purpose have reference to any records reporting the state of such native law and customs at the time of the Inquiry or in the past. It was the task of the Committee to study the question and submit its findings to the Prime Minister who would either accept it or send it back to the Committee for further study.¹⁶¹

Although the law represented the chiefs’ attempt to use the government to satisfy their own aims, the codification of the resolution of succession disputes ironically began a trend of encroaching government involvement in customary processes. In 1967, official procedure was further codified denoting the process of formal recognition of chiefs by the Government after

¹⁵⁸ Nkwi, 111.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 111-112.

they had been chosen and installed by “traditional King-makers.”¹⁶² According to a circular letter sent by the permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government to all Divisional Officers:

In order to regularise the procedure for recognising chiefs and to minimise the petitions and complaints against such recognition, it will now be necessary to have a declaration from the recognised ‘King-makers’ of a village before forwarding the name of any chief for recognition. Such declarations should, for record purposes, be in writing and signed by the ‘King-makers’ and such ‘King-makers’ must be recognised by the majority population of the village (BA. File 1063/69).¹⁶³

The new codification of chief recognition, which subsumed a customary practice into a modern state administrative process, presents another example of the ways that the new Cameroonian state struggled to balance the continued prevalence and importance of customary institutions in its modernizing political project. However, the Cameroonian state could not fully coopt this powerful institution. As of 1967, a balance existed between the state and customary authority regarding the recognition of chiefs. On the side of the government, no chief would be recognized unless the customary “King-makers” had formally demonstrated their approval to the government; in return, the Government would issue a certificate of official recognition to a new chief after the submission of this necessary documentation.¹⁶⁴ At this time, the power of customary institutions such as “King-makers” continued to rival the state administrative role in the selection of chiefs.

These examples from the new Federal Republic demonstrate that Cameroonian chiefs, and particularly those of the West Cameroon Grassfield region, were incorporated into the modern political evolution of Cameroon. Due to the essential role of chiefs in the independence struggle, as well as the continued power granted to this customary institution by the people (such

¹⁶² Nkwi, 111-112.

¹⁶³ Cited by Nkwi, 112.

¹⁶⁴ Nkwi, 112.

as the formulated role of chiefs as “peoples’ representatives”), chieftaincy and its associated customs could not be ignored by a newly independent state.

However, during this time, tensions began to arise between the authority residing in customary institutions and the newly growing authority of the modern state. The Cameroonian state struggled with how to treat an institution that rivaled state authority, as well as one that appeared contradictory to modernization. Eventually, a balance was struck between customary institutions and the state: one that integrated chieftaincy into state processes and so-called modern institutions (the Constitution, the Legislature, elections, etc.), yet preserved the authority of this customary institution over its own inner workings (selection of chiefs) as well as in the dealings of the state (granting of legislative authority to West Cameroon chiefs).

The Role of Chieftaincy in the New Unitary State

As the new Federal Republic of Cameroon continued on its path of political modernization, the role of chiefs in the state adapted with the changing political environment. Recall that Cameroon was organized as a federation of East and West Cameroon between 1961 and 1972. In the beginning of May 1972, President Ahidjo announced his intention to transform the federal republic into a unitary state, pending a referendum.¹⁶⁵ On May 20, 1972, the country officially became a united republic, abolishing federal structures and adopting a new constitution and the name the United Republic of Cameroon.¹⁶⁶

After this successful 1972 referendum, “a series of laws was introduced to regularize the legal status of traditional chiefs in the Francophone and Anglophone areas of Cameroon.”¹⁶⁷ As

¹⁶⁵ Konings, 303.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Article 19, *Northern Cameroon: Attacks on Freedom of Expression by Governmental and Traditional Authorities* (London: Article 19, 1995), <http://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/cameroon-attacks-on-foe.pdf>, 10.

the state authority, and particularly the presidency, increased its power, chiefs were brought under control of the state and the president with the new constitution of 1972. Furthermore, the Decree of July 1977 attempted to completely integrate chiefs into the state by codifying every aspect of their role (territory, power, selection, etc.), and effectively subsuming this role under state authority. The sum of these legislative actions represented the state's attempt to subject this customary authority to modern state authority, in a refashioning of the previous relationship between chiefs and the old French and British colonial administrations. Once again such events highlight the changing relationship of this customary institution with the state.

The 1972 Constitution – The Unitary State

First and foremost, the 1972 Constitution itself changed the status of chiefs in regards to the state. Whereas the Federal Constitution of 1960 had given West Cameroon chiefs a legislative status through the House of Chiefs, the Constitution of 1972 abolished West Cameroon's separate assembly and House of Chiefs.¹⁶⁸ President Ahidjo's justification was concern for the economy and unification. Nkwi explains, "chiefs were told [the House of Chiefs] was costing the state too much money to run four legislative bodies (the federal parliament, the two federated state assemblies and the West Cameroon House of Chiefs). Evidently, the forging of a national unity front and image was more paramount than the expenses involved."¹⁶⁹ Federalism was posited as too costly for a developing country, in its fostering of regionalism and impeding of economic development.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Konings, 304.; *Constitution of the United Republic of Cameroon* (1972), Part Three.

¹⁶⁹ Nkwi, 112.

¹⁷⁰ Konings, 304.

However, assertions about economics and national unity belied the true goal of these changes: to bring customary chiefs more completely under state control, particularly under the control of President Ahidjo, as most of the reforms in the new constitution, according to Konings, “increased the already enormous powers in the hands of the President.”¹⁷¹ The impetus behind the new regulations in the 1972 Constitution was to eliminate the threat of customary institutions to state authority, as well as to further the state’s social and political modernization project, one with which chiefs in their current status were viewed as incompatible. As Konings writes, “the paradigm of ‘modernisation’ which dominated the literature on political and economic development in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s reinforced Ahidjo's views on the importance of a strong unitary state for nation-building and economic reconstruction in Africa (Cameroon National Union, 1968).”¹⁷²

Decree No. 77-425 of July 1977: “To Organize Chiefdoms”

With the transition from a federal to unitary state in 1972, the role of chiefs in Cameroon changed from one of more balanced integration to a position of subordination within the state apparatus. Decree No. 77-245, “To Organize Chiefdoms,” passed on July 15, 1977, highlights this change.¹⁷³ This decree designated the exercising of customary authority at the grassroots level. Nkwi writes, “The decree of 15th July 1977 manifests the government’s attempt to integrate chiefs within the new political structure. It specified the role, nature and powers of traditional chiefs within the framework of the new nation-state. The decree defined the government’s position on chiefs and virtually integrated them into the administrative

¹⁷¹ Konings, 303.

¹⁷² Ibid, 295.

¹⁷³ Article 19, 10.

structure.”¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, it formally established “traditional leaders as auxiliaries of the central government” (Ch. III, Art. 19).¹⁷⁵ The Decree of 1977 demonstrates how the state sought to relieve the tensions between the customary institution of chieftaincy and the authority of the modern state by returning this institution to its colonial functions. The decree’s codification of the nature and powers of customary chiefs represents a refashioning of colonial policy, even returning to the old language of “auxiliaries of the administration.”

First and foremost, Decree 77-245 formulated territorial organization, dividing Cameroon into “traditional chiefdoms,” ranked in a class-structured pyramid based upon the size or economic and demographic importance of the territory comprised by each.¹⁷⁶ A First Class chiefdom would govern at least two Second Class ones; a Second Class chiefdom would have jurisdiction over at least two Third Class chiefs.¹⁷⁷ This new organization “represents a verbatim taking over... of legislation on the same subject under French colonial administration (Order No. 224 of 4 February 1933 defining the status of indigenous chiefs),” stressing the fundamental differences in prestige and power of different chiefdoms for economic and demographic reasons.¹⁷⁸

Secondly, the decree re-formalized and then codified the process of chief selection. Chiefs were to be appointed by high-level government officials, but “‘are in principle chosen from among families called upon to exercise traditional customary authority’ (section 8 of 1977 Decree).”¹⁷⁹ The first part of chief selection resides in what is sometimes called the “Council of Elders” or, as mentioned above, the “King-makers”: the local body recognized by custom with

¹⁷⁴ Nkwi, 114.

¹⁷⁵ Article 19, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Cosmas Cheka, “Traditional Authority at the Crossroads of Governance in Republican Cameroon,” ed. Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, *Africa Development* XXXIII, no. 2 (2008): 77.

¹⁷⁸ Cheka, 77.; Nkwi, 114.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Cheka, 78.

the power to choose the next “traditional ruler,” or chief. The decree mandates that government officials consult with this body of “competent elders” before “traditional chiefs” can assume their role.¹⁸⁰ On the other side of this customary body are the representatives of modern authorities of the state. As Nkwi explains:

As soon as the chief dies, the whole administrative process begins. The administrative authorities are immediately informed, and without delay they are required to begin the necessary consultation leading to the choice of the new chief. The authority, usually the prefect or sub-prefect, must consult the customary nobility, the king-makers. All the customary authorities, according to the decree, are supposed to participate in the selection process. After the consultation, the administrative authority makes known the name of the candidate to the appropriate authority, passing through the administrative hierarchy.¹⁸¹

On the administrative state side, several procedural matters must be completed before official recognition of a newly chosen chief. A “dossier” — containing a certificate of non-conviction, a birth certificate, a medical certificate, and a death certificate or act of destitution of the previous chief — is sent to the administrative authority that must formally recognize the new chief.¹⁸² This authority depends on the territorial classification of the chieftom: First Class chiefs would be appointed by the Prime Minister, Second Class chiefs by the Minister of Territorial Administration, and Third Class chiefs by the local division’s Senior Prefect.¹⁸³ The state controls the choice and installation of each of these administrative agents.

The selection process of chiefs designated in the Decree of 1977 has been both praised and criticized. Some laud this process as a balanced integration of customary and modern authority. Political scientist Cosmas Cheka notes that the representative of modern authority “consults the Council and takes the final decision. Even though this personality may be alien to local laws and customs, appointments that the latter makes that are based on the objective advice

¹⁸⁰ Article 19, 10.

¹⁸¹ Nkwi, 114.

¹⁸² Ibid, 114 (in footnote).

¹⁸³ Article 19, 10.

of the elders have stood the test of time, and the exercise has marked a good symbiosis between the modern and the traditional working together.”¹⁸⁴ On the other hand, critics of the process have argued that the decree affords true authority to the administrative representatives of the modern state. Cheka also highlights this critique:

The ‘obligatory’ consultation of the Council of Elders prior to the appointment of the chief gives representative ‘voice’ to the people akin to representation under republican values. The problem, however, is that public officials alien to local culture are endowed by the same disposition with the final decision to choose traditional rulers... Additionally, in the appeals procedure, the official responsible for appointment is both judge and jury, to the exclusion of the Council of Elders who were consulted prior to the appointment.¹⁸⁵

This example reveals the balance between customary and modern authority in Cameroon in the unitary state was not an equal one, as it was in the time immediately following independence under the federal state. Under the Decree of 1977 in the unitary state, the state must consult with the customary authority, but then may make its own decision regarding the selection of a new chief. Furthermore, any appeal process by locals is funneled through the same state apparatus.

This hierarchy of state and customary institution appears even more clearly in examining the assigned functions of the chiefs under the Decree of July 1977. In terms of administration, chiefs fall under the Ministry of Territorial Administration.¹⁸⁶ They must assist the state in establishing regional control and order; as Article 20 of Decree 77-245 states: “[chiefs must] carry out any other mission that may be assigned to them by the local administrative authority.”¹⁸⁷ Article 20 also requires, as Nkwi explains:

As auxiliaries of the administration, [chiefs] must help the administrator in the transmission of government directives to their populations. They must see to it that these directives are executed. It is also their duty to assist in the maintenance of public order, and in the promotion of the economic, social, political and cultural development of their

¹⁸⁴ Cheka, 80.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 84.

¹⁸⁶ Nkwi, 114.

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Article 19, 10.

areas. They are also required to help the government recover its taxes. Beside these tasks, they are also expected to be ever ready to perform whatever duties the administrative authorities might confer on them.¹⁸⁸

This subordination of chief to local administrator is a direct return to the role of chiefs in the British and French colonial regimes. Under the colonial administration, as Nkwi states, “[Chiefs] were expected to be the link between their subjects and the colonial administrators, transmitting government regulations and assisting in the maintenance of law and order.”¹⁸⁹ The British, under their familiar system of indirect rule, used the pre-existing local power structure of Grassfield chiefs to collect taxes and conduct other actions fitting the needs of the colonial administration. Although the exact power hierarchy between the chiefs and their respective colonial administrators differed among the French and the British, the French officials also ruled through chiefs, as Geschiere notes: “The French officials saw chiefs as executors of administrative orders.”¹⁹⁰ In return for these services, chiefs were allowed to govern their subjects in matters of custom, much as Sections 20-21 of the Decree empowered chiefs with judicial authority: chiefs could continue to arbitrate in disagreements of a customary nature.¹⁹¹

In return for these services under the Decree of 1977, chiefs would receive reasonable remunerations as government agents. They would not only derive income from tax rebates, but would also be given monthly allowances in order to handle household finances.¹⁹² Moreover, they would receive some protection by the government. No administrative mechanisms were created for citizens to lodge grievances about local chiefs (although these might have been present in village custom). Chapter 4, Article 27(1) of the decree even states that the government

¹⁸⁸ Nkwi, 114-115.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 102.

¹⁹⁰ Geschiere, 152-153; 154.

¹⁹¹ Cheka, 81.; Nkwi, 115.

¹⁹² Nkwi, 115.

“shall be bound to protect Chiefs against ... contempt ... interference, abuse or defamation ... to which they may be exposed by reason or on occasion of the performance of their duties.”¹⁹³

Much as chiefs who acted as effective colonial agents were in turn protected by the colonial administration, even at times against the will of their subjects, chiefs in the nation-state were to be protected by the Cameroonian government.

On the other hand, failure by chiefs to provide these services would have repercussions. Article 28 of the decree mandates that administrative authorities will evaluate “traditional chiefs” on a yearly basis, examining their efforts to promote “economic and social development.”¹⁹⁴ Chapter 4, Article 29(1) allows government officials to take disciplinary measures against chiefs in cases of “shortcoming in the performance of their duties ... inefficiency, inertia, or extortion from citizens.”¹⁹⁵ Nkwi observes:

While the state guarantees the protection of chiefs and the defence of their rights while they are in office, it also lays down sanctions for those chiefs who fail to live up to the laws of the nation-state. They can be made destitute or thrown out of their traditional office by the government. They must carry out their traditional duties within the limits of the laws of the state. Their powers have been completely eroded and they can only survive if they recognise and function according to the dictates of the new political elite.¹⁹⁶

The powers of the government stipulated in Chapter 4 of the decree are thus a direct reminder of the endless depositions of unruly chiefs during the colonial administration, particularly during the independence era. As the French deposed Bamiléké chiefs for participation in nationalist movements, the Cameroonian state could now lay down sanctions for those chiefs who failed to live up to the laws of the nation-state.

¹⁹³ Quoted in Article 19, 10-11.

¹⁹⁴ Article 19, 10.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Nkwi, 115.

As a growing state following the Western modernization project of the time, the Cameroonian government viewed chieftaincy in the independence and post-independence era form as incompatible with its goals. Chieftaincy, a customary institution, appeared to contradict the modernizing project to which the state subscribed, which posited traditions and customs must be abandoned on the path to modernity. Furthermore, the great power held by chiefs due to customary authority represented a challenge in turn to the authority of the state administrators, who now saw themselves as the agents of proper and modern governance. As a result, the Cameroonian government under the new unitary state sought to change the role of this customary institution to one more compatible with modernization.

The state did so through the mobilization of Western models. The invoking of these Western models was an attempt by the state to find a place for customs, the “traditional,” that was acceptable to the ideas the state was pursuing in its modernization project. One such place was the subsuming of this customary institution under full state and presidential control (to erode the regained powers of chiefs in the independence era), which the government attempted with the new constitution of 1972 and Decree No. 77-425 in 1977. The first Western model used here was the old colonial one, in this case the refashioning of the previous relationship between chiefs and the old French and British colonial administrations and the return to colonial ideology and policy regarding chieftaincy. Another possibility was the relegation of chieftaincy to a place of outmoded European customs, such as the aristocracy. Nkwi writes:

It is apparent that the independent nation-state did little or nothing to back up the chiefs in their traditional context.... The suppression of the House of Chiefs in West Cameroon and other governmental actions were steps taken to reduce the chiefs to a position of European aristocracies of today.... As the European aristocracies lost all power based on their former positions, so did the Grassfield chiefs....¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Nkwi, 112.

The relegation of chiefs to the position of deposed and dispossessed European aristocrats would represent a proper role of this customary institution in the modern state, along the lines experienced by a modernizing Europe.

In all of these actions, however, the state could never fully abandon the customary institution of chieftaincy. Despite attempts by the state to completely co-opt chieftaincy and thereby reduce it to a role deemed acceptable in modernizing projects, the state at the same time could not let this institution go. Geschiere explains:

It is interesting to compare these examples [of other areas] with the present position of the chiefs in the mountain area of west Cameroon—the Grassfields, formerly British, and the Bamiléké area, formerly French. Here the government can definitely not afford to neglect the traditional chiefs, who retain great authority over their subjects. According to Bayart, any attempt by the government to reorganise and weaken the formal position of the chiefs would certainly lead to a radical breach with the west [province of Cameroon].¹⁹⁸

The state could not completely abandon this customary institution due to the power held in chieftaincy. Despite the goal of relegating them to a position of toppled European aristocracy, chiefs were in reality elemental in state processes at a grassroots level. Without the integration of the institution of chieftaincy, the state would have been unable to complete its desired functions.

Decree No. 77-245 of July 1977 thus implicitly and explicitly assigned customary authorities — in this case, chiefs — with roles in state governance. This order had profound significance for the role of customary authority and institutions in a modern state. As Cheka notes, “Subjecting citizens to some other rules than modern law in a republic is implicit concession by republican authorities that the citizen obeys and is bound both by modern law and their native laws and customs.”¹⁹⁹ In co-opting customary rulers into the modern state in their role as chiefs, the Cameroonian state acknowledged in some capacity the legitimacy of

¹⁹⁸ Geschiere, 167.

¹⁹⁹ Cheka, 81.

community laws and customs in the life of a modern citizen. The Cameroonian citizen jointly obeys customary and modern state authority, as Cheka argues: “the citizen subjects himself to two types of orders: modern and traditional.”²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the authority held by these customary institutions can be used to further modern state functions and projects. In fact, in Cameroon, it has proven impossible to achieve these state projects without the utilization of the customary institution of chieftaincy.

The 1996 Constitution and the State of Chieftaincy Today

Since the implementation of Decree No. 77-245 in July 1977, many changes have occurred in the Cameroonian state. In 1982, President Ahidjo abdicated his position and the then Prime Minister, Paul Biya, succeeded him, according to constitutional law, on November 6, 1982. In January 1996, a new constitution was created once again to re-organize the state under Law No. 96/06. The Constitution of 1996 changed the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon, now a decentralized unitary state.²⁰¹

Unlike the 1972 Constitution and the Decree of 1977, which sought to codify all aspects of the role and nature of customary authority and subsume this institution under the state, the 1996 Constitution is silent on the status of chiefs within the state. As Cheka explains:

In its section 55, the latter Constitution ushered in decentralization whereby the decentralized authorities would be regions and councils. The latter structures are mainly charged with the task of local development under section 4(1) of Law No. 2004/17 of 22 July 2004 on the Orientation of Decentralization. The constitutional provision is silent on any consideration of traditional authorities (organized by law) as decentralized bodies. Also, traditional authorities do not formally constitute part of the deconcentrated institutions of the republican administrative machine that is made up of divisions and subdivisions. They simply are ‘traditional authorities’, albeit stakeholders in governance.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Cheka, 76.

²⁰¹ *Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon* (1996), Part 1 Article 1.

²⁰² Cheka, 70.

The 1996 Constitution appears to remove any role previously held by chiefs in government, seemingly erasing them from all state processes. On an official and legal front, the Cameroonian government has stated that this institution has no place in modern state governance.

However, the Constitution of 1996 does not legally repeal the 1977 decree organizing chiefdoms.²⁰³ Furthermore, decentralized modern authorities admit the continuing necessity of chieftaincy. As Cheka cites:

decentralized modern authorities (incarnated in councillors and members of Parliament), for example, concede that they cannot effectively operate without traditional authorities. Consequently, it is either conceded that the 1977 decree is obsolete or traditional authorities are at the crossroads of modern / local authorities, especially because the Cameroon Constitution of 1996 is silent on the status of traditional authorities.²⁰⁴

These examples show that, despite official sentiment by the government as to the obsolescence of chieftaincy in a modern state, this institution remains quite relevant and in fact essential in governance in Cameroon today.

Since the 1990s, chiefs have remained essential facets of modern governance in Cameroon, now through their utilization of the newly permitted multipartyism and the power balances among state, economic elite, and customary authority. To begin, the possibility of the mobilization of multipartyism in Cameroon became a new phenomenon in the 1990s, as opposition parties were only legalized in 1990 and the first multiparty election was not held until 1992.²⁰⁵ The advent of multipartyism in the 1990s presented a new opportunity for chiefs within the state and in state politics. Multiparty politics has allowed chiefs to enhance their potential importance at regional and national levels, as chiefs are able to play different political parties off

²⁰³ Cheka, 78.

²⁰⁴ Cheka, 81.

²⁰⁵ Susan Dicklitch, "Failed Democratic Transition in Cameroon: A Human Rights Explanation," *Human Rights Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2002): 165, doi:10.1353/hrq.2002.0007.

of each other, to mobilize their role as representatives of their communities, to act as “vote banks” for different political parties, and even to run for elected office themselves. As anthropologist Francis Nyamnjoh argues:

Chieftaincy has survived and continues to influence ongoing processes. Indeed, the idea that chiefs are marginalised and reduced to local level politics or mere auxiliaries of the administration must be put in perspective. This was much more the case during colonialism and the single-party years of the post-colony, than it is today under multipartyism and the politics of recognition. Especially since the 1990s, prominent chiefs have joined the elite ranks of the ruling party and government even at national level, some of them as members of the central committee, political bureau, government, and parliament, and others as chairmen of parastatals or governors of provinces. Some chiefs, admittedly pro-government, are so powerful that they act as if they were above the laws of the central state.²⁰⁶

According to Nyamnjoh, “Almost everywhere on the continent, many chiefs are taking up central roles in contemporary politics,”²⁰⁷ thus retaining their role as powerful autonomous political actors within the modern state.

Secondly, changes in the economic make-up of Cameroon from the 1990s to today, and thus the new rise of economic and intellectual elites’ involvement in state functioning, has also presented opportunities for chiefs. Chiefs have been able to make use of the power balance between the Cameroonian state and elites in order to remain involved and important in modern state projects. First of all, chiefs still exercise what anthropologist John Mope Simo terms “customary legitimate right.”²⁰⁸ Customary legitimate right, as described by Simo, stems from the fact that:

In the WG [Western Grassfields], all forms of customary power relations, social control mechanisms, capital accumulation, and distribution and of course, the management of

²⁰⁶ Francis B. Nyamnjoh, “‘Our Traditions Are Modern, Our Modernities Traditional’: Chieftaincy and Democracy in Contemporary Africa*,” *CODESRIA* (2004): 8, accessed April 1, 2015.
http://www.nyamnjoh.com/files/chieftaincy_and_democracy_in_contemporary_africa.pdf.

²⁰⁷ Francis B. Nyamnjoh, “Chieftaincy and the Negotiation of Might and Right in Botswana Democracy,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 21, no. 2 (July 1, 2003): 234, doi:10.1080/02589000305447.

²⁰⁸ John Mope Simo, “Challenges to Chieftaincy Today: Governance Issues and How Fons Strategise to Overcome the Obstacles of Overarching Structures in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon,” in *Les mutations en Afrique* (Yaoundé, Cameroun: Presse de l’Université Catholique d’Afrique Centrale, 2009), 166.

natural resources especially land, begins and ends with the hereditary fon [paramount chief] and all the complex palace institutions that are associated with royalty. This dignitary and notables still wield many political, symbolic and spiritual powers. He is the number one title holder in the highly stratified social, political, economic and religious structures; with various degrees of power distribution that make up the social organisation of any chiefdom.²⁰⁹

Chiefs continue to hold customary legitimate right in their chiefdoms, controlling many aspects of political and social life in their villages including social power distribution, natural resource management, and the undertaking of village-wide projects. This customary authority stems from the power of the tradition of this custom and the continued role of the chief in almost all aspects of village functioning. Furthermore, this authority extends over the chief's subjects, as Mope Simo writes, "the reigning fon [chief] also has control over persons inside his territorial boundaries. Similar rights could be exerted over his subjects who are not resident in the village."²¹⁰

Chiefs utilize customary legitimate right in relations with the expatriate community of elites from their village, which allows them to mobilize elites for their own aims. For example, many village chiefs have presided over ceremonies and functions on behalf of specific individuals in their new home cities, in order to increase the cultural capital and thus community power of these elites in their new work and living environments.²¹¹ In return, chiefs then mobilize these elites as representatives of their home villages, using them and their power in matters of state to "stake claims on national power and resources for their region and chiefdoms."²¹² Another example is the mobilization of customary land titles by chiefs. In the Bamiléké specifically, land is particularly important; over 90 percent of the time, individuals will

²⁰⁹ Mope Simo, 164.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 166.

²¹¹ Nyamnjoh, "Our Traditions," 9.

²¹² Ibid, 10.

be buried in their home villages.²¹³ As the chief is considered the titular owner of all land in his chiefdom, elites must negotiate with the chief to be buried in the village. Many times, a chief will mandate that the individual build a house in the village – thus contributing to village development – in order to then be buried there.²¹⁴ All of these examples indicate the ways that chiefs are mobilizing their customary authority – their customary legitimate right – over the elite diaspora in order to achieve their own aims. Furthermore, the exercise of this customary authority allows chiefs to maintain their role in governance and the nationwide power game, fashioning a new contemporary power balance among elites, customary chief authority, and the modern liberal Cameroonian state.

Conclusion

Modernization theory in the 1950s and 1960s predicted, as Nyamnjoh presents, “that chiefs and chieftaincy would soon become outmoded, replaced by ‘modern’ bureaucratic offices and institutions.”²¹⁵ This prediction emerges from the view, highlighted in Chapter One, that cultural traditions are incompatible with the achievement of modernity. Adherents to this doctrine saw the cultural customs of chiefs and chieftaincy in Cameroon, trapped in the historical past, as inhibitory to modern state projects. Such customs therefore must be abandoned.

This chapter has shown, however, that instead of being superseded by the modern state, “chieftaincy has displayed remarkable dynamism, adaptiveness and adaptability to new socio-economic and political developments.”²¹⁶ Despite the labeling of this institution as “traditional”

²¹³ Christiane Magnido, “Thematic Discussion 2: The Bamiléké, Between Tradition and Modernity” (Dschang, Cameroon, October 3, 2013).

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Nyamnjoh, “Chieftaincy,” 234.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 247.

– by implications antiquated and inflexible – chiefs in Cameroon have been integrated into and interacting with variations of the “modern” state throughout history: from colonial rule, to independence movements, to the newly created Cameroonian nation-state, to current day multipartyism and elite relationships. Indeed, the institution of chieftaincy has been elemental in these developing stages of the contemporary Cameroonian state, mobilized by politicians and chiefs alike to create modern state projects. In summary, as Nyamnjoh writes, “Chieftaincy is a dynamic institution, constantly re-inventing itself to accommodate and be accommodated by new exigences, and has proved phenomenal in its ability to seek conviviality between competing and often conflicting influences.”²¹⁷

However, the adaptability of chieftaincy does not mean that this institution has abandoned the customary structures and values associated with it. As Nyamnjoh writes, “Africans are far from giving up chieftaincy or from making completely modern institutions of it.”²¹⁸ The dynamism of chieftaincy has involved both the incorporation of “modern” institutions and strategies, and the mobilization and re-assertion of customary practices. Chiefs in Cameroon have adapted “modern” liberal strategies, such as obtaining political voice through the legislative body of the House of Chiefs. Yet they have also mobilized customs, using their customary legitimate right over elites of the diaspora to maintain participation in the contemporary power system. Furthermore, chiefs in Cameroon are both exercising “modern” strategies for customary aims (using the House of Chiefs to pass legislation on customary matters such as succession) and customary practices for “modern” projects (employing customary authority to bring development and financing to their villages).

²¹⁷ Nyamnjoh, “Our Traditions,” 21.

²¹⁸ Nyamnjoh, “Chieftaincy,” 232.

Nyamnjoh writes, “chieftaincy remains part of the cultural and political landscapes, and is constantly negotiating and renegotiating with new encounters and changing material realities. The results are chiefs and chiefdoms that are neither completely traditional nor completely modern.”²¹⁹ Simply put, chieftaincy in Cameroon continues to defy the traditional / modern dichotomy created by modernity discourse.

²¹⁹ Nyamnjoh, “Our Traditions,” 5.

Chapter Three: “Customizing Modernities and Modernizing Customs”: The Chief as CEO of the Village

Introduction

Fon Angwafo III, chief of Mankon, Cameroon, said in conversations with his son, ““As far as I can remember, our traditions have always been modern, our modernities traditional.””²²⁰ This chapter will explore the chief’s insight in a contemporary context, through the case study of the Bamiléké *chefferie* (chieftainship) of Batoufam, in order to develop an understanding of the ways that chieftaincy today integrates customary practices with modern strategies in complex ways. Through the study of the *chefferie* in Cameroon, and specifically the *chefferie* of Batoufam, I argue that customary institutions can both support and produce aspects of Western Euro-American modernity, particularly democratic, liberal and even neoliberal projects. Additionally, chieftaincy institutions in African nations, such as the *chefferie*, combine these “modern” structures and methods with customary institutions and values for community advancement. The dynamism of chieftaincy has involved both the incorporation of Western institutions and strategies and the mobilization and re-assertion of customary practices. This analysis will thus also show how customary institutions such as chieftaincy are mobilizing “modern” strategies in new ways, namely for social and community goals. As Nyamnjoh states, “Customs are thus not merely being modernised: modernity is being customised.”²²¹ It is in this sense that these customary institutions are in fact reshaping modernity, not merely adopting a Western version of it.

²²⁰ Nyamnjoh, “Our Traditions,” 5.

²²¹ Nyamnjoh, “Our Traditions,” 7.

Bamiléké Chieftaincy: An Introduction to the Chief of Batoufam

On an early November morning in 2014, I sat outside of the metro station in D.C., waiting for the chief, or *chef supérieur*²²² as he is called, of the Bamiléké village of Batoufam and his wife to pick me up. They arrived in a small black car, the chief recognizing me on sight and exiting the passenger side of the vehicle to hug and greet me: “*Jacqueline, comment ça va?!?*”²²³ I responded in kind, and made introductions with his wife, Yvonne, while gathering my small bags and entering into the back of the car.

This meeting was actually a reunion, re-kindling a relationship begun nearly a year before. The chief and I met for the first time in his home village of Batoufam, Cameroon, in late September 2013. At that time my study abroad program organized a visit to the chefferie of Batoufam to understand the role Bamiléké chiefs play in their own culture as well as in the development of their villages. This was my first visit to a chefferie; we received a tour of the palace complex from DASSI KAUDJOU Paule-Clisthène,²²⁴ the Manager of the Community Museum of Batoufam, ate lunch prepared by the wives of the Chief (including Maman Martine, whom I would come to know well), and spent nearly an hour talking with the chief himself. This meeting introduced me to the customs of Bamiléké chieftaincy and piqued my desire to know more about the national and international roles of these powerful chiefs.

At the end of my taught academic program, I decided to return to the village of Batoufam to conduct my month-long independent research project on the role of the chief and the customary associations connected with this institution. Paule, mentioned earlier, became my host

²²² *Chef supérieur* is a French word that signifies the supreme leader or chief of the Bamiléké village. Here I replace the title *chef supérieur* with chief (i.e. the chief of Batoufam), for ease of reading purposes.

²²³ “Jaclyn, how are you doing / how have you been?!”

²²⁴ In Batoufam, individuals write their family and titular names in all capitals, followed by their first names in lowercase letters. I have replicated this practice here as this is how my participants wrote their names themselves in our interviews.

sister, with whom I lived in the village; Maman Martine, one of the chief's wives, became my host mother, caring for all my needs. The chief eventually became my host father, an adopted familial connection that I did not fully realize until our meeting again an ocean away in Washington D.C.

As we rode away from the metro station to Yvonne's apartment, the chief and I picked up old ties. Through informal conversations in the car and at dinner, browsing through photographs on his laptop, and two formal interviews at the apartment, the chief updated me on the affairs of the village that I had long missed. He further explained to me his reasons for visiting D.C. as well as his current village projects and aspirations, adding more evidence and clarity to a reality that I had already learned during my time in Batoufam: the chief and the customary practices and structures associated with his role remain essential to the wellbeing of the village.

In order to understand the chief's role in the mobilization of both Western principles and Bamiléké customs, I will first concentrate on the chefferie, the base of Bamiléké social and political organization and the premier way that Bamiléké traditions and culture are protected and continued. A chefferie consists of a village where all the inhabitants act according to the rule of a chief. As the chief told me, he constitutes the heart of the chefferie: "people say that I am the chefferie. Wherever I am, they say that is where the chefferie is."²²⁵ The chefferie is hierarchically organized, with the chief at the top, acting in a social, political and religious role. The chief, who lives in a special housing complex (the *palais*) at the heart of the village, makes political decisions – with the advice of other advisers – for the wellbeing of his village, and directs the community in religious matters and in the practice of Bamiléké traditions.

²²⁵ "Mais la Chefferie, beaucoup le dit c'est à ma personne. Là où on me cherche, on dit qu'on cherche la Chefferie." Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT, *Chef Supérieur of Batoufam*, interview with author, personal interview 2, Washington, D.C., November 6, 2014.

The man I met in Cameroon and Washington D.C. is formally known as *Sa Majesté* NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT, 14th in the familial line NAYANG. NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT succeeded his father, the late Chief TOUKAM FOTSO Elie Roger, in 1989.²²⁶ As a young man, NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT left the village of Batoufam to pursue higher education at the Cameroonian *Université de Yaoundé I*.²²⁷ After this experience, he was selected to become chief of his village at the early age of 22.²²⁸ After his *l'arrestation* (the arrest or catching of the new chief candidate) to become chief, he returned to school at the Cameroonian *Université de Dschang* in the faculty of agronomy, for a time pursuing studies in engineering. This chief of Batoufam exemplifies what Nyamnjoh highlights as one adaptation of chieftaincy to changing socio-political realities: the pursuit of formal education, particularly advanced degrees.²²⁹

The chief's role as keeper of local customary institutions and practices is evident in the institution of chieftaincy itself. Formal questions around chieftaincy – who can become one, how does one become one, what constitutes a chief, what are his responsibilities – remain an essential part of Bamiléké village tradition. Bamiléké chieftaincy is patrilineal, passing from father to son. When the sitting chief dies, a particular group of his advisers, the Nine Notables, select among his sons a new potential chief in the process of *l'arrestation*. The newly selected candidate is subject to a set of elaborate customary rituals involving not only the candidate himself but also the village. The multi-stage process first includes a series of private tests (*Lakam*), whose end (*la sortie du Lakam*) concludes with the new chief taking many wives in addition to inheriting the

²²⁶ “Batoufam People and History.”

²²⁷ Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT, *Chef Supérieur of Batoufam*, interview with SIT students, informal interview, Batoufam, Cameroon, September 26, 2013.

²²⁸ “Batoufam People and History.”

²²⁹ Nyamnjoh, “Our Traditions,” 8.

wives of his father, save his mother.²³⁰ The customary process then continues with the chief elect's siring of a son and a daughter, the births of these children (at which time he is viewed as the rightful and in a sense divinely-confirmed chief), the maturation of that daughter, and her selection of a woman for the chief to marry in a special manner. The complete process of *l'initiation* (initiation) takes up to twenty years before the new chief is considered fully initiated, installed with an extended royal family.

Although the chief sits at the head of the village, he is advised by several others and remains part of a customary system of checks and balances. The primary system is an elite council called the Nine Notables. The Council of Nine is made up of eight select members of the nobility, plus the chief. Historically, the Council of Nine was composed of those who created the chefferie of Batoufam. They designated one among them to become the line of the royal ruling family, while the seats of the eight other members of the council would also pass from father to son. This council decides the selection of a successor to a deceased chief. The council also functions as a counterweight to the chief's power. Each week, on the eighth day (weeks in the village of Batoufam are eight days long instead of seven), a chief forgoes his title and must "explain himself" to the council, as the chief of Batoufam told me. In such meetings, according to the chief,

We always begin with: what are your projects? What are you thinking of doing? Sometimes you say, eh, I did this, or I am going to do that, but sometimes they come back to what you have already done. Because it is they who are with the people in the village, they tell you that the people are not content because you have done this, because you have done that. And you must explain yourself ... And together thus you find the solutions ... People think that the chief is a dictator, no, not at all, each week he must walk according to the rules given by the population through the eight other notables.²³¹

²³⁰ Each wife has her own lodging in the palace complex to raise her children, and the chief is responsible for the care of these wives, both women he has married himself and those that he inherited from his father.

²³¹ "On commence toujours par: quels sont tes projets? Qu'est-ce que tu penses faire? Parfois tu dis, eh, j'ai fait ceci, ou je vais faire cela, mais parfois ils reviennent sur ce que tu as déjà fait. Parce que c'est eux qui sont avec les peuples dans le village, ils te disent le peuple n'est pas content parce que tu as fait ci, parce que tu as fait ça. Et puis

The role of the Council of Nine highlights the power balance that exists between the chief and other customary institutions in the village. As the chief said to me, “You must obey them. It is the first service. Never disobey the group. It’s the principle. It’s a constitutional principle.”²³² The relationship between the Council of Nine and the chief is also founded upon Bamiléké tradition: the customary rule of community. The chief must obey the Council of Nine because of the custom of group accountability; he cannot disobey the needs or desires of the group in the pursuit of his individual aims.

In his duty as keeper of village customs, the chief has a role in maintaining custom-based village organizations, called *Réunions*.²³³ The concept of the Réunion was best described to me by Paule, my host sister:

A Réunion, it’s a space where people gather to discuss their different problems.... We speak at once of community problems. And financial problems. We could have a health issue somewhere. And we gather at the organization [the Réunion], we discuss it. We could have a problem of money, we meet at the organization [the Réunion], we discuss it.²³⁴

Each Réunion has a different focus: educating children, preserving dance customs, providing economic assistance, sharing agricultural knowledge, etc. However, all revolve around the same basic premise, rooted in local custom. According to the chief, Réunions are “associations that work for the sociability of the population, so that no one finds themselves alone ... associations

ça doit de t’expliquer... Et ensemble donc vous trouvez des solutions... Les gens pensent que le Chef est dictateur, non du tout, toutes les semaines il doit marcher par les règles données par la population auprès des 8 autres notables.” Sa Majesté, personal interview 2, Nov. 6, 2014.

²³² “Il faut les obéir. C’est la première prestation. Jamais désobéir au groupe, c’est le principe. C’est un principe constitutionnel.” Sa Majesté, personal interview 2, Nov. 6, 2014.

²³³ I capitalize *Réunion* to signify the customary organization, in order to differentiate from the French word *réunion* which means meeting, both of which are often used for these respective meanings by my participants in interviews.

²³⁴ “Une réunion c’est un espace où les gens se rassemblent pour discuter leurs différents problèmes ... on parle à la fois des problèmes de la communauté. Et des problèmes financiers. On peut avoir un problème de santé quelque part. Et on se retrouve à l’organisation, on en parle. On peut avoir un problème d’argent, on se retrouve à l’organisation, on en parle.” DASSI KAUDJOU Paule-Clisthène, *Manager of the Community Museum of Batoufam*, interview with author, personal interview, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 27, 2013.

that function for the individual and the community.”²³⁵ These organizations thus reflect customary values of community solidarity and *l’entraide* (mutual aid, helping one another). As LOWE Emmanuel, the chefferie’s Civil State Secretary, observed:

All of the Reunions here have a focal point. *L’entraide* ... All the Réunions there, what they seek is *l’entraide*... That’s to say, first there is mutual aid between the members. When they gather like that, as soon as they are already a member of a Réunion, they now form themselves as though they are a family.... In that manner that, if someone, one of the members, is affected, the entire group is affected.²³⁶

The chief plays a substantial role in the functioning of these customary village associations. For example, he sits at the head of the Réunion the Secret Society of Tradipraticiens, the central organization of traditional doctors who use plant-based methods to treat illnesses in the village. In this role, the chief gathers the doctors once a year for a conference on village health and plant-based medical treatments. The chief is also responsible for the creation and maintenance of two large women’s Réunions, MENOC and KELOFI, which gather together women of the village for economic savings and loaning activities. Finally, the chief heads the Réunion ADEBAT, Association for the Development of Batoufam, an organization he created with other village leaders to tackle issues of central development at the chefferie. The chief’s role in these Réunions, as well as the functions of the Réunions themselves, highlight the complex integration of “modern” practices and customary values and structures in the Chefferie, as the next section on ADEBAT will show.

²³⁵ “Les associations qui travaille pour la sociabilité de la population, pour que personne ne se trouve seule... Les associations fonctionnent pour l’individu et la communauté.” Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT, *Chef Supérieur of Batoufam*, interview with author, informal interview, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 14, 2013.

²³⁶ “Toutes les Réunions ici ont un point focal. *L’entraide*... De toutes les Réunions-là, ce qu’elles cherchent c’est *l’entraide*. C’est *l’entraide*... Ça dit que, il y a d’abord *l’entraide* entre les membres. Quand ils se regroupent comme ça, dès qui sont déjà dans un membre d’une réunion, ils se composent maintenant comme ils sont en famille... De manière que, si quelqu’un, un des membres est touché, ce qui c’est l’ensemble qui est touché.” LOWE Emmanuel, *Secretary of the Chefferie*, interview with author, personal interview, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 13, 2013.

The Village Development Agency: Association for the Development of Batoufam (ADEBAT)

The Réunion *L'Association pour le Développement de Batoufam* (Association for the Development of Batoufam), or ADEBAT, was created on April 7, 2013, by the General Assembly of a previous organization, MIDEBA,²³⁷ in order to establish “a new structure for development.”²³⁸ The headquarters of ADEBAT are in the chefferie of Batoufam, and the organization from its inception has been apolitical and not-for-profit. The organization is governed by a constitution and a set of bylaws that define and clarify its operating rules. As stated in Article 2 of the Constitution of ADEBAT, the organization’s goals are:

- (1) The coordination, facilitation and monitoring of development activities, individuals and associations, and of any legal entities (corporations) and any Batoufam sympathizer;
- (2) The regulation of all development activities; (3) The use of all synergies contributing to development; (4) ...the economic, social and cultural development of the Batoufam group.²³⁹

From this excerpt, it is apparent that ADEBAT employs a modern Western organizational model, one apparently foreign to the customary practices governing the chefferie of Batoufam. The organization is apolitical and not-for-profit, terminology modeled in the manner of NGOs. The rules governing the organization and its operation are delineated in written contractual documents rather than oral tradition. Moreover, the entire purpose of ADEBAT is to function as an overseer of community development, much in the way that development agencies claim to operate. Its constitutional goals recognize individuals, village associations, corporate entities and foreign bodies as various players in Batoufam’s development, following new trends in the global

²³⁷ *Mission de Développement du village Batoufam* (Development Mission of the village of Batoufam)

²³⁸ “Statuts de L’Association pour le Développement de Batoufam (ADEBAT)” [Constitution of the Association for the Development of Batoufam (ADEBAT)], April 7, 2012, author’s personal copy.

²³⁹ “(1) La coordination, l’animation et la supervision des actions de développement, des particuliers et des associations, de toute personne morale Batoufam et de tout sympathisant; (2) La régulation de toutes les activités de développement ; (3) L’utilisation de toutes les synergies concourant au développement ; (4) ...le développement économique, social et culturel du groupement Batoufam.” ADEBAT Constitution.

development industry. It is important to note, however, that the final goal of ADEBAT remains to promote “the economic, social and cultural development of the Batoufam group.” In the eyes of ADEBAT, community development involves an equal balance among economic, social and cultural promotion (e.g., preservation of customs and traditions), a view contrary to the dominant theories of modernization shown in Chapter One.

In regards to membership, ADEBAT will accept individuals, village groups and associations, and corporate members no matter their origin or current residence, as long as they conduct themselves as “allies of Batoufam.”²⁴⁰ In this way the leaders of ADEBAT, including the chief, recognize the importance of various players in the development of Batoufam, from customary village associations to international corporations and foreign donors. Any individual member or the representatives of corporate members may participate in sessions of the General Assembly (although each corporate member must speak with one voice, no matter the number of their representatives present); be an elector or elected member of interior bodies of ADEBAT; and access any information regarding the association. In return, both corporate and natural members must respect all rules and decisions of the management bodies of the organization, as well as paying regular yearly dues, which finance development projects for the village.

In the organization of membership, ADEBAT employs a Western corporate model, albeit with several mutations. Much in the way that a corporation is an entity with continuous existence independent of that of its members, with separate powers and liabilities, ADEBAT exists independent of its members and is subject to its own policies and procedures (its constitution and bylaws). Contrary to other institutions in the village, such as associations of notability or chieftaincy, membership to ADEBAT is not inherited; each member of ADEBAT must pay his

²⁴⁰ “Règlement intérieur de L’Association pour le Développement de Batoufam (ADEBAT)” [Bylaws of the Association for the Development of Batoufam (ADEBAT)], April 27, 2013, author’s personal copy.

or her own way to join. The yearly dues of members of ADEBAT reflect the relationship of shareholders to a corporation. The annual fee is in essence a purchasing of “stock” in the “company,” here a consistent yearly fee instead of growing and decreasing stock values, since no one can purchase stock in ADEBAT. Furthermore, much in the same way that company shareholders have the right to vote on policies and practices, this yearly fee gives members of ADEBAT the right to vote in the General Assembly.

However, the corporate model in ADEBAT differs from a conventional corporation in that it fits village realities and values. ADEBAT membership is designed to encourage participation from as many villagers as possible. A sliding fee scale grants donors of varying amounts membership according to a hierarchical structure, but it also allows all members to vote equally in the General Assembly as well as to stand for election to management positions. Additionally, this scale is set quite low at 2,000 CFA (~3 USD) and can be paid over the course of three months, allowing individuals in Batoufam to join despite their poverty. Loss of membership can only occur as a result of resignation, exclusion, legal incapacity or death. It is particularly interesting to note the grounds for membership exclusion: “ADEBAT can exclude from the association any member who by his unacceptable behavior, his acts contrary to ADEBAT’s objectives, his attitudes that hurt manners, customs and good sense, hinders the proper functioning of ADEBAT or menaces the interests of one or more villages or of the Batoufam Group.”²⁴¹ Specifically, anyone acting against village manners and customs can be denied further membership to ADEBAT. In this way, ADEBAT connects cultural preservation with organizational membership.

²⁴¹ “L’ADEBAT peut exclure de l’association tout membre qui par son comportement inacceptable, ses agissements contraires à ses objectifs, ses attitudes heurtant les mœurs, les coutumes et le bon sens, entrave son bon fonctionnement ou menace les intérêts d’un ou de plusieurs villages ou du Groupement Batoufam.” ADEBAT Bylaws.

ADEBAT is divided into the General Assembly, the Council, the Executive Board, the decentralized bodies, the specialized bodies, and the Office of Audit and Management Control. Such divisions echo modern western models, both corporate and governmental. ADEBAT's General Assembly, in particular, parallels the United Nations General Assembly in form and function. Decisions are made by majority vote of members and, much like observer states in the UN, various persons (both corporate and natural) may attend meetings of the General Assembly. Its main functions include adopting the budget, electing the members of the Executive Board, and passing articles and bylaws that govern the entire organization of ADEBAT as well as village policies, here resembling the passing of resolutions in the UN. In ADEBAT's General Assembly we see an appropriation of the standard western model of constitutional and democratic governance.

On the other hand, the ADEBAT Council, composed of 17 appointed or elected individual members, reflects morphing of the standard corporate board of directors model with roles characteristic of customary institutions. In terms of overall function, the Council operates much like a board of directors, with twice-yearly meetings at the chefferie to discuss corporation management and to vote on "company" (ADEBAT) decisions. The Council governs ADEBAT's Executive Board, just as a board of directors or trustees oversees a company's executive management (e.g., the CEO). Lastly, similar to a board of directors of an NGO in particular, the members of the ADEBAT Council are not paid, and complete specific tasks as individuals on behalf of the organization between board meetings.

However, the Council also integrates customary leadership and institutions into this familiar corporate structure. For instance, the Council is designed to perpetuate the chief's rule in regards to the actions of ADEBAT. In addition to the fact that the chief sits on the Council

himself, he also influences the selection of eleven other members of the Council out of the total seventeen. Furthermore, meetings of the Council may be convened not only by the Council President or by a two-thirds member majority, but also by the chief of Batoufam. The chief thus plays a central role in the functioning of the Council and by extension in all of ADEBAT. Other customary institutions as well, such as the important role held by the heads of family and *notables*, are also incorporated into ADEBAT leadership through reserved membership positions on the Council. The composition of the Council and the powers of its various members show that much leadership and representation of village interests remain through customary institutions.

ADEBAT employs another western corporate strategy re-shaped to fit the cultural realities and customs of the village of Batoufam: the role of Local Delegates. Each group of the Batoufam people existing outside of the village democratically elects their own Local Delegate. The Local Delegate represents his or her village at the General Assembly. ADEBAT's deployment of Local Delegates resembles the strategy of a Western lobbying or investment firm. After briefing them on Batoufam's development issues, ADEBAT sends Local Delegates out to diasporic Batoufam populations in order to garner private investment for village development projects.²⁴² Such a system reflects recognition by the organization's leadership that private investment, not the state, represents the newest resource model for development projects. ADEBAT underpins its development efforts with a neoliberal vision: the best method of conducting development is through the use of the free market and private investment, rather than state action or public programs.

Yet the function of Local Delegates also reflects and requires village customs. Local Delegates "work in collaboration" with the village chiefs of their residences in order to

²⁴² "They record the financial, material and physical assistances of the people in his village in the work of private investment." ADEBAT Constitution.

accomplish their tasks:²⁴³ i.e. they utilize the customary institution of chieftaincy and the power it carries in their respective villages to garner private investment. Furthermore, the use of elites (wealthy members of the diaspora) in village development represents a community check on neoliberal principles of individual achievement, in order to benefit all members of the community. The economic and political elites in the diaspora are employed by ADEBAT to finance development for the entire village community through private investment (in addition to joining the organization as yearly paying members).

I titled this section on ADEBAT “The Village Development Agency,” not only acknowledging its mobilization of a Western corporate model (one used by many development agencies), but also nodding to the ways that ADEBAT is used in the village. The chief of Batoufam mobilizes the “development agency” ADEBAT in order to conduct his various development projects for the village. As Secretary LOWE described to me, “all the Réunions here, when they have a problem- where there is a problem of development, it is those individuals [in ADEBAT] who reflect on it. Who are the line of development. Who choose community projects.”²⁴⁴ As LOWE highlights, ADEBAT is used in the village as the main organization for development projects and initiatives.

The chief markets and mobilizes ADEBAT as a development agency consciously and for specific reasons. He told me in one of our interviews in D.C.:

It’s already local associations that exist, then we can anchor the NGOs that exist, but now as any NGO or local association, there must be outside financing. But if um- but if the financing comes from the outside specifying what they are going to do, I think that there it is also a failure. Voilà. So I wish that, either someone who wants to help or an

²⁴³ ADEBAT Constitution.

²⁴⁴ “Donc, toutes les réunions-là, quand ils ont un problème- quand il y a un problème du développement, ce sont les gens [in ADEBAT] qui réfléchissent. Qui font la ligne du développement. Qui choisissent les projets communautaires.” LOWE, personal interview, Nov. 13.

association who wants to help from the outside, partners with an association on the inside.... Like a Réunion, yes, like a Réunion.²⁴⁵

The Chief utilizes ADEBAT as an organization through which he may participate in the global development industry. As an organization modeled after the structure of a Western corporation, ADEBAT seems familiar to international development actors. It legitimizes its participation in development work in the way that a customary institution, such as chieftaincy, cannot. Through ADEBAT, the chief of Batoufam can harness private investment or partner with outside NGOs and other Western development agencies, as ADEBAT in many ways fits with the dominant discourse governing development.

Additionally, the use of ADEBAT allows the Chief of Batoufam to remain involved and in many respects in control of village development. As the chief notes:

So, if it was- if we knew the company, if it was a village agency or a village association that was constructing [the school], certainly we would have the right to tell them, but at least to tell them: go finish the roof because it's weeks of classes that the children are going to lose.... But, when it's people who we don't know how they got here, how they obtained the money, they do what they want. Sometimes they don't finish but you don't know who you can ask about it.... Knowing that this existing Réunion has a moral consciousness of the community, before handling the job... I think that we have a better chance that it will happen.... I know the mentality of all the members, I know the mentality of the president, I know nearly everything that is necessary, so there are less risks of diversion or embezzlement, or even of laxity and permissiveness, or if someone does something that does not fit, you have a right to say why, and to rise up.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ "C'est déjà des associations locales qui existent, puis eh, on peut ancrer des ONGs qui existent, mais maintenant comme toute ONG ou toute association locale, il y a falloir des financements de l'extérieur. Mais si le financement vient de l'extérieur en spécifiant de ce qu'ils vont faire, je dis c'est là qu'ils vont le faire. Mais si um- si on ne sait pas ce qu'on va faire, je pense que là c'est aussi un échec. Voilà. Donc je souhaite que, soit quelqu'un qui veut aider ou une association qui veut aider de l'extérieur, s'associe à une association à l'intérieur... Comme une Réunion voilà, comme une Réunion." Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT, *Chef Supérieur of Batoufam*, interview with author, personal interview 3, Washington, D.C., November 6, 2014.

²⁴⁶ "Alors, si, c'était- si nous connaissons l'entreprise, si c'était une entreprise du village ou une association du village qui construisaient, certainement on sera le droit de lui dit, mais, au moins de lui dit: va sceller l'être haut parce que les semaines de classes que les enfants vont perdre, c'est comme ça, c'est comme ça. Mais, quand c'est des gens on sait pas comment ils sont arrivés, comment ils ont obtenu le crédit, ils font qu'ils veulent. Parfois ils finissent pas mais tu ne sais pas qui tu vas demander. Mais, par contre... Sachant que cette Réunion existant a une conscience morale de la communauté, alors avant de confier le travail... Je pense qu'on a plus de chance que ça réalise... je connais la mentalité de tous les membres, je connais la mentalité de la présidente, je connais presque tous qu'il faut, donc il y a moins de risques de détournements ou même de laxisme, de paresse ou si quelqu'un quelque chose qui ne tient pas, tu as un droit de dire mais pourquoi, à se lève." Ibid.

Funneling development projects through ADEBAT, a village Réunion and organization inherently connected with and dependent upon customary structures in spite of its resemblance to a Western corporation, allows the chief to remain centrally involved in the development of the village. In fact, this development is probably more effective than if it were overseen by an external NGO. ADEBAT allows members of the community to ensure that projects are actually completed, and with the proper end result; to guarantee that the money harnessed by foreign actors is in fact going to its intended community projects; and to voice the most serious needs of their community and speak on the formulation of development initiatives. In this situation, the proper management of modern village development occurs through the customary institution of the chief, instead of the most commonly identified international development players such as foreign NGOs.

Customizing Liberal Economics: Banks, Loans and Community Solidarity

The Réunions MENOC and KELOFI are central organizations, gathering individuals from all fifteen *quartiers* of the village of Batoufam to meet at the palace complex. Each of these two Réunions consists solely of women, KELOFI regrouping about 120 members and MENOC around 140. KELOFI was created by the current chief of Batoufam, while MENOC was created by his father, the previous chief. The current chief created KELOFI as an additional means to “aid the population” and “support the village.”²⁴⁷ Both Réunions conduct many of the same actions, mainly providing varying types of economic support to all women of the village who

²⁴⁷ “Aider la population”, “soutenir le village”; MEKOUOKOY Djuidje, *Secretary of the Reunion MENOC*, interview with author, group interview, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 28, 2013.; NONO Emilienne, *Censeur of the Reunion MENOC*, interview with author, group interview, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 28, 2013.

join. Between the two, over 260 women in Batoufam directly share in the benefits that these Réunions provide.

Both MENOC and KELOFI retain strong connections with customary institutions in the chefferie. In addition to their creation by current and former chiefs, both Réunions are led by queens of the village. Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF Felicité, an elderly and exceptionally sharp retired professor, is the President of KELOFI. Chiefs initially initiate women into the matrilineal and hereditary title *Mefo* for performing actions and service that benefit the village community. As the chief described, the title Mefo signifies that “she has a nobility, and she is independent in relation to her husband. It’s true that she is the wife of someone, but she’s also a woman who already has this capacity to give advice either to the chief or to the public.”²⁴⁸ Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF said in an interview that she is the President of KELOFI because she was the first mefo, or queen, this chief named, and thus the chief gives her certain responsibilities in the community in her retirement. The Reunion MENOC is run by another type of queen, Mafo PEUMI.²⁴⁹ The word *Mafo* signifies a woman who is a queen because she is a wife of the chief. Through the leadership of Mafo PEUMI and Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF, both KELOFI and MENOC remain closely linked with the institution of chieftaincy, and are a means by which the chief works for the wellbeing of the village of Batoufam.

Both MENOC and KELOFI are organized in a similar manner. In addition to the President, both Réunions have an administrative committee that consists of a secretary; a *commissaire au compte*, which is similar to an accountant; a treasurer; and a *censeur* who

²⁴⁸ “Elle a une notabilité, et... elle est indépendante par rapport à son mari. C’est vrai que c’est la femme de quelqu’un, mais c’est aussi une femme qui a déjà cette capacité de donner conseil soit au Roi soit au publique.” Sa Majesté, personal interview 2, Nov. 6, 2014.

²⁴⁹ JOUKAP MBATCHOU Madeleine, *member of KELOFI*, interview with author, personal interview, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 24, 2013.

maintains order during meetings. Both Réunions regroup for meetings at the Chefferie twice a month. In addition to their other actions, these meetings function to communicate important news that pertains to the entire village. Both organizations as well revolve around similar goals: to provide *les entraides sociales*, mutual social assistance.

The Réunions MENOC and KELOFI accomplish these goals through a particular employment of *Tontines*. Essentially, a “Tontine” is a type of community financial institution found in many Réunions. As Paule described:

A Tontine, it’s a place where we gather to discuss, to save [ourselves] from financial problems. Therefore, in the Tontine, we speak about money. In the Tontine we speak more about financial problems.... We contribute, we take, and we exchange. The one who has need, they borrow, the one who does not have need deposits, and we do, it’s a bit of an exchange. You borrow, you give to someone else ... so that they can live.²⁵⁰

In a Tontine, members gather for the purpose of resolving financial problems, both communal and individual. The meetings of a Tontine allow members to give financial advice to one another, as well as provide tangible support through various services. A Tontine provides the structure through which members of the village can loan and borrow money and grow their current wealth through savings. On a community level, Tontines in Batoufam also raise money to donate to village-wide development projects, particularly the projects instigated by ADEBAT.

Tontines – commonly referenced as a type of “Rotating Savings and Credit Association” (ROSCA) – now currently exist in all ten provinces of Cameroon, but have their roots in the Bamiléké Grassfields area where they have existed since before colonization.²⁵¹ In this area, the ROSCA members pooled together resources in a rotating system of individual beneficiaries. This

²⁵⁰ “Une tontine, c’est un endroit où on se rassemble pour discuter, pour épargner de problèmes financiers. Donc, dans la tontine, on parle de l’argent. Dans la tontine on parle plus de problèmes financiers... On cotise, on prélève, et on échange. Celui qui a besoin, il prête, celui qui n’a pas besoin dépose, et on fait, c’est un peu un échange. Tu prêtes, tu donnes à quelqu’un d’autre... pour qu’il puisse vivre.” DASSI KAUDJOU, personal interview, Nov. 27.

²⁵¹ Leonard Tchuindjo, “The Evolution of an Informal Financial Institution: The Rotating Savings and Credit Association in Cameroon,” *African Review of Money Finance and Banking*, (January 1, 1999): 5.

resource sharing evolved from that of physical labor (work ROSCA), to staple goods (goods ROSCA), to the shell currency of *Mbeum* (money ROSCA).²⁵² At the end of the 1700s, according to economist Leonard Tchuindjo, “the ROSCA was the nervous system of the economy of the Bamiléké area,” and had begun its spread to neighboring regions.²⁵³ The advent of European colonialism in Cameroon further shaped the evolution of these organizations. The high liquidity of coins introduced by German colonization in 1884 became the new ROSCA currency, and the development of writing by the French and British colonization post-World War I facilitated the accounting of these financial operations.²⁵⁴ The colonial period also fostered the vast spread of these organizations, thus in different areas of Cameroon the ROSCAs are both pre-colonial creations and recent introductions.²⁵⁵ In the post-independence era, socio-economic realities such as the payment of children’s school fees led to the development of new ROSCA initiatives seen today such as the bank and other savings and loan functions.²⁵⁶

In present-day Cameroon, these ROSCAs – termed Tontines in French – dominate approximately 90 percent of the informal financial system and mobilize several billion CFA Francs.²⁵⁷ Studies show that in 1989, “the deposits collected by the ROSCAs were more significant than the monetary volume held by the whole of the nation’s secondary banks.”²⁵⁸ Although Tontines are a phenomenon found widely in Cameroon, they are especially common amongst the Bamiléké.²⁵⁹ Geschiere asserts that this is due to their connection with customary

²⁵² Tchuindjo, 6, 7.

²⁵³ Ibid, 7.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 7-8.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 9.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 10.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 5.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 5.

²⁵⁹ Patrice de Comarmond and Dan Soen, “Savings Associations among the Bamiléké. Traditional and Modern Cooperation in South West-Cameroon,” *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 41, no. 2 (1971): 191, doi:10.3406/jafr.1971.1689.

institutions in this region, explaining, “The credit associations – the *tontines* or *njangis* – had such spectacular success in the west because they continued the tradition of associations around the chieftaincy. There is now so much money involved in these *tontines* of the west that they threaten the functioning of the official banks. The chiefs seem to be closely involved with these developments.”²⁶⁰

Although Tontines remain a widespread practice, MENOC and KELOFI illustrate particularly complex examples of this in that they contain several Tontine services with clearly delineated rules for money lending and borrowing. Both MENOC and KELOFI conduct the following Tontine services, termed: (1) tontines (a type of rotating loan system) (2) the bank and (3) *l’aide* or *les aides*, a collection of money raised and held to finance community events. KELOFI, in addition to the bank, conducts the fund.

Tontines, according to anthropologists Patrice de Comarmond and Dan Soen, “represent a multi-faceted institution in which the economic and social aspects, the traditional and the modern, are tightly linked and interdependent.”²⁶¹ In their Tontine services, the women’s Réunions MENOC and KELOFI integrate Western liberal economic strategies with a customary social structure (the Réunions were created by chiefs and are run by queens) and customary social practices such as *l’entraide*²⁶² and solidarity. As Comarmond continues, “the well-integrated social organization provided favourably [sic] ground for the development of these Associations ... the traditional social cohesion was utilized for non-traditional purposes.”²⁶³ Customary social organization and values thus foster the development of Tontine mutual-savings associations. These customary associations then use Western liberal and neoliberal strategies of

²⁶⁰ Geschiere, 167-168.

²⁶¹ Comarmond and Soen, 192.

²⁶² Mutual assistance, mutual helping

²⁶³ Comarmond and Soen, 192.

individual economic development through banks and savings, loans, and forms of insurance policies, but in the effort of achieving social and community goals.

MENOC and KELOFI both employ the service present in every form of Tontine, that of the “tontine,”²⁶⁴ which refers to members’ contributions in a rotating loan system. In this service, the group conducts “*la présence*,”²⁶⁵ which occurs at nearly every meeting of the Tontine organization (in this case, twice a month). When a member is present at the meeting, she gives a *cotisation* (a certain sum of money) to the tontine, usually an established standard amount, perhaps 1,000 CFA (~1.70 USD), although members may donate according to their means. The total of these collected *cotisations* is then given to one member. The next meeting, each member contributes again and the beneficiary rotates.

As NONO Emilienne and MEKOUOKOY Djuidje, the *censeur* and secretary of MENOC, explained:

Each day, if it’s you who receives, we are going to contribute, and give it to you... If you give me 500 CFA [~0.80 USD], I will return to you 500 CFA. If you had given me 2,000 CFA [~3 USD], I am going to return to you your 2,000 CFA... And so on. If you had given me 200 CFA [~0.30 USD], I am going to return to you 200 CFA. If I gave you 500 CFA, you are going to return to me my 500 CFA. The day that it comes to me.... Because we receive to the end of the list. You receive today, the other day I receive. The other day it’s her.²⁶⁶

This signifies that the sum that any one member gives at a meeting for the tontine depends on the sum she received on her turn from the current member benefiting. If Jacky received 200 CFA

²⁶⁴ The tontine is a smaller service in a Tontine organization, which is why I use the lowercase to differentiate between the two.

²⁶⁵ MBOOPOUO TOUKAM Jean Pierre, *Notable and President of Réunion NGOOGUE*, interview with author, personal interview, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 18, 2013.

²⁶⁶ “Chaque jour, si c’est toi qui bouffe, on va cotiser, et te donner... Si tu me donnais 500 CFA, je vais te remettre 500 CFA. Si tu m’avais donné 2,000 CFA, je vais te remettre tes 2,000 CFA... Ainsi de suite. Si tu m’avais donné 200 CFA, je vais te remettre 200 CFA. Si je t’ai donné 500 CFA, tu vas me remettre mes 500 CFA. Le jour que c’est arrivé chez moi... Parce qu’on bouffe au bout de rôle. Tu bouffes aujourd’hui, l’autre jour je bouffe. L’autre jour c’est elle. C’est comme ça qu’on fait.” NONO, group interview, Nov. 28.; MEKOUOKOY, group interview, Nov. 28.

from Christiane and 500 CFA from Annie on her turn, she will pay 200 CFA and 500 CFA on the turns of Christiane and Annie, respectively. This ensures that the amount of money a woman gives to the tontine will eventually equal the amount that she receives. It also creates a loan and borrowing system that allows for members of the tontine to give different amounts of money based upon their means and individual situations.

Depending on the number of women attending the meeting, the total sum from a tontine can be as large as 100,000 CFA (~162 USD) or more. The beneficiary of the tontines can then use this revenue however she pleases. Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF described this tontine strategy as such:

There is the tontine, there is a rate, we can say 1,000 CFA [~1.60 USD]. If you feel that you cannot have 1,000 CFA all the time... you only give 500 CFA. In such a way that, when it's your turn to benefit, we will give you only 500 CFA, we only contribute 500 CFA. That will make, either 20,000 or 100,000 CFA [~32 or 162 USD], depending on the number of women participating, and we give it to you now. And it is these tontines- we see now who is going to help you. Either to go, and use it like a commercial fund, either to use it for buying seeds to farm your field, either to pay the very people who will help you to cultivate the field because if you are tired you cannot cultivate this time. Either to buy medicines in the case where you are sick, etcetera, etcetera. Thus, there you have it- each time there is at least one beneficiary. Thus, it's that for the tontines.²⁶⁷

The tontine incorporates a modern Western economic model. First, it resembles a microfinance loan, as the tontine provides its members with small amounts of financial capital that they are then expected to repay over time. Additionally, the tontine loan system incorporates liberal and neoliberal elements, according to Ferguson, “the valorization of market efficiency,

²⁶⁷ “Il y a la tontine, il y a soit un taux, on peut dire 1000 CFA. Si tu te sens que tu ne peux pas avoir 1000 CFA tout le temps... tu ne donnes que 500 CFA. De tel sort que, quand c'est ton tour de bénéficier, on te donnera que 500 CFA, on cotisera que 500 CFA. Ça te fasse, ou 20,000 ou 100,000 CFA, ça dépend du nombre des femmes qui se trouvent dedans, et on te donne pourquoi maintenant. Et ce sont ces tontines- on trouve maintenant qui vont t'aider. Soit pour aller, utiliser comme un fond commerce, soit pour utiliser pour acheter les semences pour cultiver ton champ, soit pour payer les gens mêmes qui vont t'aider à cultiver le champ parce que si tu es fatigué tu ne peux pas cultiver ce temps. Soit pour acheter les médicaments dans le cas que tu es malade, etcetera, etcetera. Donc, voilà- à chaque tour il y a un moins un bénéficiaire. Donc, ça c'est pour les tontines.”; NGOUOMONEDJEF Félicité, *Mefo and President of KELOFI*, interview with author, personal interview 1, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 19, 2013.

individual choice, and autonomy; [and] themes of entrepreneurship.”²⁶⁸ It focuses on individual economic development, seeing the individual as an entrepreneur and rational economic actor, one best suited to make decisions to increase their own development. The tontine loan system is thus creating neoliberal subjects: individuals who take the responsibility for their social wellbeing that was previously done by the state.

Unlike Western loaning institutions, however, the tontine incorporates village and customary realities. First of all, the tontine collects no interest over time. Secondly, it allows members to pay for their loans on a flexible payment schedule, giving varying amounts of *cotisations* based on their means. For collateral, the tontine employs village social customs. Comarmond and Soen explain, “No deposit may guarantee the subscription payment. Such a deposit would be superfluous, since the Savings Association is, above all, a traditional association for mutual help, and therefore, the loyalties of the traditional society are automatically transferred to it.”²⁶⁹ The collateral for the tontine is thus the social expectation that you will pay the member on her turn what she paid on yours, a mutually agreed upon customary social contract based upon the responsibility of one member of the group to its other members. This differs from the (often written) contracts of loan agreements with state or international financial institutions. The tontine also relies on the solidarity of the community in order to benefit the individual: all of the members pool funds to benefit one individual on a rotating basis. Lastly, the tontine allows the member benefiting to use the funds however she wishes, a practice that differs from the conditions on microfinance loans, but one that is arguably more neoliberal.

Both KELOFI and MENOC provide the Tontine service of *l’aide* or *les aides*. This literally translates to: help, assistance or aid. *Les aides* are a collection of money raised and held

²⁶⁸ Ferguson, “Uses of Neoliberalism,” 174.

²⁶⁹ Comarmond and Soen, 196.

to finance unexpected events in the community. Most often the Réunions use this aid for *les assistances deuils*, which provide financial assistance to family members of the deceased during the funeral celebrations and burial. Each member of KELOFI and MENOC will pay an amount to keep in these collections. Each Réunion then gives the total sum to a trusted person to keep until someone dies, as they always raise money in advance to prepare for the unpredictability of life. When a death occurs, as Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF explains, “We give a part to the family to buy a coffin, and we have a part with which we will use to cook and make the drinks, when people will arrive there, for consumption.”²⁷⁰ The members of the Réunion then attend the *deuil*, or funeral process, participating in the dancing, singing, and crying. The members even wear specialized uniforms that they sew themselves to take part as a unified group in this cultural custom.

Viewed in a different light, the practice of *les aides* resembles a type of Western-based insurance policy. Over time, money is institutionally saved and can be collected by the individual under certain circumstances. In the case of financing funeral services, *les aides* specifically equates with a modern life insurance policy that a family uses to pay for the wake, funeral and burial services. These Réunions have thus taken communal systems of support and inserted neoliberal and individually-based systems of insurance: in *les aides*, the collective members donate the money and thus the “life insurance” is paid for by the community for the benefit of the individual.

Additionally, these Réunions have changed an individually-based policy of insurance and made it communal. In other cases, the Réunions gather *les aides* from their individual members

²⁷⁰ “On donne une partie à la famille pour acheter le cercueil, et on a une partie qu’on va faire la cuisine et faire les boissons, quand l’association va arriver là-bas, pour, pour consommer. Voilà comment ça se passe.” NGOUOMONEDJEF Félicité, *Mefo and President of KELOFI*, interview with author, personal interview 2, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 25, 2013.

in order to support communal events or village-wide projects. As Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF elucidated, “We support all that the chief does at the chefferie. It’s especially in that sense. We are the support. When the chief does things, we, we support him. Even financially. Materially, etc. We support what he does for traditional aims.”²⁷¹ This example further shows the community-oriented nature of these organizations, as well as their continued connection with customary institutions and practices, particularly the chief.

In addition to the tontines and *les aides*, both KELOFI and MENOC keep a central bank, with KELOFI adding a separate fund as well. In the case of the bank, both Réunions’ members can decide to give money at the Réunion meetings twice a month. KELOFI and MENOC collect all of these *cotisations*, which can total around 300,000 CFA (~485 USD) or 400,000 CFA (~647 USD) each time, given the number of women present, and place them in the “bank.”²⁷² For KELOFI’s fund, each woman desiring membership pays a one-time obligatory sum (similar to a membership fee) that KELOFI collects and puts in the fund. During the course of the year, any member of the Réunions can “buy” from the bank or fund for intervals of two months and one month respectively, after which they repay the capital and interest. Interest is calculated every two months for the bank and monthly for KELOFI’s fund. For KELOFI specifically, interest is 10 percent for every two months or 5 percent per month. If a member would like to take out an additional loan, she may borrow another sum from the Réunion as long as she deposits the interest from the last loan. If a member discovers that she cannot reimburse after the loan period,

²⁷¹ “On appuie à tous ce que le Chef fait à la Chefferie. C’est surtout dans ce sens-là. On est un appuie. Quand le Chef fait les choses, nous, on l’appuie. On appuie. Même financièrement. Matériellement, etcetera. On appuie pour ce qu’il fait sur le plan traditionnel.”; NGOUOMONEDJEF, personal interview 2, Nov. 25.

²⁷² NGOUOMONEDJEF, personal interview 1, Nov. 19.

she pays that period's interest and is then given more time to repay the rest of the loan. As Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF explained:

If in the two months you cannot reimburse the totality, you put the interest. You leave again for two months, again having the time to search. Such that, for example, me [laughs], I borrow 100,000 CFA [~162 USD]; at the end of two months I no longer have money. I put the 11,000 CFA. We leave me again for two months. At the end of these four months I haven't been able to. We push, we push. But here, here when I am now obligated to give is the opening of the bank at the end of the year. Now I have to find the 111,000 CFA.²⁷³

As the Mefo indicates, each member must repay her loans to the bank by the end of the bank year, because at this time the Réunions open the bank and share the interest and capital among their members. At each meeting, the secretaries of KELOFI and MENOC have kept written records of the sums each member has given to the bank. At the end of the year, the financial managers calculate the interest earned by each member. Each member is then returned the total capital that she has given to the bank during the year as well as the interest that this capital produced throughout the year. At the end of the fund year, a different time than the bank, the members of KELOFI open the fund and share the capital and interest among the contributing members, before beginning again at zero. As Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF describes:

This fund, we keep it and make it grow. And make it grow. Exactly like the bank, which is a savings. Thus, we open the fund at the end of a year. Like the bank. We open it- of course, with all the interest that it has produced. We distribute it, we open it at the end of a year, and the fund, and the bank, and that produces a lot of interest, thus it's a savings. Thus we start again. Again. That's it. These are all of the things that allow us to live.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ "Si dans les deux mois tu ne peux pas rembourser la totalité, tu mets l'intérêt. Tu quittes encore pour deux mois de temps, encore d'avoir le temps de chercher. De telle sorte, par exemple moi, [laughs] je prête 100,000 CFA; au bout de deux mois je n'ai plus d'argent. Je mets le 11,000 CFA. On me laisse encore pour deux mois. Au bout de ces quatre mois je n'arrive pas. On pousse, on pousse, mais-là, là où je suis obligée maintenant de donner c'est l'ouverture de la banque à la fin d'année. Il faut que je trouve le 111,000 CFA." NGOUOMONEDJEF, personal interview 1, Nov. 19.

²⁷⁴ "Ce fond, on garde et le fait multiplier. Et le fait multiplier. Exactement comme la banque, qui est une épargne. Donc, on casse le fond au bout d'un an. Comme la banque. On casse- bien sûr, avec tous les intérêts que ça a donnés. On distribue, on casse au bout d'un an, et le fond, et la banque, et ça produit beaucoup d'intérêt, donc c'est une épargne. Donc on recommence. Encore. Voilà. Voilà autant de choses qui fait un peu vivre." Ibid.

When KELOFI has not loaned out the entirety of the money in the fund or the bank, the Treasurer takes these sums and deposits them in the MC² bank in the city.²⁷⁵ However, this is not often the case, as KELOFI tries to continually loan out the bank and the fund in the goal of producing interest and thus increasing the savings.²⁷⁶

In the examples of the bank and the fund, customary organizations such as KELOFI and MENOC incorporate and integrate Western economic strategies. The bank and the fund rely on the capitalist economic model of individual savings and the use of loans to provide necessary starter capital in order to increase value due to interest payments. Both of these Tontine services greatly resemble a Western banking system, as members of the Tontine deposit funds into their “bank account.” Although pooled into one large fund, the Secretaries of the Réunions keep written accounts of the amount that each member has deposited, like the keeping of individual bank accounts. The Réunion then loans money from the bank or the fund to its members, and not necessarily those who contributed to the initial capital. This is exactly how a commercial bank borrows funds from individual accounts to loan to other individuals who apply for loans with the bank. KELOFI and MENOC then calculate these loans with interest, allowing the initial capital in the “bank” to grow. As an individual’s account with a commercial bank grows yearly with interest, the initial capital of the contributing Réunion members is returned to them once a year with the added interest the amount has made.

However, MENOC and KELOFI mutate their “banks” to fit a customary system, one based upon village socio-economic realities as well as customary practices. First of all, KELOFI and MENOC have altered the loaning process, calculating their monthly interest at five percent, a rate much lower than loans granted by state or international institutions through commercial

²⁷⁵ *Mutuelles communautaires de croissance* (Community Growth Mutual Funds) bank

²⁷⁶ NGOUOMONEDJEF, personal interview 2, Nov. 25.

banks or microfinance projects.²⁷⁷ Individuals to whom banks would deny loans due to insufficient credit, a common reality in villages such as Batoufam, can still borrow from the bank or the fund in the Réunions' Tontines. Borrowers from the Tontine can also use the funds however they wish, a situation different from a commercial bank that would demand a proposed business venture or other investment (house, car, etc.), or a microfinance loan with specific conditionality. Secondly, the women's Réunions modify the commercial banking savings model. Many of the contributions by individual Réunion members are too small to open an individual private bank account. The Réunions thus pool all of these individual accounts into one community "account" whose funds they will at times deposit into the local MC² bank,²⁷⁸ thus using the city bank as a community and not an individual. It is in these ways that the Réunions adapt Western strategies to fit their village realities.

As with every customary institution discussed in this chapter, the Tontines in the women's Réunions MENOC and KELOFI are founded upon the village customs of *l'entraide*, meaning mutual assistance or helping one another, and solidarity. As Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF explained to me:

Here is a bit of the goal. Of all these associations. It's *les entraides* (mutual assistance), truly, on the social plan, economic, everything.... That's just the clear objective. It's for survival. It's for survival... so that people can escape poverty. The fight against poverty... That's thus the goal, it's so that people survive, by themselves fighting. But, society thus, we support each other. We support each other.... So, for all of that, we- we always put in common everything that we have done. It's because of that, that I say that our life here is truly [laughs], it's truly for one another.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ According to the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, in 2011 microfinance interest rates across Africa were at a median of approximately 30 percent, with a 5th percentile of approximately 10 percent, meaning that only five percent of microfinance institutions in are collecting interest rates below 10 percent. Richard Rosenberg, Scott Gaul, William Ford, and Olga Tomilova, *Microcredit Interest Rates and Their Determinants, 2004-2011*, Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) and Its Partners, June 2013, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.cgap.org/sites/default/files/Forum-Microcredit%20Interest%20Rates%20and%20Their%20Determinants-June-2013.pdf>, 8.

²⁷⁸ *Mutuelles communautaires de croissance* (Community Growth Mutual Funds) bank

²⁷⁹ "Voilà un peu le but. De toutes ces associations. C'est les entraides, vraiment, plan sociaux, économique, tout. C'est ça... Voilà un peu l'objectif clair. C'est pour la survie. C'est pour la survie... Pour que les gens sortent de la

The solidarity and unity of these Réunions comes from the fact that members must rely on each other for *l'entraide*, for mutual aid. In a Tontine system, one member cannot benefit from the bank, the fund, or the tontine unless every other member contributes. The members as a whole *cotise*, or raise funds, so that each member can benefit. In turn, the reason that the Tontines of MENOC and KELOFI can utilize this *l'entraide* comes from the concepts of solidarity and kinship already existent in the culture of this community. Thus, the economic strategies employed by Tontines function successfully because they are integrated into the community's values. Furthermore, the Réunions use neoliberal economic strategies at times for decidedly un-neoliberal aims. As *l'entraide* represents mutual aid, the incorporation of the individual into the community in order to bring up the community as a whole, it functions as the antithesis of neoliberalism, a practice that views the unrestricted precedence of the individual and individual development over all else.

These Réunions of Tontines thus employ the customary values of *l'entraide* and solidarity through the addition of social services to the aforementioned neoliberal capitalist strategies. As Paule explained:

And in the Réunions, there is that which one calls solidarity. In addition to the money that we loan in the Réunion, if me, I have a problem, Inesse is in the same Réunion as me, Jacky is in the same Réunion as me, if I have a problem, Jacky comes and visits me. It could be with a plate of food, it could be a little bit of corn, it could be a bit of salt, or, well, we realize that you, you are quite poor and that you have nothing to eat at your house. We decide, well, we are part of a Réunion or an organization, we need to help our sister, who has nothing to eat, who has nothing at her house.²⁸⁰

pauvreté. La lutte contre la pauvreté ... C'est comme ça, et voilà dont le but, c'est pour que les gens survivre, en se battant eux-mêmes. Mais, la société donc, on soutient les uns les autres. On soutient les uns les autres.... Donc, pour tout ça, nous, on met en commun toujours tous ce qu'on a fait. C'est pour ça, que je dis que notre vie ici c'est vraiment [laughs] les uns pour les autres." NGOUOMONEDJEF, personal interview 1, Nov. 19.; NGOUOMONEDJEF, personal interview 2, Nov. 25.

²⁸⁰ "Et dans les réunions, il a y ce qu'on appelle la solidarité. En plus de l'argent qu'on prête dans la réunion, si moi, j'ai un problème, Inesse est dans la même réunion que moi, Jacky est dans la même réunion que moi, si j'ai un problème, Jacky vient me rendre une visite. Ça peut être avec un plat de nourriture, ça peut être un peu de maïs, ça peut être un peu de sel, ou bien, on se rend compte que toi, tu es assez pauvre et tu n'as rien pour manger à la

Paule illustrates that Tontines such as MENOC and KELOFI employ the customary practices of *l'entraide* and solidarity to provide holistic social support in addition to the purely financial. This social support comes in the form of advice or counseling in times of distress, and gifts of food or tools.

Furthermore, these sorts of functions, vitally important to members of the community, differ from those of the standard Western finance institution. The Réunions' integration of Western and neoliberal strategies with customary practices represents another clear difference between these village organizations and their "modern" international and state counterparts. As Paule elaborated: "The bank, it doesn't do that. The bank doesn't know that. The bank is there for the interest of the banker. While the Réunion, the *cotisations* (the group contributions), the association, it is there for the interest of the community."²⁸¹

Countless respondents were clear to highlight the fact that many international development organizations like NGOs and commercial banks, including the World Bank, do not operate using this ideology. NONO and MEKOUOKOY, the *censeur* and the secretary of MENOC, declared, "The World Bank has too many conditions. There are no conditions here [in the Tontine]. For us, it's to help people."²⁸² Mefo NGOUOMONEDJEF supported this point in saying:

So that's kind of the point. Of all these associations. It's *les entraides* (mutual assistance), really social, economic, everything. That's it. To put- someone began to build their house, voilà, in their tontine... they win 200,000 CFA [~324 USD]; 500,000 CFA [~809

maison. On se décide, bon, nous faisons partie d'une réunion ou bien d'une organisation, il faut qu'on aide notre sœur, qui n'a pas de quoi à manger, qui n'a pas de quoi chez elle." DASSI KAUDJOU, personal interview, Nov. 27.

²⁸¹ "La banque, elle ne fait pas ça. La banque ne connaît pas ça. La banque est là pour l'intérêt du banquier. Lorsque la réunion, la cotisation, l'association, elle est là pour l'intérêt de la communauté." Ibid.

²⁸² "La banque mondiale a trop des conditions. Il n'y a pas les conditions ici [dans la Tontine]. Pour nous, c'est pour aider les gens." NONO, group interview, Nov. 28.; MEKOUOKOY, group interview, Nov. 28.

USD]; that allows him to build. To put on the roof, etcetera, etcetera. So these are all the things. So the banks in town, we do not know that, we do it here. [laughs]²⁸³

As such, respondents from the village found these foreign institutions to be much less effective than Réunions and Tontines at addressing community needs and problems. Paule continued:

The bank, you sit, you talk to the bank who passes by – in the Réunion you can fully explain your problem. We can decide not only to loan to you, we can say, well, the problem is big enough, and we decide to *cotise* (to raise funds) to help you. At the bank, the bank does not *cotise* (raise funds) to help you. The Réunion can *cotise* and help. We say well, we do not loan to you, we give to you.... Réunions allow- the population benefits because the populace does not have enough money to go and borrow from there- or does not have the means to go take loans in the banks. Because to take a loan from the bank, it's a fairly high percentage. But in the Réunion, it's a story that is much like a family because we consider ourselves as being members of the same family, and we can mutually help each other. Because the bank is the state. And the bank is not there to aid the population to do whatever. The bank turns its money, while the Réunion helps the population.²⁸⁴

To conclude, the Réunions of MENOC and KELOFI provide another example of the ways in which customary institutions can both support and produce “modern” neoliberal projects. These two organizations remain strongly rooted in the customary institutions and values of the Bamiléké chefferie. Through their Tontine services of the bank, fund, rotating loan systems of tontines, and insurance policies of *les aides*, these organizations incorporate capitalist

²⁸³ “Donc, voilà un peu le but. De toutes ces associations. C’est les entraides, vraiment plan sociaux, économique, tout. C’est ça. Pour mettre- quelqu’un a commencé sa maison à construire, voilà, dans sa tontine... il gagne 200,000 CFA; 500,000 CFA ; ça lui permet d’élever. Bien de mettre le toit, etcetera, etcetera. Donc voilà autant de choses. Donc les banques en ville, on ne connaît pas ça, on fait ici. [laughs]” NGOUOMONEDJEF, personal interview 1, Nov. 19.

²⁸⁴ “La banque, tu t’assois, tu parles à la banque qui passe- à la réunion tu peux bien expliquer ton problème aux gens de la réunion. On peut décider non pas seulement de te prêter, on peut dire bon, le problème est assez grand, et on décide de se cotiser pour t’aider. À la banque, la banque ne cotise pas pour aider. La réunion peut cotiser et aider. On dit bon, on ne te prête pas, on te donne ... Les réunions permettent, font bénéfice- la population bénéficie parce que les populations n’ont pas assez d’argent pour aller prêter de là- ou n’ont pas les moyens pour aller faire des prêts dans les banques. Parce que pour faire un prêt dans la banque, c’est à un pourcentage assez élevé. Mais dans la réunion, c’est une histoire qui s’est fait un peu comme une famille parce qu’on se considère comme étant membres de même famille, et qu’on peut s’entraider. Parce que la banque c’est l’état. Et la banque n’est pas là pour aider la population à faire de n’importe quoi. La banque tourne son argent, alors que la réunion aide la population.” DASSI KAUDJOU, personal interview, Nov. 27.

economic strategies. MENOC and KELOFI also mobilize many liberal ideas of the importance of the individual, particularly as a rational actor best suited to determining her own development through entrepreneurial action. They also employ strategies of neoliberal development, namely the idea that private, free-market functioning can offer solutions to social and economic problems, and that these systems should exist outside of government or political regulation.

However, MENOC and KELOFI also demonstrate the ways that customary institutions employ neoliberal concepts and Western practices in new ways, namely in the advancing of community and social (quite “traditional”) goals. The Tontine services of these organizations adapt Western economic strategies to village realities, morphing individually-based practices into a customary framework centered on the importance of the community, solidarity, and *l’entraide*. Arguably, it is in fact due to these customary values that the Western economic strategies employed in the Tontines function at all. Additionally, villagers of Batoufam continually highlighted that these customary institutions succeed in achieving community and individual development in ways that other “modern” international and state development institutions do not.

Lastly, as MENOC and KELOFI were created by Chiefs of the Chefferie of Batoufam, they further illustrate how the chief, a customary institution and the representative of tradition, mobilizes Western economic structures and neoliberal concepts in new ways. The chief of Batoufam makes use of other customary institutions and practices in the village, such as the Réunions of ADEBAT, MENOC and KELOFI, in order to complete his village projects. These organizations could not function without the chief of Batoufam, as it is this institution around which all other customary structures and practices in the village revolve.

The Chief of Batoufam: Customary Chief and Corporate CEO

In addition to mobilizing other customary village institutions, such as the Réunions of ADEBAT, MENOC and KELOFI, the chief of Batoufam conducts many individual actions to work for his village's development. These further highlight how the chief is "customizing modernity and modernizing customs": employing Western practices in new and complex ways that integrate and in fact require customary institutions and structures. It is due to this that I describe the chief as both "Chief and CEO" of his village: customary leader and Western corporate actor, dynamic and simultaneously "traditional" and "modern." The chief of Batoufam remains a global actor, participating in a global connectedness and clearly aware of the place of his village in relation to a global landscape.

Firstly, the chief of Batoufam uses the Internet and social media to promote and secure resources for his village. Through partnerships with various YouTube channels, including SOPIEPROD TV and *CultureetTradition* Bamiléké (Bamiléké Culture and Tradition), the chief utilizes social media and technology to market his village customs, in the end goal of garnering international attention and material and financial support for village development. The eight currently available YouTube videos include a 40-minute guided walking tour of the chefferie palace complex,²⁸⁵ in which Paule explains the chefferie's functioning and various customs associated with Bamiléké chieftaincy. Two videos²⁸⁶ involve personal interviews with the chief of Batoufam, dressed in complete chiefly attire. Here, the chief answers questions about the

²⁸⁵ "Visite guidée chefferie des BATOUFAM By SOPIEPROD Paris" [Guided visit of the chefferie of Batoufam by Sopiéprod Paris], *YouTube*, last modified January 15, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkZxStXkd8Y&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

²⁸⁶ "Fô Nayang Toukam Innocent, Chef supérieur Batoufam parle de son Royaume" [Chief Nayang Toukam Innocent, Chief superior of Batoufam speaks about his kingdom], *YouTube*, last modified October 4, 2013, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty6TYGK0lls&feature=youtube_gdata_player; "Sa Majesté Nayang Toukam Inocent roi des Batoufam invité de SOPIEPROD Paris" [His Majesty Nayang Toukam Inocent king of Batoufam guest of Sopiéprod Paris], *YouTube*, last modified April 23, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=075b2lVAuHE&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

current state of affairs in Batoufam and describes the customs of his village, such as chieftaincy succession and various symbolic totems. Two other videos²⁸⁷ consist of the chief, again in full regalia, directly addressing the Batoufam diaspora as well as foreign individuals interested in the village. In the first video, the chief describes his wishes for both the diasporic and foreign communities, and in the second invites individuals to join him at an event during his next trip to Paris. A final video²⁸⁸ presents a minute-and-a-half silent clip showing the ruined state of a traditional building in the chefferie. It ends with the words “Batoufam La case à reconstruire!” (Batoufam The building to rebuild!), implicitly requesting foreign donation to achieve this community project.

These videos illustrate the concept, coined by anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff, of “ethnoprise” or *Ethnicity, Inc.*: “the incorporation of identity and the commodification of culture-as-intellectual property, this by appeal to the natural copyright of indigenous knowledge, by deploying sovereign exclusion, and by exploiting markets in difference, not least via the tourist industry, the media, and the Internet.”²⁸⁹ The chief of Batoufam thus commodifies and markets customary structures and practices, mobilizing them in a capitalist fashion to encourage foreign investment and promote village development. These actions resemble how a corporate CEO would advertise for their company in order to influence people to buy their products and thus increase the company’s wealth.

²⁸⁷ “Vœux 2014 du roi des BATOUFAM by SOPIEPROD Paris” [2014 vows of the king of Batoufam by Sopiéprod Paris]. *YouTube*, last modified January 1, 2013, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqQ6Ncx-ouY&feature=youtu.be_gdata_player; “Une invitation de Sa Majesté Inocent NAYANG TOUKAM Roi des BATOUFAM by SOPIEPROD” [An invitation by His Majesty Inocent Nayang Toukam King of Batoufam by Sopiéprod], *YouTube*, last modified April 10, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xg_yDoMcKGw&feature=youtu.be_gdata_player.

²⁸⁸ “Batoufam une case à reconstruire!” *YouTube*, last modified March 17, 2014, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mE7hNB1MPd4&feature=youtu.be_gdata_player.

²⁸⁹ Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving toward Africa* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 18.

A second habitual action of the chief is his personal search for foreign investment. This was one of the primary reasons for his visit to Washington D.C., and thus why I found myself entering Yvonne's car that November morning. Much in the way that a company CEO travels to attend meetings with other corporate institutions or individual financiers to encourage investment in their company, the chief of Batoufam travels abroad to search for possible investors in his village. The chief described his trip to the United States:

This is the purpose of my trip. Sometimes it's to search for these NGOs who can help the community, either by direct aid, either by direct aid, that means that they can come directly, to invest. Um, to help, by a program [pause] and very often I ask for manual things where the population effectively participates in the development of these projects. I have a lot of projects, um that I balance like that for the NGOs or philanthropists who can help us, there it is.... So if I travel a lot it's because I want people to understand that it's like that. If not, people, in order to contact people, NGOs, or even individuals to say, come and help Batoufam, come and do such and such a project, [once we had this] I would not travel any more, I would stay there.²⁹⁰

As a CEO acts as the representative of their company, the chief of Batoufam thus acts as an ambassador of his people to the world.

On this particular trip to Washington D.C., the third of his lifetime, the chief visited the Inter-American Development Bank, specifically searching on behalf of his village for individual private investment. As he continued to explain in our interview:

We know someone who is the director of the Canadian branch, voilà. He was interested, we met.... when I presented regarding development and all of that he was very interested and he invited us to his office.... He told us that in Canada for example he knows [people], particularly a former Canadian minister, who each time has said 'when I'll take

²⁹⁰ "Enfin. C'est l'objet de mon voyage. Parfois c'est chercher ses ONGs qui peuvent aider la communauté soit par des aides directs, soit par eh aides directe ça dit qu'ils peuvent venir directement, investir. Um, aider, par un programme [pause] et très souvent je demande des trucs manuels où la population participe de façon effective élaboration de ces projets. J'ai beaucoup de projets, um que je balance comme ça pour les ONGs ou des philanthropes qui peuvent uh nos aider, oh voilà.... Alors si je bouge beaucoup c'est parce que je veux que les gens comprennent que c'est comme ça. Si non, des gens, pour contacter des gens, des ONGs, ou même des particuliers pour dire, venez aidez les Batoufam, venez faire tel projet, je ne bougerais plus je resterais sur place." Sa Majesté, personal interview 2, Nov. 6, 2014.

my retirement I would like to work, to do agricultural projects in Africa, work in Africa and all that.’²⁹¹

Even in regards to my research, and in all his interactions with foreign researchers, the chief thinks of how he can mobilize the end project for the development of his village. As he said to me at the end of our final interview:

I don’t want to define what is called research where I am from, but it should be a base, something like a tool to use tomorrow, so I wish that this research that you are in the process of doing on these associations could be a great tool that we will use tomorrow for an effective development for the Batoufam people. And, that the community is supported and that the community thrives through this document that you are going to provide, and also strongly that we find ... a project, that partner, eventually of an appearance- that’s to say someone or an organization who is going to finance and who is going to support. So, that as soon as you finish the document, that we easily find people interested in supporting this people, in supporting the development of Batoufam. So that’s all I want, that’s all I wish. I wish that you have all the convincing components, all the details, I give you all of my availability. You have my card, I hope? You still have it?²⁹²

Conclusion

As this final section has presented, the chief of Batoufam markets customs on the internet and social media, personally travels abroad to meet with possible foreign investors, and even mobilizes partnerships with foreign researchers, all to work for his village’s development.

²⁹¹ “On connaît quelqu’un qui est le directeur de la branche canada, voilà. Il était intéressé, on se rencontrait.... Quand j’ai exposé par rapport au développement tout ça il était très intéressé et il nous a invité à son bureau.... Il nous a dit qu’au Canada par exemple il connaît, particulièrement un ancien ministre canadien, qui chaque fois disait ‘quand je vais prendre mon retraite je voudrais travailler, faire de l’agriculture en Afrique, travailler en Afrique et tout ça.’” Sa Majesté, personal interview 2, Nov. 6, 2014.

²⁹² “Eh, je veux pas définir ce qu’on appelle recherche chez nous, mais ça devait être un socle eh quelque chose comme un outil à utiliser demain eh, donc eh je souhaite que cette recherche que tu es en train de faire sur des associations puissent être un grand outil qu’on utilisera demain pour eh un développement effectif du peuple de Batoufam. Et, que la communauté soutiennent et que la communauté s’épanouissent à travers ce document que tu vas fournir, et vivement aussi qu’on trouve des- parce que un projet, ça compagne, éventuellement d’une air, c’est à dire de quelqu’un ou de l’organisation qui va financier et qui va soutenir eh. Donc eh, que dès que tu sors le document, qu’on trouve facilement des gens intéressés à soutenir ce peuple à soutenir l’épanouissement de Batoufam. Donc voilà tous mes vœux, voilà tous mes souhaits. Je souhaite que tu as tous les éléments convaincantes, tous son détail, je te donne toute ma disponibilité. Tu as ma carte j’espère ? Tu l’as encore?” Sa Majesté, personal interview 3, Nov. 6, 2014.

These actions highlight how the chief understands his village to be a part of a greater global development landscape, one that functions in a corporate manner through the use of marketing and publicity; private investment; and international power players such as foreign governments, Bretton Woods institutions,²⁹³ and NGOs. These individual actions are in addition to the chief's utilization of other customary institutions in the village such as Tontines and Réunions (ADEBAT, MENOC and KELOFI) to work for community development. This demonstrates how the chief of Batoufam has taken his customary role, described at the beginning of this chapter, and broadened it to include representing and advocating for his people in an international sphere: acting as the "Chief and CEO" of the village. This exists, despite a global development industry that tends to disregard customary institutions such as chieftaincy as "traditional," and thus either irrelevant, at best, or inhibitory, at worst, to community development.

²⁹³ The Bretton Woods institutions are a set of international development organizations including, among others, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank Group, the African Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, etc.

Conclusion

The Creation of a New Modernity

While traditional structures are often perceived as antithetical to modernity and development and, therefore, are excluded from the global development industry, customary institutions can in fact produce aspects of Western modernity. This was demonstrated by the case study of the chefferie of Batoufam, and particularly the role of the community's current chief: Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT. The individual actions of the chief of Batoufam, such as marketing his village and himself on the Internet, and traveling abroad to search for foreign investment, highlight how he mobilizes his customary role as chief to function as a CEO of the village, a "modern" Western construct. This idea is further supported by the chief's leadership in organizations such as the Association for the Development of Batoufam (ADEBAT) and the Tontines MENOC and KELOFI, which themselves utilize the Western and neoliberal development practices of the capitalist individual actor, loans and banking systems, private investment, and the employment of development corporations. While these Western practices are not usually associated with traditional structures, and in fact are seen as incompatible with them, they are in reality being mobilized by customary institutions.

Not only does chieftaincy in Cameroon exhibit dynamism to adapt itself to new realities, this institution simultaneously integrates the aforementioned "modern" principles and strategies into community-based customary frameworks. In the words of literary scholar and political scientist David Simo:

All this proves that the opposition tradition-modernity is perhaps one of those forgone conclusions that hinder knowledge more than they favor it. This opposition is inadequate to capture the complexity of the African reality. We must resolve to realize that the sociocultural reality of Africa today is certainly very different than that of a hundred

years ago, but that it has not ceased to be African and that it shows, despite obvious ruptures, continuities that we need to understand.²⁹⁴

Chieftaincy institutions in African nations, here shown in the case study of the chefferie of Batoufam, combine the aforementioned “modern” structures and methods with customary institutions and values for the purpose of community advancement. They have both, à la Nyamnjoh, modernized customs and customized modernity by utilizing liberal and neoliberal ideologies and practices for new uses, namely social and community goals.

Furthermore, the dynamic creations in the chefferie of Batoufam could not exist without their customary or traditional foundations. The Tontine services would not function without the customary values of solidarity, community, and *l’entraide*, the ideology of mutual helping. ADEBAT would not exist without the customary structures of nobility and chieftaincy. All of the Réunions in Batoufam, and their mobilization of both customary and Western practices, would not exist without the role of the chief, as it is this institution that lies at the heart of all tradition in the village.

The chefferie of Batoufam thus presents a particular kind of relationship between tradition and modernity. It not only defies the idea that traditions are antithetical to modernity, but proves that “modern” constructions often could not exist without tradition. Additionally, the customary institution of chieftaincy in Cameroon presents forms of liberal and neoliberal modernity not yet demonstrated in European structures and institutions. Chieftaincy in Cameroon thus demonstrates that customary institutions in Africa are, in fact, reshaping modernity by

²⁹⁴ “Tout cela prouve que l’opposition tradition-modernité fait peut-être partie de ces évidences qui entravent la connaissance plus qu’elles ne la favorisent. Elle est inadéquate pour saisir la complexité de la réalité africaine. Il faudrait se résoudre à réaliser que la réalité socioculturelle de l’Afrique d’aujourd’hui est certes bien différente de celle d’il y a cent ans, mais qu’elle n’a pas cessé d’être africaine et qu’en elle se manifeste, malgré les ruptures évidentes, des continuités qu’il s’agirait d’appréhender.” Goethe-Institut/Yaoundé and David Simo, *La politique de développement à la croisée des chemins : le facteur culturel : colloque organisé à Yaoundé les 13 et 14 juin 1996* [Development policy at the crossroads: the cultural factor: symposium held in Yaoundé on June 13 and 14 1996] (Yaoundé: Editions CLE, 1998), 131.

creating new conceptualizations, forms and applications of its original Western form. The institution of chieftaincy in Cameroon – viewed as “traditional,” unchanging, inhibitory, by the dominant modernity discourse – is in fact creating new and dynamic forms of modernity that exist beyond what the West has heretofore presented.

This suggests the idea, framed and supported by Jean and John Comaroff, that modernity is in fact being *created* in Africa, rather than something that must be *imposed* on Africa. As the Comaroffs present, these African realities are first of all neither a failed copy of a Western Euro-American modernity, nor a more customary version of it;

modernity in the south is not adequately understood as a derivative or a *doppelganger*, a callow copy or a counterfeit, of the Euro-American ‘original’... Nor is it best labeled an ‘alternative modernity.’ It is *vernacular* – just as Euromodernity is a vernacular – wrought in an ongoing, geopolitically situated engagement with the unfolding history of the present.²⁹⁵

Secondly, as the realities currently produced in African societies display forms and innovations heretofore non-existent in Euro-America, Africa is in fact prefiguring the West. As the Comaroffs argue:

Contrary to the received Euromodernist narrative of the past two centuries – which has the global south tracking behind the curve of Universal History, always in deficit, always playing catch-up – there is good reason to think the opposite: that, given the unpredictable, under-determined dialectic of capitalism-and-modernity in the here and now, it is the south that often is the first to feel the effects of world-historical forces, the south in which radically new assemblages of capital and labor are taking shape, thus to prefigure the future of the global north.... [I]n the history of the present, the global south is running ahead of the global north, a hyperbolic prefiguration of its future-in-the-making.²⁹⁶

The dynamic and hybrid constructions forming in these “traditional” African villages, such as the chefferie of Batoufam, thus do not present an alternative modernity. They demonstrate a different form and, in fact, conceptualization, of modernity altogether. This new

²⁹⁵ Comaroff and Comaroff, 7, 9.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 12, 19.

conceptualization of modernity manifests itself in a two-fold manner: in Africans' awareness of their lack of equal access to resources and power systems present in Western industrialized nations; and in their rejection of this phenomenon's connection with local culture and customs. As Ferguson describes, "Africans who lament that their life circumstances are not modern enough are not talking about cultural practices. They are speaking instead about what they view as shamefully inadequate socioeconomic conditions and their low global rank in relation to other places."²⁹⁷ Africans reformulate modernity as "a privileged and desired socioeconomic condition."²⁹⁸

Africans are thus redefining modernity as a socio-economic status, or standard of living, one that denies opposition with tradition and instead *requires* the mobilization of customs in order to achieve this higher socio-economic status for both the individual and the community. The creations occurring in African chieftaincies are not simply another version of modernity as commonly understood, i.e. a multiple modernity, one that is more customary. Rather, these villages are reshaping what modernity means. As the dynamisms in places such as the chefferie of Batoufam demonstrate, a new modernity is being created in Africa, by Africans, one that may soon be leading the West.

Implications of a New Conceptualization of Modernity

One may ground these theoretical formulations in important real-world realities, posing the question: why do the aforementioned conclusions about modernity and tradition matter in a practical sense? Here, I return to the initial impetus of this project, highlighted in the

²⁹⁷ Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, Kindle Loc. 3171-3172.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, Kindle Loc. 665-667.

introduction: to discover why the current international development industry ignores customary institutions, and to suggest a possibility for a better development practice.

The great importance of the conceptualizations of modernity and tradition is that these discourses have power. As Escobar asserts:

In sum, the system of relations establishes a discursive practice that sets the rules of the game: who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise; it sets the rules that must be followed for this or that problem, theory or object to emerge and be named, analysed, and eventually transformed into a policy or a plan.²⁹⁹

Discourses of modernity and tradition create the framework within which everything must operate. A modernization strategy could never seek to incorporate customary institutions if these discourses conceive the traditional as antithetical to the achievement of modernity.

Discourses of what it means to be a modern state or society also shape the development industry by determining development strategies and practices. This is because the end goal of these practices and policies (and the end goal of development, as shown in Chapter One) is to reach a state of modernity. As Escobar explains, “Instead of seeing change as a process rooted in the interpretation of each society’s history and cultural tradition ... these professionals sought to devise mechanisms and procedures to make societies fit a pre-existing model that embodied the structures and functions of modernity.”³⁰⁰ This modernity, as already shown, remains the dominant Western model.

As such, this discourse of what it means to be modern shapes the way that development is conducted; it determines what development projects are selected and who receives the money and resources in order to conduct them. Ideas about the inherent opposition of tradition and modernity, and the supposed inhibitory role played by traditions in modernization, have led to a

²⁹⁹ Escobar, 87.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 91.

corresponding view in the development industry of tradition. As Escobar writes, “Development was conceived not as a cultural process (culture was a residual variable, to disappear with the advance of modernization)....”³⁰¹ Discourse of modernity thus explains the exclusion of customary institutions, such as chieftaincy, from the global development industry. It explains why the realities I saw and lived in the chefferie of Batoufam are absent from the picture of development presented on that street corner in Bastos. This exclusion will continue until these dominant conceptualizations of modernity are changed. As Escobar asserts:

although this discourse has gone through a series of structural changes, the architecture of the discursive formation laid down in the period 1945-55 has remained unchanged, allowing for the discourse to adapt to new conditions. The result has been the succession of development strategies and substrategies up to the present, always within the confines of the same discursive space.³⁰²

The assertion that a new conceptualization of modernity is being created in Africa, and that this modernity both utilizes and depends upon customary institutions, suggests a new possibility for the relationship between tradition, local cultures, and development. As Simo presents:

If we assume that development can only be conceived as part of a strictly European way of life, then we must admit that it is necessary to transform Africa to reach it.... But then, might one think, the African culture I have just described is not antithetical to any idea of development. My opinion is that it is not. The attitude of the African that I just described signifies a great propensity to openness, to the acceptance of the new. It is thus anything but the fixation on the past which is often discussed. But this discussion of openness still allows for the survival of the past.³⁰³

³⁰¹ Escobar, 91.

³⁰² Ibid, 89.

³⁰³ “Si nous supposons que le développement ne peut se concevoir que dans le cadre d’un mode de vie rigoureusement européen, alors il faudrait admettre qu’il faut transformer l’Afrique pour y accéder... Mais alors, pourrait-on penser, la culture africaine que je viens de décrire n’est-elle pas antithétique à toute idée même de développement. Mon avis est qu’il n’est pas le cas. L’attitude de l’Africain que je viens de décrire signifie une grande propension à l’ouverture, à l’acceptation de la nouveauté. Il s’agit donc de tout autre chose que la fixation sur le passé dont il est souvent question. Mais cette question ouverture s’accommode de la survivance du passé.” Goethe-Institut/Yaoundé, 137.

As the chefferie of Batoufam demonstrates, tradition need not be abandoned on a process of modernization or development, as it is not innately inhibitory to the desired end goal: the achievement of modernity.

In fact, customary institutions such as chieftaincy present a particularly effective resource for development. Customary institutions offer a means for a community to increase their level of socio-economic status, therefore achieving a state of modernity and development much in the way the chief of Batoufam mobilizes his role as customary chief to further development of his community. This can occur through the Tontine actions of community loans, banks, and *les aides*; the chief's securing of private investment in his travels or with social media; and the development projects sponsored by ADEBAT.

The most important issue that now remains is the one presented by sociologist Jean-Marc Ela: how can we integrate indigenous strategies and knowledge, and mobilize the intelligences of the African continent to work for its development?³⁰⁴ According to Ferguson, “Can neoliberalist doctrine be put to different uses?”³⁰⁵ Is it possible for an alternative development path that empowers and supports these village customs, institutions that continue to hold great power in their communities and that are in fact furthering modern aims? As one interviewee questioned: can we empower and support certain African traditional structures – the institution of chieftaincy, its associated structures such as Tontines, and the customs of solidarity and *l'entraide* on which this depends – to redefine the concept of development in an African framework?³⁰⁶ So much remains to be lost if the development paradigm continues to revolve

³⁰⁴ Jean-Marc Ela, *Innovations sociales et renaissance de l'Afrique noire : Les défis du monde d'en-bas* [Social innovation and renaissance of Black Africa: the challenges of the world from below] (Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1998), 236.

³⁰⁵ Ferguson, “The Uses of Neoliberalism,” 173.

³⁰⁶ TAGUE Alexi, *Professor at University of Yaoundé I*, interview with author, informal interview, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 7, 2013.

around Western-rooted modernization theories, ignoring what the African continent has to offer. As MBOOPOUO TOUKAM Jean Pierre, a *notable* in the Chefferie of Batoufam, pronounced, “It’s today ... that we drive towards the West, that we lose many things.”³⁰⁷

This study has sought to provide an investigation into some of the customary institutions and values being mobilized for village development in Cameroon. Yet so much remains to be explored. In the chefferie of Batoufam alone, over 100 Réunions like MENOC, KELOFI and ADEBAT work for the wellbeing of their community,³⁰⁸ only three of which this research investigated in a rather short time. Additionally, the village of Batoufam presents only one case study among the hundred Bamiléké chefferies in the Grassfields, the thousands of other village chieftaincies in Cameroon, and the millions that exist across the African continent.

In order to envision an alternative way of conducting development, it is essential that we continue to work with these customary village institutions in order to understand their organizational configuration, goals, values, actions, and contributions to development. The diversity that could be found among these structures and organizations across African nations, and the ways in which each could provide alternative development strategies to the problems faced by the people of this continent, remain a valuable richness that has yet to be truly understood and utilized. As Ela illustrates in his book *Social Innovation and Renaissance of Black Africa: the Challenges of the “World from Below”*:

At the hour of doubt, the difficulty of separating the question of development from the West imposes on us some fundamental interrogations about the credibility of a paradigm whose claim to universality clashes with basic social practices that must be reconsidered

³⁰⁷ “C’est aujourd’hui que nous avons- que nous courons vers l’occidental- que nous perdons beaucoup de choses.” MBOOPOUO, personal interview, Nov. 18.

³⁰⁸ LOWE Emmanuel, *Secretary of the Chefferie*, interview with author, informal interview, Batoufam, Cameroon, November 28, 2013.

as to whether the failure of development today is not an opportunity and a condition for the revival of Black Africa.³⁰⁹

Perhaps the current state of development in Africa thus provides an opportunity for the world to reconsider its international development practice and form new frameworks and strategies – ones that would in fact benefit from the realities currently being created in African nations.

³⁰⁹ “À l’heure du doute, la difficulté de séparer la question du développement de l’Occident nous impose des interrogations fondamentales sur la crédibilité d’un paradigme dont la prétention à l’universalité se heurte aux pratiques sociales de base qu’il faut bien reconsidérer pour savoir si la faillite du développement ne constitue pas aujourd’hui une chance et une condition pour la renaissance de l’Afrique noire.” Ela, 32.

Appendix 1: Primary Research

- DASSI KAUDJOU, Paule-Clisthène. *Manager of the Community Museum of Batoufam*. Interview with author. Informal Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 22, 2013.
- DASSI KAUDJOU Paule-Clisthène. *Manager of the Community Museum of Batoufam*. Interview with author. Personal Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 27, 2013.
- DASSI KAUDJOU Paule-Clisthène. *Manager of the Community Museum of Batoufam*. “Tour of the Bamiléké Chefferie of Batoufam.” Batoufam, Cameroon, September 26, 2013.
- JOUKAP MBATCHOU Madeleine. *Member of KELOFI*. Interview with author. Personal Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 24, 2013.
- LOWE Emmanuel. *Secretary of the Chefferie*. Interview with author. Personal Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 13, 2013.
- LOWE Emmanuel. *Secretary of the Chefferie*. Interview with author. Informal Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 28, 2013.
- MBOOPOUO TOUKAM Jean Pierre. *Notable and President of Réunion NGOOGUE*. Interview with author. Personal Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 18, 2013.
- MEKOUOKOY Djuidje. *Secretary of the Reunion MENOC*. Interview with author. Group Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 28, 2013.
- NGOUOMONEDJEF Félicité. *Mefo and President of KELOFI*. Interview with author. Personal Interview 1. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 19, 2013.
- NGOUOMONEDJEF Félicité. *Mefo and President of KELOFI*. Interview with author. Personal Interview 2. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 25, 2013.
- NONO Emilienne. *Censeur of the Reunion MENOC*. Interview with author. Group Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 28, 2013.
- “Règlement intérieur de L’Association pour le Développement de Batoufam (ADEBAT)” [Bylaws of the Association for the Development of Batoufam (ADEBAT)], April 27, 2013. Author’s personal copy.
- Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT. *Chef Supérieur of Batoufam*. Interview with SIT students. Informal Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, September 26, 2013.
- Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT. *Chef Supérieur of Batoufam*. Interview with author. Informal Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 14, 2013.

Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT. *Chef Supérieur of Batoufam*. Interview with author. Personal Interview 1. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 28, 2013.

Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT. *Chef Supérieur of Batoufam*. Interview with author. Personal Interview 2. Washington, D.C., November 6, 2014.

Sa Majesté NAYANG TOUKAM INOCENT. *Chef Supérieur of Batoufam*. Interview with author. Personal Interview 3. Washington, D.C., November 6, 2014.

“Statuts de L’Association pour le Développement de Batoufam (ADEBAT)” [Constitution of the Association for the Development of Batoufam (ADEBAT)], April 7, 2012. Author’s personal copy.

TAGUE Alexi. *Professor at University of Yaoundé I*. Interview with author. Informal Interview. Batoufam, Cameroon, November 7, 2013.

Appendix 2: Figures

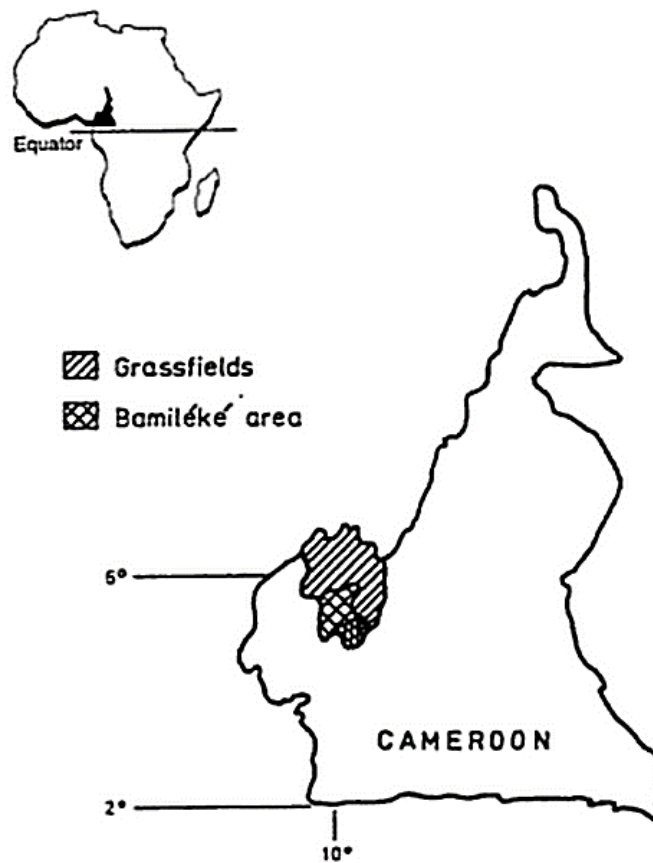


Figure 2. *Above left*, Map of Cameroon situated in the African continent; *right*, Map of the Bamiléké Highlands and Grassfield area of Cameroon. Feldman-Savelsberg, Pamela, *Plundered Kitchens, Empty Wombs: Threatened Reproduction and Identity in the Cameroon Grassfields* (University of Michigan Press, 1999), 44.

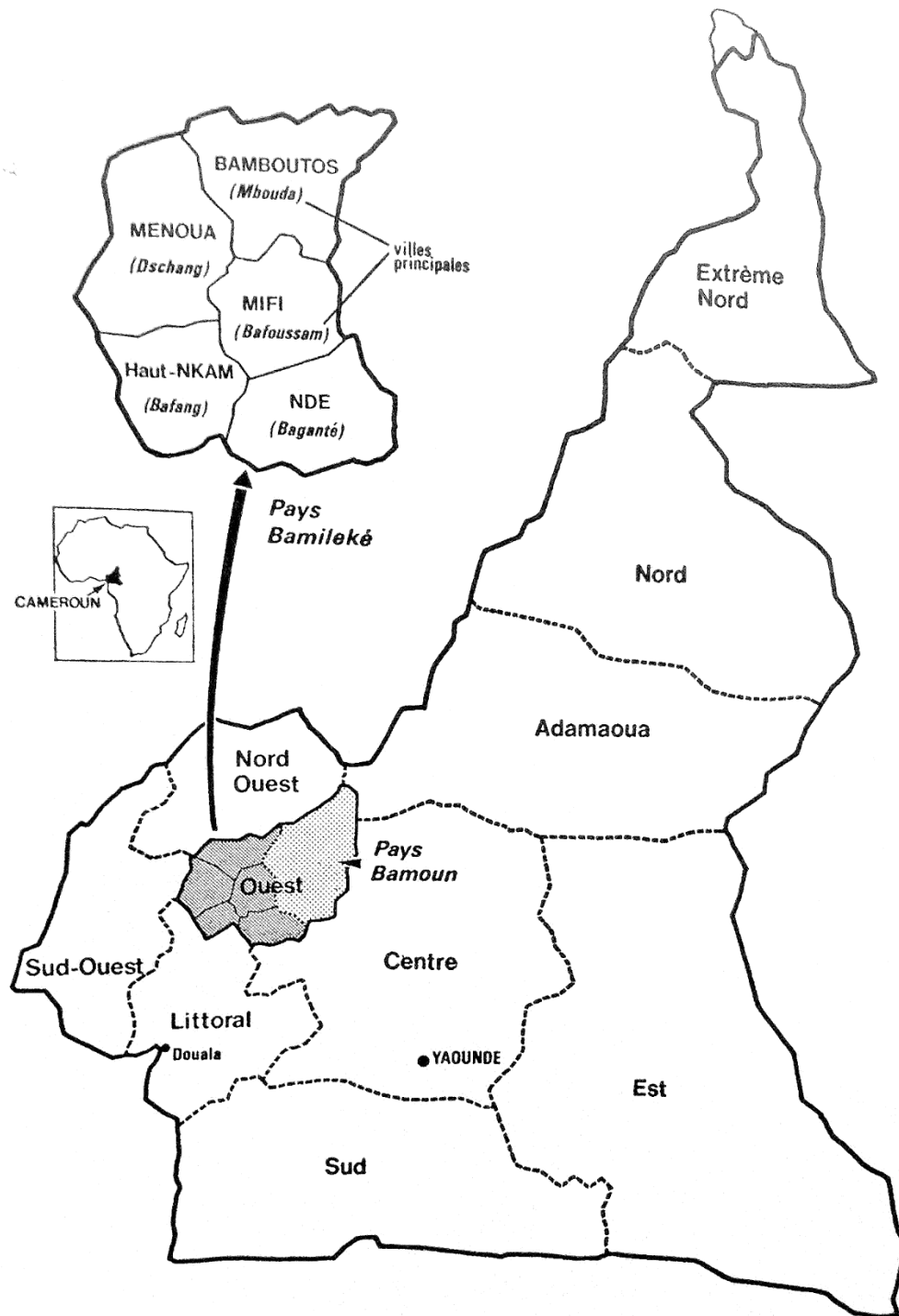


Figure 3. Map of Cameroon with its 10 Provinces, highlighting the Bamileké region. Metangmo, Pierre-Marie, *Développer pour libérer: L'exemple de Bafou, une communauté rurale africaine* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1986), 138.

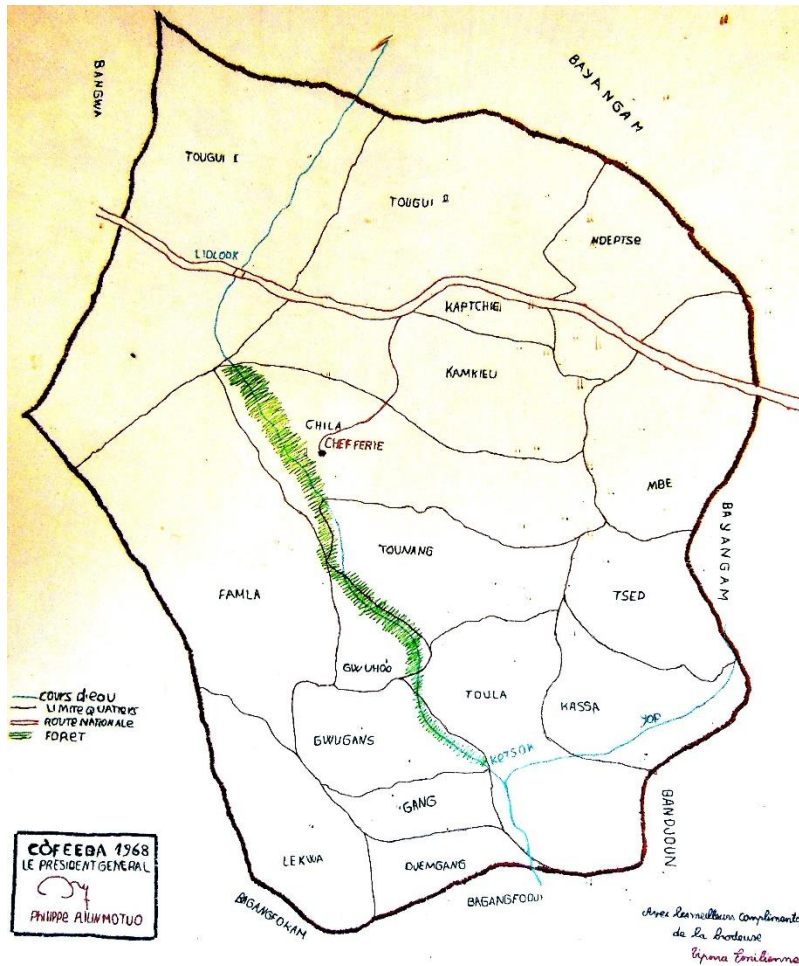


Figure 4. Map of Batoufam (includes the 15 quartiers, the Chefferie and the Sacred Forest). Photograph taken by author at the Chefferie.

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