



## The Bakweri Paramount Chieftaincy: An Assessment of its Indigenusness

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### ABSTRACT

Many African ethnicities possess paramount chiefdoms with more or less authority over subjects or vassals. The Bakweri of Cameroon is one of those ethnicities that have a paramount chieftaincy institution with over a hundred years of existence. The contention lies whether this paramount chieftaincy institution was an indigenous or European creation; and to what extent had modernity influenced the Bakweri paramount chieftaincy institution. In defense of this argument, we utilized the qualitative survey research design, with data garnered from secondary and tertiary sources of literature. For the sorting of relevant literature, we engaged in purposive sampling. Findings depict that the Bakweri paramount chieftaincy institution of Buea and Limbe are not indigenous creations but appear to be alien because the Bakweri had never had any single ruler with suzerainty over others as vassals answerable to him. We propose that there is the need for more efforts to be made towards cultural heritage preservation and cultural resilience.

Keywords: Bakweri, Bakweri Paramount Chieftaincy, Bakweri Paramount Chief, Modernity/Modernization

### Introduction

The Paramount chieftaincy institution is an age-old institution that has been the pivot around which many African communities (culture) find their identity. Chieftaincy embodies the preservation of culture, traditions, customs and values of the African people, while also representing the early forms of societal organization and governance (Cheka, 2008). It appears to be one of African people's enduring cultural heritage and institution, which is deeply rooted in ethnic consciousness of communities. It provides the scope for leadership and exercise of authority. Consequently, chieftaincy is one of the major important traditional institutions in contemporary Africa, symbolizing socio-political and shared power vested in chiefs in many parts of Africa (Ferim, 2017).

In Africa, the chieftaincy institution has preserved the rich cultural values of communality, respect for the elderly, and the principles of reciprocity and hospitality among the citizenry. Indeed, it is through the leadership of traditional authorities that unity and the country's cultural values are sustained. Other research works from other scholars revealed that traditional leadership structure is hierarchical (Cheka, 2008).

Throughout African history and modern politics, chieftaincy as an institution has stood the test of time. It is still common place to find kingdoms spread across different states in the African continent having either ceremonial or absolute powers and this is the case in Morocco and Lesotho wherein the Kingdoms have ceremonial powers whereas Swaziland is an absolute monarchy. So therefore, myriad of nations in Africa also maintain powerful chiefs and chieftaincies. Among others, these comprises: the Paramount Chief Chikowi of Yao people of Malawi, King Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II of the Ashanti in Ghana, ChitimukuluAcksonMwamba of Mbembe people of Zambia, and King Goodwill Zwelithini of the Zulu people of South Africa (Ferim, 2017).

In Republican Cameroon, traditional authority/chieftaincy has been at the crossroads of modern governance. That is traditional authorities/chieftaincies play a complementary role towards modern authority in local governance matters in the country as far as the kind of support they give to local councils. Besides, being auxiliaries of the modern state Governance, they are more or less consulted in matters of socio-economic and political concerns that directly or indirectly concern them. This is because even with their rich historical background which maybe a simplistic-complex whole so interwoven, they are more or less integrated into the realm of republican institutions. Still in Cameroon, the evolution of traditional authority has been the case in the country level as a whole and local level specifically, with legislations/laws being part of the evolutionary trends at either level. The 1977 law on the organization of chieftaincies is one of those legislations which classified traditional authority into first, second and third classes respectively (Cheka, 2008).

Among the Bakweri of Fako and Meme divisions, the Paramount chieftaincies of Limbe, Buea and Womboko are first class chiefdoms par excellence in line with the 1977 law organizing chiefdoms in Cameroon, known as paramount chieftaincies headed by a paramount chief whom must be an indigene of repute, timber and caliber or commanding authority and have the aspirations of his subjects at heart or held in high esteem over self-aggrandizement (Kaze&Ngam, 2008).

This paper tries to do a critical and thorough examination of the evolution of the Bakweri Paramount chieftaincies of Fako, Limbe and Womboko as well as tries to do finding if the paramount chieftaincies were European or indigenous creations. Besides, we also wish to investigate how cultural globalization, modernization and cosmopolitanism have had an influence on the Bakweri Chieftaincy as a whole as well as to discuss De-indigenization as a problematic to paramount chieftaincy. The importance of this research is to provide avenues for an appraisal/re-appraisal of the roots of the Bakweri paramount chieftaincies as a whole and also to raise awareness on the necessity to rethinking indigenization of Bakweri paramount chieftaincies as a whole and also to raise awareness on the necessity to rethinking indigenization of Bakweri paramount chieftaincy for future generations (Claessen, 2014).

### ***Statement of the Problem***

The paramount chieftaincy structure of the Bakweri culture is changing as a result of modernization which has destroyed some aspects of the Bakweri cultural values. The Bakweri seem to share varied versions as to how their paramount chieftaincy came about. This raises a debate on its creation whether it was an indigenous creation or a European creation and generally puts to question its indigenosity. Modernization and cultural globalization have had their manifestations in varied societies and varied sectors. Indigenous cultures have come under the sun rays of these aforementioned elements if we have many de-indigenized cultures today especially in Africa and Cameroon precisely. Modernization and cultural globalization have blended with ethnocentrism in Cameroon in general and particularly the Bakweri. So, the Bakweri have had their political, economic and socio-cultural institutions not left indifferent by the wind of cultural globalization, modernization and cosmopolitanism. The chieftaincy institution notably - the three (3) paramount chieftaincies of the Bakweri have been more or less seems to be greatly or mildly affected by these phenomena.

### ***Methodological Consideration(s)***

The study employed a qualitative Survey Research Design where data was garnered principally from secondary and tertiary sources of literature. The purposive sampling was employed to sort the relevant literature. Narratives approach was used for the analysis regarding the state of chieftaincy in the two chiefdoms—Buea and Limbe. We did less of interviews in the focus area. We conducted some fifteen interviews. We surveyed more works on the aspects pertaining to or connected to paramount chieftaincy of Buea and Limbe or Bakweri chieftaincy as a whole. And besides we used literature to better appraise some concepts.

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## **Literature Review**

### ***Conceptual Review of Relevant Terminologies***

#### ***(Paramount) Chieftaincy***

One of the oldest institutions in the World and in Africa to be precise is chieftaincy. Chieftaincy has stood to be a holistic political, socio-political and politico-religious structuralization rooted in pre-historic periods and not in the establishment of independent African states following a full stop to colonial rulership. As we have it today Chieftaincy is neo-traditional (Ferim 2017:60-61; Cheka, 2008: 76-85; Ngam&KazeTindo, 2020: 14). At the helm of Chieftaincy is a chief whom wields/commands some degree of respect. Claessen(2014) defines chiefs as hereditary socio-political leaders in occupation offices, and in possession of influential capacity on positive fertility as well as the atmosphere being possible for them to amass goods and food for the support of the chiefly hierarchy to the erection of great works as well as their engagement in warfare of defense and conquest. Historically, Chiefs have stood at the core of political, socio-economic and cultural life of their respective communities. Albeit the fact that they are known by varied appellations, there exist some commonality in the core-content and duties of Chieftaincy and chiefs respectively. Several Chieftaincies in a group may more or less acknowledge the supremacy of one leader/leadership though each Chieftaincy may have its own leader. This is what is referred to as Paramount Chieftaincy.

Claessen(2014) paramount chieftaincy refers to a political structure characterized by the existence of dual administrative levels. That is the local level and the paramount chief as a body. The local level constitutes a host of villages, quarters, neighborhoods, and or family groups, appearing to be under the rulership of a chief of the lower class. Meanwhile, paramount chief is the central authority whom wields some degree of respect from his subjects and subordinates. The paramount chief seems to be overall.

According to Beyene,Blaser, Gould &Oben (2014) paramount chieftaincy has presented itself as traditional system of local government and an integral part of governance in certain African countries namely: Ivory Coast, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cameroon. It appears simply that a Paramount Chieftaincy has at its helm a Paramount Chief. Taking the case of Sierra Leone, Paramount Chiefs have as tasks: acting as guarantors of community safety and play palpable a role in conflict resolution. Paramount Chieftaincy is more integrated in modern democratic governance rendering its functionality complex and challenging, paradoxically.

The fact that chieftaincy and chiefs are gradually and steadily losing their indigenous character in myriad of societies do serve as a call for concern in an era of cultural globalization, modernity and modernization. Chiefs are no longer commanding so much respect as formerly was the case in many African societies and Cameroon to be precise. In Cameroon, the indigenesness of some Chieftaincies as a whole and Paramount Chieftaincies has come under question in recent years, due to growing cultural valuation loss and basically due to the overarching colonial mishaps notably influence.

### ***Contextual Review of Paramount Chieftaincy in Cameroon***

Within the Cameroonian legal context, the 1977 Law on the Organization of Chiefdoms in Cameroon groups Chiefdoms into first, second and third classes and the chiefs are all entitled to remunerations from the state<sup>1</sup>. This organizational and legal grouping was a step to put some orderliness in traditional authorities in Cameroon and to streamline their influence greatly all in the name of organization. With this law, traditional authorities in Cameroon seem to appear as administrations which could be consulted or not consulted regarding the development of their communities. Though the law highlight that traditional rulers be consulted as regards the development of their communities this is rarely adhered to strictly as most at times it is given a deaf eye because of political, egoistic and chauvinistic motivations. In fact within the Cameroon democratic context, chieftaincies/paramount chieftaincies are less able to self-develop as the government system in place has made them so dependently-independent (Brain, 1967).

Democratization which since 1990s took a different gear has had an overarching influence on (Paramount) Chieftaincy. Indeed, the Government recognized these chieftaincies/authorities as auxiliaries of the administration but what basically applies on the ground is that they are mere auxiliaries of the administration given that paradoxically, the sacredness of these authorities have left less to be desired and their authority over land matters have known sharp decline besides their political control (Ojong, 2016).

Constitutionally, traditional authorities are given due consideration in the ambits of the law of 1996 and 2008 constitutions of Cameroon, having being politicized. Article 1 stipulates that “the recognition and protection of traditional values in accordance with democratic principles, human rights and the law”. The politicization of traditional authorities amongst which are paramount chiefs/rulers has engendered a serious problematic a hidden risk of rejection of the chief on the one hand stands and besides the perturbation of a local democracy. Traditional authorities have lost most of their powers to the state, in this context of multi-partism. They are more accountable to state officials than to their subjects. Just the fact that chiefs have being made to enjoy certain privileges such as their due right to salary makes them to be more loyal to the state. So, some chiefs have had their legitimacy undermined by their people due to their involvement in partisan politics/political activism, amongst others. Their involvement in partisan politics has partly contributed to cultural erosion through the desecration of symbols of traditional authority and the decline in the sacredness of traditional authority as well as their relegation to the background as a whole in the multi-partism democratic system of Cameroon (Wandji, 2021).

Paramount chieftaincy in Cameroon has undergone de-culturalization - that is the process of culture losing its weightiness and influence as a result of the pressures from other cultures as it evolves. This is because culture is dynamic and traditional leadership which is part of culture is on the evolutionary track. Traditional leadership especially in cases where we have paramount rulers, complexity and complicatedness in control and command have stood as a keen characteristic in evolution of traditional authorities.

### ***Historical Review of Paramount Chieftaincy in Cameroon***

Paramount Chieftaincies in Cameroon dates as far back as the 17th century or much earlier. Cameroon has evolved some Paramount Chieftaincies which depict the place value of traditional Governance in communal growth and sustainability. With evolution, more than twenty Paramount Chieftaincies have seen the limelight in Cameroon and they are in existence for well over three centuries in Cameroon. Among the prominent are: the Aghem, Bafaws, Balondos, Bamileke, Upper Bakossi, Lower Bakossi, Balong, Molonge, Bassa du Wouri, Buea, Limbe, Eyumojock and Ossing (Wandji, 2021).

Paramount Chieftaincies emanated from villages acknowledging the supremacy of another either through conquest, peace negotiation or by some sort of a concord especially during the 18th and 19th centuries. For instance among the Bangwa during the 19th century, colonial pressures made some villages come under the influence of a paramount Chief (Beyene, Blaser, Gould, Petterson&Oben, 2024).

From the 1960s, much (paramount) chiefdom in Cameroon has come under the strong eclipses of modernization and cultural globalization. Their indigenous character seems to have being facing de-indigenization on almost all sides be it in the political, economic, social and cultural dimensions. As a result, the paramount nature of oodles paramount Chieftaincies have witnessed some sort of superficiality and or deflation as well as cosmopolitanism and evolutionism (all characteristics of modernization and cultural globalization) in power relations through municipalization in decentralization drive (Lockhart, 1994, Ojong, 2016).

Paramount chieftains today are more or less paramount as they are served prefectural order just as satellite chiefs under his command are served prefectural order. Had it being the satellite chiefs under a paramount chief were installed and served a prefectural order while paramount chiefs were installed and served a ministerial order duly signed by the minister of Territorial Administration, their paramouncy over satellite chiefdoms will be stronger as they can exercise full authority over satellite chiefdoms under their command (Ojong, 2016).

<sup>1</sup>See Article 2, of Law No. 77/245 of 15 July 1977 Organizing Chiefdoms in Cameroon

### ***Theoretical Review of Literature***

This study employs the theory of Evolution as its theoretical framework to explain the functions that chiefs play in the society using the paramount chieftaincy institution as a system with interrelated parts.

#### *The Theory of Evolution by Charles Darwin 1859*

The notion where one type of species can descend from the other dates far back to the pre-Socratic era. This idea carried itself to the Roman era and was evident in some scientific works from that period. The concept of Evolution was proposed by Charles Darwin in his book on "the Origin of Species". According to this theory, the organism, over time, changes as a result of behavioral or physical traits which are passed down from generation to generation. These changes enable species to better adapt to their environment and eventually pass on the traits to future generations. Those organisms that cannot adapt to change, die out – hence the term survival of the fittest (Darwin, 1959). A subset of evolution is social evolution whose theorization renders evolution to be seen as a societal plow and bedrock of interconnectivities and complexities wherein the visualization of numerous political and social forms of organization characterize societal construction. These forms are better comprehended within the context of dynamism and continuity. With dynamism and continuity, it is rather facile to handle new scale integration in the web of state institutionalization. Thus, to the institutionalization of a state involves formal changes to handle new scale integration. The building of more inclusive socio-political forms is a demonstration of state building which is a process of transformation and/or re-transformation, given the fact that villages are constructed from family groups, chiefdoms from villages, and states, from chiefdoms. Chiefdoms are constructed from a multi-scalar assortment of social groups including families, kin associations, and village-like local arrangements with each having a degree of independence in their spheres of action. At each organizational level, much of what goes below is left unchallenged, because it is more or less irrelevant to the operation of the higher level or it is prohibitively costly to dynamism (Darwin, 1959).

Within the context of our study which is more of an evolutionary based-study we see that the theory of evolution will fit as we discuss change and continuity in the paramount chieftaincy institution of the Bakweri considering its creation, its structuralization, the customary chieftaincy laws, the approaches towards chieftaincy succession and the chieftaincy related problems contextually.

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### **Synopsis of the Location/Situation of the Buea and Limbe Paramount Chiefdoms/Chieftaincy Seat**

#### ***Location/Situation of the Buea Paramount Chiefdoms/Chieftaincy Seat***

The Buea Paramount chiefdom has as its jurisdictional area the Buea one of the sub-divisions of Fako Division of Cameroon. The Paramount Chieftaincy seat is in Mokunda, Buea Town (*Gbea*). Current Paramount chief of Buea is His Royal Highness Dr. (Naliomo) Robert Esuka Endeley since March, 2022 (Yinkfu et al, 2003). The Buea subdivision which is also his jurisdictional area as he is the guarantor of the cultural and historic heritage (Authors insight, 2024) has a total surface area of 870 square kilometers and has roughly 67 villages (PNDP, 2012).

Buea is situated between latitudes 4°12' north of the equator and longitudes 9°2' and 9°9' east of the Greenwich Meridian. The area is privileged to have neighbors such as Limbe/Ō to the South West, Douala to the South, Muyuka to the east, to name these (Yinkfu et al, 2003).

The population of Buea has been reported differently by different studies with the issue of consensus standing tall. Who is saying the truth and who is propagating facts (with/without truth)? PNDP (2012:11) and Abam (2017:1) report that the population of Buea is about 200,000 inhabitants. But Nwana (2022) asserts that Buea has a total population of about 300,000 persons. It is quite pathetic that Nwana (2022) cites this statistics (300,000) without any reference. So, how can we take him to be factual or be truthful when he is not a demographer and has been involved in any census data collection in the town? Besides, he even appears to be handling a subject of historical, social, political and cultural significance not only vital to Cameroonians but to Africans and other people that is: mass migration out of Buea as an offshoot of the (2016) Anglophone Crisis in his article (See Nwana, 2022). And on the other hand, PNDP (2012) and Abam (2017) seems to have not really captured the recent population given that their studies were conducted twelve and eight years ago respectively, so these statistics cannot pass/apply for the present population of Buea. There is therefore the need for a population census to be conducted in Buea as the last one conducted not only in Buea but in Cameroon in general was in 2005 and it has been long, and the population is highly cosmopolitan. This is because there have been great immigration into Buea which accounts for this cosmopolitanization population-wise. Emphatically, the population of Buea is a total reflection of Cameroon (and is almost) Africa in miniature as there are people from varied ethnic groups in the chiefdom such as: the Balondo, the Bafaw, the Bangwa, the Balong, the Ewondo, the Mundang, the Bulu, the Bassa, the Efik, the Ibibio, the Ibo, the Arabs, et cetera. We may deduce that the population of Buea should be between 200,000 and 300,000 inhabitants considering given that there have been a quite observable exponential population increase in Buea.

Principal socio-economic functions of the town are: agriculture, transportation, tourism and hospitality, real estate development, land commercialization, and/or business as a whole. The principal economic hubs in Buea are: Molyko, Mile 16, Mile 17 and Muea. Clerks Quarters may fall in the list. Transportation in the town is crucial with commercial motor taxi driving and many busy agencies operating in the town with bus stations situated in Mile 17. Among the bus agencies operating in the town are: NsoBoyz, Musango Bus Service (MBS), Grand Jeannot, Moghamo Express, Amour Mezam Express, Guarantee Express, Vatican Express, Mondial Express, to name but these.

The town which is also a paramount chiefdom is indeed almost a mellifluous heaven with plethora of educational and business opportunities as well as a melting pot of cultures in interaction.

## 5.2. Location/Situation of the Limbe Paramount Chiefdom/Chieftaincy Seat

Limbe also known as *Voin Mokpwe* language of the Bakweri is the jurisdictional area of the Limbe Paramount Chiefdom. The paramount chiefdom spans Limbe I, II and III sub-divisions and has a total of nineteen chiefdoms. Indigenes of *Vo* are: Bakweri, Wovia and Isubu (Limbe City Council, n.d.) The Paramount Chieftaincy Seat is found in Down Beach, Limbe.

The total population of the chiefdom/Limbe city is estimated at 200,000 inhabitants. The population is rated as follows: Limbe I - 54%, Limbe II - 32% and Limbe III - 14%. 75% of the population is youthful. That is about 150,000 inhabitants out of 200,000 inhabitants are still in their early or later part of their youths (Limbe City Council, n.d.).

Indigenous language spoken by the people is *Bakweri/mokpwe* although, there exist (slight) variations in pronunciations, spellings and naming from the Mokpwe spoken and written by Bakweri indigenes in Buea. It is rather (unfortunately that the Bakweri language is not spoken by a considerable number of youths in the area and what accounts for this situation is globalization, cultural globalization, modernity and or modernization.

The current paramount chief is His Royal Highness (*Ikanea* - is the indigenous title) John Elufa Manga Williams was crowned paramount ruler of Limbe in June 2022 at the Limbe Centenary Stadium (Agborem, 2022). The paramount Chief animates the historic and cultural heritage of the people (LimbeCity Council, n.d.). The current paramount chief is a (well known) business fellow and a developmentalist. His ascension to the throne puts an end to a 17 years long period of vacancy featuring (fierce) contestations over the throne (A good example such contestations is presented ahead) (Agborem, 2022).

## Results and Discussion

### A Critical Examination of the Buea Paramount Chieftaincy

Chieftaincy, as a traditional institution of governance in Buea, dates back to 15<sup>th</sup> Century. During those days, the village served as a single political unit with a single leader known as a chief also considered as the father of the village. In other words, chieftaincy existed in Buea well before the first contact with Europeans in the 15th century. With the coming of the Germans, all villages were conquered by Buea and had acknowledge its hegemony during the reign of Chief KuvaLikenyé. So it was a centralized system. In 1891 and 1894, wars broke out between the Germans and the Bakweri (Buea), which led to the dismantling of the centralized system of authority by the Germans who did not like the system. Each village in Buea however, though accepting the new leadership structure imposed by the Germans still managed its own affairs and had a council of elders and a village head. (Lyonga, 1990)The council of elders were selected randomly from among the lineages. Each village community constituted of members of various family group or extended family groups form different parent villages and sometimes from different tribes who have lived in the same territorial unit for several generations residing in the village. Each of these families had senior members of the family regarded as the law. The chiefs at that time must be members of a senior male line of the founder of the village. Some other patrilineages may be from the founder in junior lines or from co-founders or even those who may claim right of the dependency. However precedence is given to the senior male. This explains the origin of many disputes as to which village head may inherit the office or represent the territorial unit in the central Bakweri court or council. According to the D.A.F Shute District Office for Victoria in his report in 1938 he rightly spells out that the position of the village head is entirely a creation of the Europeans.

In Buea, village chieftains seem to pay far less allegiance to the paramount chief as was formerly the case in the 1800s and also from the period 1900 to 1977 following the new law organizing chiefdoms in Cameroon. This is because a host of chiefs view the paramount chief as a figure head or one entirely with mostly ceremonial functions or one just there for as a state administrative auxiliary basically saddled with reporting roles(Lyonga, 1990).

The question which maybe asked is: Historically and traditionally did the Bakweri of Buea have paramount chiefs? How did this conception and practice come heralded in Buea come about? From the 1750s/1770s, following the migrations and settlement of the first indigenes into Buea, each village was made of families with various heads. Then, with population growth village communities had village heads. Each village was autonomous and the head of each village selected by the Kingmakers or by some selected elders from the ruling families. Nobody outside the village concerned had any authority in the selection of each village head. So the idea of paramount chief is not only alien but preposterous since no one ruler has the authority to create subordinate chiefs either either at clan or tribal level. The prominence of some chiefs in Buea such as Chief KuvaLikenyé appears to have strongly raised the conception and engineered the position of paramount chieftaincy. In the 1880s, the influence of the said ruler and later on the influence of Chief GervaisMbelleEndeley placed conspicuously on the ruler ship table the position of paramount chief. The point here is that villages in Buea and or the Bakweri of Buea did not initially, historically and traditionally ever had any single ruler with suzerainty over the others as vassals who are answerable to him as is the case with some chiefdoms/Fondoms in the North West of Cameroon. If one talks of paramount chief of Buea it gives the impression that there are subordinate chiefdoms. The question definitely arises that which are these subordinate chiefdoms? The answer to this question is simply none. So, therefore the rulers of various villages in Buea have been like Wokpwaongo (Bokwaongo), Wokwai (Bokwai) and Ewonda, have been rulers in their right and have never being vassals of any Buea paramount chief. Paramount chieftaincy is less indigenous to the people than being more indigenous to them. If we have a paramount chiefdom and chief in Buea and this has been sustained, it is simply because of two principal factors which are: leadership prominence off a single chief and the creation and occupation of the position of the chairmanship position of the Buea Native Court by GervasiusMbelleEndeley (Motinda, 1983:8).

Besides, Cahoon(1994) paints a picture as if the Bakweri historically had paramount chieftains. To him, the paramount chieftaincy commenced with the emergence of the Bakweri community of Buea. He names Eye Njie Tama Lifanje as the first paramount chief of the Bakweri community. His historico-

social narrative and critical analysis, is subjective as some Bakweri indigenes interviewed such as MolaMwambo (2024) opine that the Bakweri (of Buea) never had paramount chieftains from the onset. They argue that this only came along the line of evolution of the Bakweri community in the wake of the European colonization prior to independence in the 1961.

The Buea paramount Chieftaincy which is striving on has had a number of paramount chieftains whom are: Their Royal Majesties Likenye I (time of rulership remains unclear), KuvaLikenye (who ruled upto 1895 but the period he took over from Likenye I is blurred), Endeley I (1895-1913), Matthias LifaffeEndeley II (1913-1925), GervasiusMbelleEndeley III (1925-1982), Samuel MokaLifaffeEndeley (1991-2015) and most recently Robert EsukaEndeley (since 2022) (Ardener, 1996:46;Cahoon, 1994, Enohmbi, 2016).The aspect of social evolution as raised in the Darwinian theorization is seen here. The Buea Paramount chieftaincy has witnessed changed in leadership and has also evolved in terms of influence. The paramount chieftaincy position exist in such a way that though the 1977 law regards the position as of first class, it is more of an illusory first class, as in actual fact second and third class chiefdoms are not compulsorily or mandatorily his vassals and must not necessarily report to him about the welfare of the various villages. Worthy of note is the fact that all chiefs receive a prefectorial order giving them the right to function. So, the prefectural order of the paramount chief is not so different from those of other chiefs.

#### ***A Critical Evaluation of the Evolution of the Limbe Paramount Chiefdom***

The Limbe Paramount Chieftaincy or Paramount Chiefdom as it is known today emerged in 1908 (Cahoon, 1994). In 1908, it was just known as the Victoria Chiefdom which was so full of and socked with indigenes. This Chiefdom was more of a European (Germans) creation than an indigenous creation. The Germans created it to enforce communal unity and to ease administration of the area which was gradually but steadily growing extensively population wise. From 1908 to 1982/3 it was known as the Victoria Chiefdom but from/in 1984, it was renamed Limbe Paramount Chieftaincy because of a presidential decree by the Cameroon sovereign which changed the name of the town from Victoria to Limbe.

Since 1908, the Limbe paramount has had three paramount chiefs in succession. The table below shows the chiefs and their period of reign.

**Table 1: Different Paramount Chiefs of Limbe Paramount Chiefdom**

S/N	Paramount Chief	Period of reign
1	HRH John Nambeki Manga Williams	1908 - 1958
2	HRH Ferguson Billa Manga Williams	1959 - 09/07/2006
3	HRH Ikanea John Elufa Manga Williams	12/06/2022 – Present

**Source:** Information to build this table was gotten randomly from internet sources/works such as that of Ben Cahoon, traditional states. [https://www.worldstatesmen.org/cameroon\\_native.html](https://www.worldstatesmen.org/cameroon_native.html); Sama Jonathan, Johnny begins journey as Limbe Paramount Chief, posted: June 15 2022, <https://newswatchcameroon.com/index.php/2022/06/15/johnny-begins-journey-as-limbe-paramount-chief/>, Retrieved: 03/08/2024; Solomon Agborem, John Elufa Manga-Williams is New King of Limbe. Posted: September 6, 2022, <https://africa-excellence.net/john-elufa-manga-williams-is-new-king-of-limbe/>, Retrieved: July 13, 2024.

**Nota Bene:** From July 09, 2006 to June 07, 2022 the Paramount Chieftaincy throne was vacant. It was vacant because of chieftaincy tussle. For example between Princes Henry NjallaQuan and Nanjia Carr in 2005 over the said throne (Timbong, 2005:9).

The creation and existence of the Victoria Federated Council which were a constitution of the then local councils (Native Authorities in Fako Division, the late Chief Manga Williams was President of the Council and the seat was in Victoria. The membership of the council included such traditional rulers as Chiefs GervasiusMbelleEndeley and Fritz EkoMotinda of Buea, August Monono of Great Soppo, Fritz Mokete of Muyuka and Mokoso of Wonjongo (Bonjongo). The fact that Chief Manga Williams was the President did not necessarily translate that he was paramount ruler of Victoria (today known as Limbe) and the other chieftains his vassals. He was only primus-inter-pares (first among equals (Motinda, 1983:8).

The paramount chieftaincies of Buea and Limbe as we have them today, have significantly comes under the influence of modernity. Modernity has made the paramount chieftaincies to shrink in terms of cultural originality. What the forefathers left as Bakweri paramount chieftaincy appears to be more or less ceremonial with little efforts done or put in place in defense of the culture.

#### ***Effects of Modernity on the Buea and Limbe Paramount Chieftaincies***

As a result of modernization/modernity and cultural globalization the traditional chieftaincy institutions in Fako Division as a whole and the paramount chieftaincy have experienced and feature some changes. These changes have been in the domains of succession to chieftaincy thrones, the extinction of the Mbando and decline in chieftaincy authority.

According to Mikano (n.d.), chieftaincy succession rules in Fako Division have faced distortions within this first twenty years or so of these 2000s. These rules had to do with the strict respect of the customs and traditions in the selection of a chief considering the hereditary position of chiefs, consideration of indigenes to be chiefs. But these has been usurped by alternate succession rules for example the Cameroon 1977 Decree Organizing Chiefdoms wherein instead of chieftaincy being purely hereditary section 8 emphasizes on the appointment of chiefs. The provision allows that chiefs might be chosen in principle only from families requested to exercise customary jurisdiction and candidates vying in for the position are obliged to satisfy physical, moral and literacy requirements, which was not the case before 1977. Per Section 10, upon vacancy of the throne, the competent authority consults with elders of the community before any move are made designate successor. Should there be any contestations arising as far as the issue of appointing a chief is concerned, Section 16(1) stipulates that the competent authority should have the final say on the issue. Section 15 of the decree puts administrative authorities (Divisional Officers, the Minister of Territorial Administration and or the Prime Minister) at the pivot of the appointment of a chief, serving as a development which has infused political considerations in the process of appointment of chiefs and the relegation of customary rules (Mikano, n.d.). This phenomenon has sowed the foundation for chieftaincy succession disputes in Fako Division. Since our focus is on the paramount chieftaincies of Buea and Limbe, examples of conflictual issues discussed here focus them. In Limbe, the paramount chieftaincy throne came under serious/fierce contestation first in 2005 and secondly, in 2022.

In 2005, the first onslaught for the Victoria throne was launched by Prince Nanjia Carr – the Head of the Carr Family who claimed that their forefather Chief David NanjiaOvasse Carr, the Founder of Victoria New Town was the chief of Victoria before his destitution by the British colonial administration. To Carr, Bakweri indigenes were ruled by Native Courts during the colonial administration, claiming that the leadership of the court was rotatory. Effortfully, this aspirant/contestant to the Limbe Paramount chieftaincy throne tried to substantiate his claims with documents which confirmed that the late chief Manga Williams I replaced his grandfather in the court. In short Carr, tried to explain how the paramount chieftaincy throne of Limbe was erroneously given to Manga Williams I due to his educational status: arguing that all attempts to reclaim the throne were fruitless. Despite all the claims and narratives by Nanjia he did not succeed to ascend to the throne as he claimed (Timbong, 2005).

In 2017, there was serious discord over the Limbe Chieftaincy stool. The three main families of the Limbe Paramount chieftaincy being: the Mukebas, the Carrs and Manga Williams could not arrive at a consensus over the choice for a successor to the Late His Royal Highness FogersonBilla Manga Williams who had passed away some 11 years ago. They had disagreement over the chieftaincy lineage and over the issue of legitimacy, with claims such as the Manga Williams were not the rightful possessors of the Limbe Paramount Chieftaincy throne (Akana, 2017).

In earliest 2020, the next onslaught to the Limbe paramount chieftaincy throne was spearheaded by the Chief KinghiLiwoto of Efolofo village in Meme Division. Chief Kinghi fiercely opposed John Elufa Manga Williams' enthronement as paramount ruler claiming that he was a stranger and not the rightful personality to be successor of the paramount stool. He even went as far as filing a lawsuit against the enthroned chief with matter undetermined till he was enthroned in 2022 (Agborem, 2022).

In Buea the Paramount chieftaincy stool was also contested by the Likenye's who claimed that the current paramount chief deserved not to be the rightful heir to the Buea paramount chieftaincy throne. They argued that give him the throne would be a moving towards hailing illegitimacy. Irrespective of their contestation, the paramount chieftaincy throne was finally given to him following a Prime Ministerial order of 2022 recognizing him as Paramount ruler of Buea.

These succession disputes/crises are the deep fruits of modernity because before this was not the case as chieftaincy was hereditary. In Former times, chieftaincy was from father to son and before the dead of the current chief, a potential successor was already known. This made the potentiality of any chieftaincy dispute erupting seldom. Apart from this some efforts have been made to ensure the sustainability of the chieftaincy institution among the Bakweri of Cameroon.

Besides, the Mbando which was and is a public ritual exercise which served for the entire community has been affected by modernity. According to (Pa. WonganyaEsose, personal communication, 2024), during the Mbando rituals pouring of libation was done at night but today they are done in broad daylight and also involved human sacrifices to strengthen the Mbando rituals however Mbando does not involve human sacrifices in this contemporary times. It should be underscored that it was because of this issue of human sacrifices which led the extinction of the Mbando. And also according to (Chief EwomeKinge, 2024) of Mo'oli, when the *Mbando* was done indigenes were not supposed to and did not go to the farm but this is not the case today. Rituals were done in unison but this is far from being the case in this contemporary times. The pouring of libation regarding the *Mbandois* led by the Paramount Chieftain and or other chiefs.

### ***The Role of the Bakweri in the Sustainability of the Buea and Limbe Paramount Chieftaincy***

Even though the chiefs perform their functions, as guided by the state as well as the fact that the system of appointment and installation of a new paramount chiefs is guided by the state of Cameroon: the village council of every Bakweri society in charge of seeing into the nomination of paramount chiefs as well as the advancement of their communities and resilient in protecting their culture and the nature of the Paramount chieftaincy to ensure sustainability. The following are ways through which the Bakweriparamountcy of Buea and Limbe have been sustained as opines Ikundi (personal communication, 2024), MolaPepe (personal communication, 2024), MolaMwambo (personal communication, 2024) and other respondents.

- According to the respondents from Na'anga and Bokwaongo villages, Bakweri Paramount chieftaincy at the level of succession is normally hereditary and to them, they ensure that this strategy of being an old system is maintained despite the role of the government. That fact is

maintained, where a son succeeds his father following patrilineage: is a sign to efforts put in place by the Bakweri communities to sustain their paramount chieftaincy.

- Paramount chieftaincy has also been sustained today through the customary regulation which the indigenes must respect if not, culprits who violates the cultural rites and rules are taken to court to solve these problems and receive sanctions for misconduct. Notables are the people who decide on the next of king after the initial king has made his will. “*MwanawaWonjia*”, are doing their best to ensure that succession rights are respected and follow the family line.
- Paramount Chieftaincy has equally being sustained over the years by maintaining Succession to leadership process. This is done by indicating the line of succession how it is supposed to be, how it is supposed to move from one family to another to avoid issues where people who have nothing to do with royalty want to inherit the throne. That is why there are a lot of chieftaincy disputes in Bokwaongo.
- The aspect of consultative talks is still observed in these contemporary times wherein the main families of the village meet to discuss on their choice of personality to occupy the paramount chieftaincy throne. And this is done before the candidate chosen is presented to the Senior Divisional Officer for installation formalities to be organized and the potential chief installed.

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## Conclusion

The Buea and Limbe Paramount Chieftaincy as we have them today have greatly evolved over time and space with different paramount chiefs' haven occupied the thrones. In this article we have been able to argue and defend the points that the Buea and Limbe paramount chieftaincies/chiefdoms were European creations. Although the paramount chiefdoms have faced modernity as far as succession is concerned with the appointment of chiefs contrary to hereditary pattern and the Mbando rituals which depicts the unity of the Bakweri loosing part of its indigenes, the paramount chieftaincies of Buea and Limbe have been sustainable no doubt as have been discussed with some moves at revitalizing the aspects of hereditary leadership and leadership by merit as the preservation of the aspect of consultative talks.

We propose that for the Bakweri paramount chieftaincy to be sustainable there is the need for more concerted efforts to be made towards cultural heritage preservation and cultural resilience. This can only be achieved if the village communities are united. For unity is the strength of the Bakweri. NaliomoDrEndeley (2022) opines that with unity everything is possible and unity comes not by accident as it is an intentional act to bring others together.

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