

Socio-political Basis and Cultural Implications of the *Fon-Bah* Traditional Power Rift in the Vengo fendom: Colonial and Post Colonial Manifestations

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Abstract: This paper explores the intricate nature of leadership roles between the Fon and Bah, two top institutionally structured traditional authorities historically entrusted with the charge of traditional governance among the Vengo, in the Ndop plain of the Cameroon Grassland. Evolving and competing trends continue to redefine the cultural tenets that sanctioned the leadership roles between the Fon and Bah. Through an ethnographic investigation, this study makes appeal to primary and written sources to analyze the extent to which tensions between the Fon and Bah; key cultural custodians and community leaders, manifest in both social practices and cultural expressions. The study reveals that the conflict, often rooted in historic grievances and contending visions of authority, result in cleavage construction that disrupts community solidarity and threatens the sustainability of certain cultural practices, that constitutes the core value of the Vengo community. The paper concludes that the rift between the Fon and the Bah has not only diminished the overall effectiveness of traditional governance but has also led to a decline in communal adherence and participation in cultural activities. As factions grapple for influence and legitimacy, cultural underpinnings—once firmly integrated into the daily lives of the people, now face erosion, emphasizing the delicate imbalance between authority, identity, and cultural transmissions.

Keywords: Cultural crisis, tradition, authority, legitimacy, Vengo, colonial, post-colonial

1. INTRODUCTION

In understanding the cultures and traditions of a people, a look into their foundation histories and location in a particular region becomes important as such knowledge aids in understanding how and why they turned out with a particular kind of lifestyle. It could have come about as a result of basic elements of the lifestyle or cultures of other societies which they picked up in their migration. The Cameroon Grasslands, notably home to the Bamenda Highlands, is characterized by rich cultural diversity, with numerous ethnic groups, each possessing unique languages, customs, and socio-political organizations. The region has been a repository of traditional practices that reflect the history, identity, and values of its communities. Traditional authority particularly that of the Fon, plays a crucial role in the social fabric. Fons served as custodians of culture, presiding over rituals, conflict resolution, and communal activities. As a result of the decentralization of authority, a common feature among these Grassfield villages, the Fon did not rule in isolation. Rather, there were subsidiaries in administration as was the case with the Vengos where there existed institutions like the Bah and *Tifuan* that served as vice ruler and elements of checks and balances respectively.

Vengo is one of the Tikar kingdoms that migrated from Ndobo in the present day Adamawa region and settled in the Grassfields region (Mumenu, 2022). They are rich in fertile soil, water, hills, ideal grazing lands, and swampy areas that enable for rice cultivation. The history of the origins, migration and settlement of Vengo is shrouded in controversies and myths. It is commonly held that, the first Fon and his attendants emerged from a cave behind a waterfall called *Forghai* (Fanso, 2017:47). Another tradition holds that it was because of wars that the Vengo left their home territory in Ndobo in the Tikar country in the Mbam valley to settle in their present location. The group of emigrants who shared authority included *Tiefu-Tifuan*, considered to be the chief, *Nswi*, the *Ndiwah*, *Songho* and a mother called *Mange* and her children (*Fuanje*, *Bah*, *Saingi* and *Nfanyui*) (Kungnso, 2019:37); eventually, it was this power dynamics that complicated the issue of traditional authority and governance in the Vengo fendom.

The erosion of culture in the context of the Fon-Bah power rift can be understood as the gradual decline and transformation of traditional cultural practices, beliefs, and social structures due to competing socio-political forces. This phenomenon was particularly pronounced in the Vengo fendom due to several intersecting trends; colonial impact, post-colonial challenges and internal conflicts. Understanding the socio-cultural implications of the Fon-Bah clash, requires a nuanced appreciation of the complex interplay between tradition and governance. By examining the interconnectedness of traditional authority, colonial influences, and contemporary political structures, this study seeks to illuminate how these factors have shaped and continue to affect community identity, social cohesion, and cultural practices among the Vengo. This paper argues that the Fon-Bah power rift in Vengo as a complex phenomenon, is rooted in socio-political dynamics and cultural manifestations with varying implications that evolved during colonial and post-colonial periods. It seeks to explore how colonial presence altered existing power dynamics within the Vengo fendom with specific focus on the ways colonial administration and practices influenced indigenous traditional leadership. Equally, this study investigates the manifestations of the Fon-Bah power rift in post-colonial Vengo, including shifts in political authority, changes in community governance, and the responses of the Vengo people to these transformations. Lastly, it analyzes the cultural implications of this power rift, assessing how it has affected cultural identity, social practices, and community cohesion in Vengo. To achieve these objectives, the paper has been structured into three main parts. The first part tackles the genesis of this power tussle with particular regards to the colonial era and its influence on the traditional authority system in Vengo. The second part explores how this rift has transcended through generations and into the post-colonial era with the contemporaries of Fon Ndofoa Zofoa III and Gweiju Bah Tifuan. The last part then showcases the socio-cultural implications of this indigenous political divide between the Fon and Bah in the Vengo fendom. It rounds up with a conclusion that projects the findings of the paper and proposed peace resolution mechanisms that could put an end to this crisis and foster cultural and community developments moving forward.

2. ORIGINS OF THE FON-BAH RIVALRY

The origins of the Fon-Bah conflict can be traced to the oral history of Vengo's migration from Tikar. According to oral sources, the people were led by three brothers: the Fon, Bah, and Fuanjeh. Upon securing their settlement, leadership was assigned to the youngest brother, the Fon, with the Bah and Fuanjeh assuming supportive roles as key advisers (Tita Tiehfeh Lo'ong, interview with author, 2024). The Bah's position as the head of the *Ngumba* or *Tifuan* (a secret society and highest regulatory institution in Vengo), endowed him with significant authority, particularly in sacred governance, which traditionally complemented the Fon's executive powers.

During the colonial era this power-sharing arrangement became a source of tension. The Bah's role as the traditional prime minister and quarter head of *Moukang* gave him dual influence that sometimes conflicted with the Fon's centralized authority. As the leader of the *Tifuan*, the Bah presided over cultural and ritualistic matters, an area directly intersecting with the Fon's role as the overall custodian of tradition. This overlap led to recurring struggles over the scope of each leader's authority, creating a fragile imbalance in the Vengo's political structure.

The leadership strife in Vengo was principally a tussle for authority, power, and influence which witnessed public manifestations during the reign of Fon Saingi II (Kungnso, 2021:40). Certainly not because previous Fons were less concerned with imposing their authority and power but because of a combination of factors including the influence of neighboring fondoms and most importantly, the spectacular arrival of Zintgraff (the German explorer) in the village which further dramatized the crises (Afuhngang, 2022:194). This indicated the varying extent to which the contact factor influenced cultural dynamics bringing about an avalanche of cultural implications on the community. While Zintgraff saw the political divide as an opportunity to make a new "friend" in his quest for a base to control the sub region, Fon Saingi II saw in the arrival of the European colonialist, an opportunity to exploit the presence of a foreign ally to consolidate his position which was already being threatened by the Bah in the then ongoing power tussle. The crisis in Vengo can thus be said to have escalated out of proportion merely because of the interest of actors within and outside the village.

As indicated earlier, real tussle for power and authority began under Fon Saingi II and persisted with his successors, continuing the struggle to maintain their political authority. In public, all was done in

the name of the Fon. In fact, *Tifuan*, the regulatory institution was the locus of political authority and Bah, its head, held effective powers in the fendom (Afuhngang, 2022:194). This implied that kingship in the Vengo fendom from origin was dualistic in nature with the two key institutions being the Bah and the Fon, who represented hidden decision making and open consensual authority respectively.

The regulatory institution, *Tifuan*, was a closed and secret entity that excluded women in its affairs. Newly initiated members of this society were given clear instructions on the power ladder in the village. According to the *Tifuan* code, once the Fon entered the *Tifuan* Lodge, he ceased to be Fon and could not be addressed as such. Rather, he got the provisional title *Tifuanneh*, meaning in the Vengo dialect as “the honored one of *Tifuan*”. In the physical and social space of the regulatory body, the Fon ranked only as a privileged and senior member (Fowler, 1993:253). That is to say, when the Fon entered *Tifuan*, he did so not as Fon but as a board of the village *Tifuan*, under its head, Bah. So in the *Tifuan* society, Bah led and the Fon served as an ex-officio member. However, outside of *Tifuan* in the public space, Bah ranked second to the Fon and was largely recognized as his advisor and deputy. In the absence of the Fon, it was the Bah that rendered his prerogatives.

The senior title-set of *Tifuan*, the *Voetughua*, under the leadership of Bah, was responsible for the selection and enthronement of a new Fon. *Tifuan* even though an institution, unrepresented in Vengo traditional structure as “father of the Fon”, was tasked with the responsibility of “making the new Fon” (Ndula Ndula, Interview with author, 2024). In the course of his seclusion in the *Tifuan*'s lodge, once identified as the new Fon, he was regarded as the “the child of *Tifuan*” thereby expressing his filial dependency on the *Tifuan*. Thus, throughout Saingi II's reign, they depended on the *Tifuan*. Fowler captures this over bearing role of the *Tifuan* institution and its personality on the Fon as follows

Prior to the arrival of Zintgraff and the subsequent imposition of colonial rule, the Fon was most certainly subordinate to the senior Voetughau title-set in the Tifwan compound. This unit had the power to summon the Fon, to punish him for infringement of customs and traditions, and that no decision reached by the Voetughau could be vetoed or overtly obstructed by the Fon. However, the Fon did rank as an equal to individual members of the set and had his own stool in the Tifwan compound. Yet, he did not have an automatic right of entry to their meetings since they could refuse him access. In a wider context, a titular head of the Fon was the Fon but political authority lay largely with the senior ranks of the regulatory associations, Bah (Fowler 1993:261).

Institutions of governance and the prerogatives that came with the offices further complicated the issue of authority in the Vengo fendom, consequently, clashes over power and control between the Fon and Bah (institutions and personalities), became unavoidable.

3. MANIFESTATIONS OF THE FON-BAH POWER MISAPPREHENSIONS

The introduction of colonial values in the Vengo fendom, greatly affected the foundation of cultural politics and the respect for instituted culture and traditions by traditional stakeholders. The German colonial policy to extend administration in the hinterlands by using local power structuring, accentuated the emergence of the conflict between Fon Saingi II and Tita Bah in Vengo. As earlier indicated, Fon Saingi II was a major collaborator of the German colonial administration in the Ndop area (Nkwi 1989:41). He saw an opportunity in the German presence to change the balance of power in the traditional system of governance in Vengo to his favor. The Fon saw the Bah not only as a permanent rival within the traditional and political governance system, but as an obstacle to the implementation of his friendship pact¹ with the Germans in the fendom” (Kungonso, 2021:109). It was in this context that Fon Saingi II complained about the lavish display of royal treasures and the dominant position of the Bah, particularly during the *Nekia* festival. In an effort to redress this, an

¹ When Zintgraff visited Vengo in 1889, a friendship pact was reached between Fon Saingi II and Zintgraff through gifts and servants. This pact consisted of the supply of labor for their plantations and road construction, pay tributes, porters and especially to remain an ally to the German colonial authorities in the area. In return, the Germans were to help subdue all rebellious subjects to the Fon in Vengo.

open quarrel ensued initiating an open strife between both institutions that has transcended generations as we get to discover in the proceeding paragraphs beginning with the instance of Fon Saingi II.

4. FON SAINGI II AND THE BLACKSMITHS SAGA

The development and growth of the blacksmithing industry in Vengo soon led to the emergence of a new elite class whose overbearing influence came from the wealth they derived from iron production. They came up powerfully in opposition to the Bah and the senior titleholders, and this constituted a key element in the disputed power tussle. As Fowler underscores;

Blacksmith lineages were of growing importance over the years following the death of Ngwifon (a renown blacksmith and political aspirant to the throne). Without titles or powers vested on them by tradition or the culture of the people that they commanded, they adopted a new strategy of compound expansion through acquisition of slaves. This encouraged the development of a compact settled core to the fonom that stood in contrast to the redistribution of compounds outside this central area (Fowler, 2001:270).

While wealth from forging and trading iron products encouraged the expansion of blacksmith groups, it gave no access to what was a limited set of titles associated with political authority. There was scope in the social system for the acquisition of privileges and prestige through the creation of new lineage headships. There was equally the possibility for the acquisition of ranks/titles through wealth in goods, but there was apparently very little potential for the creation of a new nobility with high ranks and political powers. This created enormous strain that, together with the fortuitous event of the demise of Ngwifon, an aspirant to the rank of nobility, almost led to the dissolution of the fonom. Those without established authority employed force to install their own candidate for the institution of Fonsip. This led to squabbles in the palace, where the Bah was beaten and his cap removed; marking a serious breach of the Vengo customs (Afuhngang, 2022:196). This event caused the village to split into two factions and remained fragilised politically, ritually, and economically, paving the way for the intervention of neighboring fonom in the crises.

From Fon Saingi II, the struggle against the dominant position of the Bah in Vengo continued with Fon Sake II following his accession to the throne in 1927. During the installation of Tita Bah, Fon Sake II withheld some important valuable objects including a staff, spear, and some beautifully adorned cowry objects such as the traditional title pipe, a sword, and a metal bangle; all of which were insignia of power and prestige of the Bah ((Afuhngang 2022:196). In these confiscated items was also the bangle with a jingle (*mbengleuh*) which the Bah wore on his right arm during the coronation of the Fon. The Bah often made use of these adornments during cultural outings and festivals like the *Nekia* dance and his request for the Bah's items to be relinquished got back no favorable response. This refusal action from the Fon further strained relations between the two authorities in the Vengo fonom.

The duality of leadership between the Fon and Bah reflects a broader phenomenon in traditional African governance, where checks and balances are embedded within hierarchical systems (Ray,1997:144). The *Tifuan*, as a sacred and legislative body, is a powerful institution, and its leader, the Bah wields considerable influence over cultural and political decisions. This power dynamics created an inherent tension, particularly when the Fon perceived the Bah's actions as encroachments on his authority. Conversely, the Bah viewed attempts by the Fon to assert control over the *Ngumba* as a violation and attempt to disrupt the traditionally established institutional checks and balances. in traditional governance.

The traditional axiom that the Bah 'governs at night' while the Fon 'governs during the day' symbolizes the separation of their spheres of influence. However, contemporary practices often blur these boundaries. Instances where the Fon has sought to influence *Ngumba* or where the Bah has publicly asserted authority beyond his role as the Fon's adviser exemplify how this structural overlap fosters conflict. Such disputes are consistent with studies on traditional governance, which highlight that undefined or overlapping roles can lead to power struggles within leadership hierarchies (Nyamnjoh, 1997:71).

5. CONTEMPORARY ESCALATION OF THE FON-BAH CONFLICT

In recent decades, the conflict between the Fon and the Bah in Vengo has escalated with the present leaders, Fon Ndofoa Zofoa III and Bajon Bihai (Gwejuh Bah), reflecting both historical tensions and contemporary challenges. This escalation is shaped by several interwoven factors, including shifts in administrative interpretations, educational advancements, symbolic gestures, and evolving community dynamics. The conflict, which was once contained within traditional frameworks, now incorporates modern intellectual, political, and cultural dimensions that further complicate the resolution process.

One of the primary drivers of the contemporary escalation is the Bah's push for Vengo to be reclassified within Cameroon's administrative framework for traditional governance. The proposed reclassification was to elevate Vengo to a First-class Chiefdom, recognizing the Fon as a First-class chief and the Bah as a Second-class chief (Songiefua Robert, interview with author, 2024). Such a change had the potential to ostensibly secure government stipends and administrative legitimacy for both positions while recognizing the hierarchy of the Vengo's governance structure. However, this proposal met with resistance from the Fon and his allies, who interpreted it as an attempt by the Bah to institutionalize his position as an equal or rival to the Fon.

The disagreement over this proposal highlights the broader tension between traditional governance and modern administrative systems. While the Bah frames the reclassification as a pragmatic solution to align Vengo with state structures, the Fon views it as a threat to the historical autonomy and supremacy of his position. This divergence underscores how modern governance frameworks can exacerbate traditional rivalries by introducing new avenues for power and recognition, disrupting longstanding balances in leadership roles (Songiefua Robert, interview with author, 2024).

Furthermore, the fact that the contemporary Fon and Bah are both highly educated, a departure from earlier generations of leaders who operated primarily within the bounds of traditional knowledge even spirals this conflict some more. This shared intellectualism has introduced a new dimension to their rivalry, as both leaders use their education to interpret and justify their positions within the Vengo governance system. The Bah, in particular, has leveraged his education to advocate for reforms that he believes would modernize the political structure of the village. However, these efforts are perceived by the Fon's supporters as overreach, challenging the sanctity of traditional practices and norms.

The intellectual dynamics has polarized the community, with factions forming around each leader. The Bah's supporters often framed his actions as progressive and align with the realities of modern governance, while the Fon's allies emphasized the need to preserve traditional hierarchies and cultural authenticity. This intellectual rivalry deepened the conflict, creating an ideological rift that extended beyond their immediate spheres of influence and affected the entire community. Such shifts in leadership paradigms, especially when influenced by education, often lead to ideological clashes that destabilize governance systems (Ray, 1997:168).

The Fon-Bah conflict was further intensified by symbolic acts that challenge traditional authority. The Bah's decision to allow his wives to wear cowries, a privilege historically reserved for the Fon's wives was not immediately welcomed by the Fon. In Vengo, cowries are not merely decorative; they are potent symbols of authority, power, and spiritual protection. By granting this privilege to his wives, the Bah appeared to assert the status *primus inter pares* with the Fon, a move that was perceived as a deliberate affront to the Fon's authority. Such symbolic transgressions exacerbated tensions because they undermined the traditional codes that governed the village's leadership system. Symbols play a crucial role in traditional African societies, serving as visual and performative manifestations of authority (Vansina 1985:93). When these symbols are appropriated or misused, they disrupt the cultural and political order, eroding the legitimacy of leadership and creating divisions within the community.

The Fon-Bah conflict also germinated from the absence of consensus around certain communal activities and cultural observances. For example, traditional events in the Bah's quarter, such as funeral celebrations and other rituals, were suspended for over a decade. The Bah and his followers of the Muokang quarter boycotted key cultural activities, including libation ceremonies and the emblematic *Nekai* annual festival. This withdrawal fragmented Vengo's cultural life, undermining the community's ability to collectively celebrate and preserve its traditions.

6. CONFLICTS STEMMING FROM RELIGION IN THE VENGO POLITICAL SETUP

Religion, particularly Christianity, has introduced a significant source of conflict within the Vengo's political setup. Traditional leadership and cultural practices are deeply intertwined, with leaders such as the Fon and notables serving as both political authorities and spiritual custodians. The rise of Christianity brought a shift in the belief systems, challenging traditional norms, symbols, and rituals. These religious shifts led to tensions within leadership structures, among family units, and across the broader community. This section delves into the nature of these conflicts, their manifestations, and their impact on the Vengo's governance and cultural heritage.

One of the most profound religious conflicts in Vengo involved traditional leaders who converted to Christianity, rejecting the rituals and symbols central to their cultural roles. A notable example is a high-ranking quarter head who became a devout Christian. His religious convictions led him to violate a key cultural tenet: the requirement that a notable or quarter head never removes his ceremonial cap in public. As a Christian, he began removing his cap in church services, citing scriptural requirements, despite this act being considered a cultural taboo. This newly acquired religious doctrine that went against traditional norms caused friction between the quarter head, the Fon, and the Ngumba. The quarter head's decision to prioritize his religious beliefs over cultural expectations culminated in his willingness to relinquish his traditional title. Such incidents highlight the tension between individual religious freedom and communal cultural obligations, raising questions about the compatibility of Christianity with the demands of traditional leadership. Empirical evidence supports the view that religious conversions often disrupt traditional governance in African societies. Oyewumi 1997, argues that traditional authority rely heavily on the adherence to cultural symbols and rituals (Oyewumi, 1997:193). When leaders abandon these practices, it weakens the legitimacy of their roles and creates voids in the systems they represent. In Vengo, this dynamics has fragmented leadership and undermined the unity of the traditional governance structure.

Such religious conflicts extended beyond village leadership into family dynamics. In Vengo, family heads were often responsible for performing rituals that honored the ancestors and brought blessings. However, as family heads converted to Christianity, many refused to perform these rituals, citing conflicting interests with their religious beliefs. This refusal created rifts within families, as other members viewed the discontinuation of these rituals as neglecting ancestral duties and betraying cultural values. The introduction of Christianity also caused ideological divisions within families, with some members embracing Christian doctrines and others remaining committed to traditional practices. These divisions were further promulgated by the presence of pastors and prophets in families who actively oppose rituals associated with ancestor worship, creating ongoing tensions. Research on African traditional societies has shown that such internal family conflicts weaken cultural transmission, as younger generations are caught between competing worldviews (Appadurai, 1996:93). In Vengo, this resulted in the gradual erosion of practices that have historically been central to familial and communal identity hence, limiting the efforts by stakeholders to advocate for peace within the traditional authority system in the Vengo fondom.

7. EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

External factors further stirred Vengo's internal conflicts. Neighboring kingdoms like Kom, Nso, and Bali Kumbat often capitalized on these disputes to extend their influence over the village. The arrival of colonial powers, notably the Germans under Eugene Zintgraff, added another dimension. Zintgraff's engagement with King Saingi II, ostensibly to form alliances against regional rivals, symbolized the complex interplay of internal ambitions and external interventions. While Saingi II sought to leverage colonial support to consolidate his authority, the Germans viewed Vengo's division as an opportunity to strengthen their foothold in the region.

The broader context of power struggles in Vengo reflects the intrinsic tension between centralized authority and decentralized decision-making structures. The Bah's role as a custodian of tradition often clashed with the Fon's aspirations for centralized control. This duality, while ensuring checks and balances, also became a source of persistent friction, particularly when external pressures such as colonialism and regional rivalries intensified these dynamics.

In sum, the origins and evolution of political conflicts in Vengo were deeply entrenched in its historical governance structure, socio-economic changes, and external influences. The dual authority system, while vital to the people's political identity, also fostered enduring power struggles that have shaped its political trajectory across centuries. These conflicts underscore the complexities of maintaining traditional governance systems amidst changing socio-political landscapes.

8. CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN THE VENGO FENDOM

Conflicts within the Vengo's socio-political setup have deeply impacted its cultural landscape, eroding traditional practices, fragmenting leadership structures, and weakening communal cohesion. Rooted in historical tensions and compounded by modern tendencies, these conflicts reveal the delicate balance between governance and culture in the Vengo community.

9. DISRUPTION OF RITUAL PRACTICES

Like in many other villages in the Bamenda grassland, rituals were central to the Vengo culture, serving as conduits for ancestral communication, social cohesion, and spiritual affirmation. Conflicts within the socio-political structure, have however, disrupted these practices, leading to their neglect or outright abandonment. For instance, the Fon-Bah conflict affected the performance of key communal rituals like those performed during the *Nekai* festival. Traditional libation ceremonies, essential for invoking ancestral blessings and ensuring communal harmony were suspended in Muokang quarter due to leadership disputes. The Bah's withdrawal from such events further fragmented participation, reducing the cultural significance and spiritual efficacy of these ceremonies.

The influence of Christianity has added another layer of disruption. Several notables and quarter heads who have converted to Christianity now refuse to perform rituals such as libations or participate in cultural ceremonies, citing conflicts with their religious beliefs. This shift has not only disrupted the continuity of these practices but also created ideological rifts within families and the broader community. Empirical research highlights the role of rituals in maintaining cultural identity; their discontinuation often leads to cultural erosion (Ray, 1997:172). In the Vengo fendom, this has resulted in a loss of communal unity and spiritual connection, diminishing the community's collective cultural identity and culminated efforts at peace resolution between the Fon and Bah.

Conflicts within the sociopolitical setup have therefore fractured communal identity. Cultural events that traditionally brought the community together, such as the *Nekai* dance and Samba events, have witnessed drastic under-performances and under-participation due to ideological and political divisions. The Fon-Bah conflict, for example, has led to boycotts of key events by Muokang quarter, further isolating factions within the community. These divisions are exacerbated by the influence of modernity and religion, which have introduced new value systems that often conflict with traditional norms.

10. FRAGMENTATION OF TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP AND LOSS OF COMMUNAL COHESION

The conflicts between the Fon and the Bah significantly fragmented the Vengo's traditional leadership structure. The Fon, as the cultural and political head, relies on the support of the *Ngumba* and quarter heads to maintain authority and execute cultural responsibilities. However, disputes, particularly over symbolic privileges and authority, undermined this unity. The Bah's assertion of symbolic authority, such as allowing his wives to wear cowries traditionally reserved for the Fon's wives, exemplified how symbolic gestures could disrupt cultural norms and leadership legitimacy.

This fragmentation weakened the ability of traditional institutions to function effectively as custodians of the culture they inherit. When leaders are embroiled in disputes, their focus shifts away from preserving and promoting cultural practices, leaving a void in communal leadership. Vansina (1985) emphasizes that cohesive leadership is critical for sustaining cultural traditions (Vansina, 1985:115). In Vengo, the lack of unity among leaders has stalled cultural initiatives and eroded trust in traditional governance. The loss of communal cohesion on its part, undermines the collective ethos that is central to the Vengo culture. Cultural practices, which rely on collective participation and shared identity, lose their significance when the community is divided. Research in cultural anthropology underscores the importance of unity in maintaining cultural vitality; without it, traditions become fragmented and lose their meaning (Oyewumi, 1997:57). In Vengo, this fragmentation accelerated the decline of

cultural practices, particularly among younger generations who lacked exposure to unified cultural expressions.

11. IMPACT ON INTERGENERATIONAL CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

The conflicts within the Vengo's socio-political structure disrupted the transmission of cultural knowledge to younger generations, creating a generational gap in cultural understanding. Traditional events and ceremonies, which served as critical sites for cultural education, became sporadic or politicized, depriving youths of opportunities to learn about their heritage. For instance, the suspension of cultural activities in the Bah's Muokang quarter for over a decade translates that an entire generation missed experiencing these traditions first hand.

This loss of cultural transmission and erosion of symbolic authority are particularly of primary concern given the pressures of globalization and urbanization, which already distanced the Vengo youths from their cultural roots. Studies argue that consistent engagement with traditions is essential for their survival (Appadurai, 1996:67). In Vengo, the lack of such engagement has left younger generations more susceptible to cultural assimilation, weakening the community's long-term cultural resilience. Pertaining to the erosion of symbolic authority, symbols play a vital role in legitimizing authority and reinforcing cultural norms in Vengo. Conflicts within the socio-political structure, however, eroded the symbolic authority of traditional leaders. The Fon's symbolic supremacy, represented by rituals, attire, and ceremonial privileges, waned in the face of defiance from the Bah and Christian leaders. For instance, the refusal of Christian leaders to participate in certain cultural events signaled a rejection of traditional authority and values. Similarly, the Bah's symbolic transgressions undermined the Fon's role as the ultimate cultural custodian.

12. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the conflicts within Vengo's sociopolitical setup that have had profound and far-reaching cultural implications. It revealed how historical rivalries, socio-political dynamics, and cultural expectations shape these conflicts ultimately impacting the cohesion of the community. From the disruption of rituals to the fragmentation of leadership and the erosion of communal cohesion, these conflicts have weakened the foundations of traditions and culture. The impact is particularly pronounced with the loss of intergenerational transmission of cultural values and the decline of symbolic authority, both of which threaten the community's cultural sustainability. The contemporary escalation of the Fon-Bah conflict in Vengo reflects a convergence of historical rivalries, structural ambiguities, and modern influences. Administrative reforms, intellectual rivalries, symbolic acts, and the forces of modernity have deepened the divide between these two key leaders, destabilizing Vengo's political and cultural systems. Resolving this conflict requires more than a return to traditional norms; it demands innovative approaches that address both historical grievances and modern realities. Only through dialogue and mutual recognition can the Fon and Bah restore the unity necessary for cultural and political resurgence. It requires a comprehensive approach that reconciles leadership disputes, fosters community unity, and prioritizes the preservation of the Vengo's cultural heritage in the face of modern and religious pressures. The call for the reinforcement of traditional governance structures by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of both the Fon and Bah can help restore legitimacy and foster a sense of shared authority within the community

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