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The story of houses in the grassfields: mobility, belonging and hierarchies in urbanising North-West Cameroon

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4. Access to Land and Conflicts

4.1 Introduction

Understanding mobility and the need to demonstrate its achievement through the use of the highly disputed natural resource, land for building of mansions and the opening up of large scale farms by urban elite is a subject that has been going on amongst Africanists for some time now. Importantly, these large and modern houses are contested by the indigenous people as well. It will be pivotal here to find out how these actions affecting the social fabrics of the community that they are constantly seeking to enact their belonging and identity through material culture. Access to land generally speaking especially in rural Africa is tied to one's membership and status, labour and investment of capital within various social units in the community making it almost impossible to take out issues of belonging and/or identity when questions on land arise. Scholars such as Berry (1989), Shipton and Goheen (1992), Goheen (1996) and Ribot and Peluso (2003) have done some excellent work on land and according to them land is seen as a means of personal and social identification. These notions on land, belonging and/or identity are delicately interwoven within a web of social connections making 'land an important social asset in Africa' as it is a means through which local and descent group affiliations are maintained (Haugerud, 1989:61-62 and Berry, 1989:42). It is therefore only through this resource that we will get to understand to an extent why these urbanites are returning home, acquiring land and building these houses which are the main sources of attraction in this thesis. In order to construct a house, we need land and in order to gain access you must go through various processes of negotiation that would permit you to acquire land.

The pith of this chapter lies on the access of land. Accessibility from the perspective of the Papiakum people is crucial in understanding their materiality. Through cultivation, houses, schools, health centres etc people are able to access land in multiple ways. Without land the infrastructural changes on the landscape becomes impossible. This chapter delves therefore not only answer the question of access to land but it is also on the aspect of land conflict and how it is managed within this community. This will not only deepen our knowledge of the ethnography of the people but expand discussions on the changes brought by these urbanites through their landed and social investments. Fundamentally, this chapter rotates on the fabric of social relation amongst the Papiakum when they did settle in their present site. It questions how land was distributed so as to accommodate each other and to enable the people to live in harmony. Due to how people relate with it, land is said to be gendered. However, having, owning or using land does not make it safe and free because no matter how one relates with land, there are always conflicts especially when it comes to the question of access. These conflicts stem mainly from the fact that land has a social life through people's relations to and with it. Land here will not be taken simply as a place or thing but will be regarded as a mobile and immobile material and immaterial culture which people use for varied 'purposes: not just to produce the material conditions of survival and enrichment, but also to gain control over others, and to define personal and social identities' and to a larger extent, power (Shipton and Goheen, 1992:307).

The negotiations within these processes will be a vital point as they no doubt affect people's everyday relations. It also discusses how gender relations played out in terms of access and usage with regards also to competition and conflicts. Ribot and Peluso (2003:153-156), opines that 'access as the ability to benefit from things-including material objects, persons, institutions and symbols ... helps us understand why some people or

institutions benefit from resources, whether or not they have the right to them.’ It is this constant striving for the benefits from this resource that makes societies tick as power game comes to play in the process to gain, control and maintain access.

This chapter is structured in three parts: the land tenure system, various mechanisms to gain access to land and different types of land conflicts existing. These processes of gaining access to land amongst the Papiakum is quite relevant to the understanding of mobility, landscapes and general infrastructure because it is only through these processes therefore that we can understand and appreciate how and why some urbanites could access land within certain location for their investments. Theirs may not be very different to that of most of the other peoples of the Grassfields areas. With the use of empirical cases, I will be able to critically appreciate what is happening in Baba I. Also in this process, I will show how the mobility of people and ideas are influencing the land tenure systems, thus, affecting the socio-cultural and political connections amongst the Papiakum people.

4.2 The Land Tenure System in Cameroon

During the pre-colonial period in the Western Highlands of Cameroon, people were administered under Fondoms (Kingdoms) and these Fondoms were ruled as independent states that later became auxiliaries to the colonial administration and the present state of Cameroon. Under the traditional hierarchical systems, the Fons, usually imbued with quasi-religious functions manage the affairs of their states with the assistance of the big notables. Notables were in charge of different quarters, and constituted the council assisting the Fon to govern the village. Each notable had an area of land under his control and the land was allocated to him and his families. Land was/is collectively owned by the village under the leadership of the Fon as he was/is the custodian of the land according to customary law still in place. Men were in charge of land and as an obligation to allocate land to each of their wives for cultivation and to their sons for building as the need arises as land was considered the lifeblood of the community. If a man died without a son, his land became communal property again. Land was community property, inalienable and even sacred that was handed down from one generation to another. Talks about single ownership were far-fetched as individuals could only have a right of enjoyment to satisfy their food and housing needs. It is relevant to note that the allocation of land to members and possession varied from one region to another and from one ethnic group to another. This type of land management was and is generally known as “customary” or “traditional” land tenure (Chilver and Kaberry, 1967; Goheen, 1996).

Colonialism came with the introduction of individual land titling through fulfilling certain administrative procedures; land became private property that could be disposed of at will. The German colonial administration (1884-1914), though short-lived, extended its influence throughout Cameroon. Cameroonian territory was delimited under the Germans introducing registration in the Grundbuch as a principle of land securitization. This was mainly in their favour as they occupied vast expanses of land along the coastal regions of Cameroon for banana, palms, rubber and tea plantations.

After World War 1, Cameroon came under the French and British rule. In French speaking Cameroon prior to independence, three land tenure systems were attainable. The transcription system, under which each real property owned, had to be recorded in a special register reserved only to French ‘expatriates’. The customary land rights recognition system for indigenous peoples that required them to prove effective occupancy to the administrative authorities for rights over the land to be recognised and a land registration book issued which was lower in status to land certificate. The registration system was for all

Cameroonians to have their customary rights established following a procedure that led to the issuance of the land registration book with a probative value (African Development Bank (ADB) Report, 2009).

In the northern and southern parts of Cameroon placed under the British, the Land and Native Rights Ordinance was issued to enable all and sundry to use and occupy land with two types of right of occupancy: the Statutory Right of Occupancy for non-indigenes and the Customary Right of Occupancy to indigenes. The Governor by an article added later on to the ordinance could revoke the customary right of occupancy at any time. Freehold land or leasehold land was introduced afterwards to guarantee access to full ownership of land. Outside these two land categories, all occupied or unoccupied land was declared as customary land. All these measures emanated due to the importance of traditional forms of access to land and the complexity of the land issue which every survey including those to modernize the lands and surveys sectors, must take into account (ADB, 2009).

The reunification of Cameroon in 1972 provided a platform for harmonization reforms of the different land tenure systems according to Ordinance No. 74-1 and 74-2 of 6 July 1974 which classified land as Private, owned by individuals and corporate entities, groups or the state and must be titled and registered. By Public land this referred to highways, parks, waterways as examples held by the state for all and sundry in Cameroon while National land referred to most unoccupied land and land held by communities under customary law, informal settlements and grazing land with the state having the power to allocate use rights to individuals or groups or convert such land into the state's private or public property.

The following tenure types are recognized by formal law; Ownership where landowners have rights to exclusive possession and use of their land, the right to mortgage the land, and the right to transfer the land and all these must be registered; The state can grant Usufruct rights to occupants of national land especially to unregistered community land; Leaseholds can be granted by private parties or the state under terms agreed to by the parties. Leasing, rental arrangements and share cropping are some common deals made on the ground; Profit or license right for customary communities to benefit products from unoccupied national land until assigned to a particular use by the state (GOC Land Law No. 74-1, 1974 and ADB, 2009).

However, most land in Cameroon has been obtained through purchase, leasing, borrowing, inheritance, or allocation by traditional leaders. The process of obtaining a land certificate has three phases: Administrative for assessing the land occupation and development taken care of by the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Technical for its physical description done by the Department of Surveys and Legal for analysing the conditions of access to property right by the Department of State Property and the Department of Land Tenure. The above mentioned departments are under the Ministry of State Property and Land Tenure. The registration procedure formally will take 93 days and costs 18% of its value which requires a copy of the property deed at the Land Registry, drafts and final versions notarized, and registration with the Tax Authorities and Land Registry. However, the registration process is generally considered cumbersome, expensive and time-consuming (GOC Land Law No. 74-1, 1974; Halle, 2006; ADB, 2009; USAID, 2011).

Though the authority for registration was decentralized to local levels in 2005, with the prefect-level Land Consultation Boards assuming responsibility for demarcating land and adjudicating rights, the Land Consultation Boards and local government offices systems, equipment, financial support and training for the process to function as intended.

This has made the vast majority of the population to continuously depend on the customary law with its insecurities and limitations.

In addition to costs associated with registration, gaps in the land administration processes and infrastructure have contributed to slowing the transition from customary property rights to private ownership of property. Land tenure insecurity has grown rather than diminished. Reports of multiple sales of the same land, false land certificates, and inaccuracies in boundary definitions are commonplace, and conflicts and disputes are frequent. In general, the registration process does not improve tenure security, and banks, landholders or buyers do not rely on the system. As part of the state's efforts to modernize agriculture, land has been made available to politically and economically powerful individuals and entities (GOC Land Law No. 74-1, 1974; Halle, 2006; ADB, 2009; USAID, 2011).

4.3 Land Tenure System in Baba I

The Papiakum people rely more on customary laws for the acquisition of land and their procedures varies amongst the different peoples of the Grassfield. Land's mobility as a cultural resource could be seen through its social history because land in itself has its own life. Traditionally, land was partitioned according to the different compounds (a large unit of several families), that formed various quarters under a quarter head and all these quarter heads were/and/or, answerable to the Fon who was/is the custodian as well as the auxiliary of the government of the entire land surface under his jurisdiction. The different compounds further distributed the land accordingly to various heads of households and heads of households to their wives and children (temporarily to the daughters and permanently for the sons). Migrants are settled by families that they have had close ties with or given land by the Fon depending on their reasons for migrating. This in fact is not different from what was attained during the pre-colonial times but of course this has been undergoing some changes.

However, men are generally regarded as guidance of the land as per their customs and conventions which are still being upheld. Immediately a man marries, though his/their family might surrender part of his/their land to his wife/wives, it is still considered his/their property. When a woman is granted access to land through marriage by the husband or his family, this becomes hers as she is the one farming on it and maintaining the borders. Once a piece of land is to be given her, the wife becomes its manager and controller till she dies or she starts sharing the land to her children or daughters in-law. However, the land remains the property of the husband though management and control is in the hands the wife/wives.

When it comes to the sale of the land, it becomes problematic and gender roles are evoked. It was a taboo for a woman to sell land while the husband was alive or dead likewise the husband without the consent of the wife. The sale of land can only be done by the husband in consultation with the wife. He must consent with the wife if he thinks of doing something on or about it. A sale of land especially family property was a taboo. A transfer of ownership with a token was just what was required. Monetary value was not so much attached to it as it is today as it was considered a shameful act. This is still the case to a certain extent these days as a good number of research partners pointed out. Land is mostly sold as a last resort to handle some family financial crisis where there is no option left like in the case of ill health.

In Baba I, there are reserved areas that are closed sacred places and others open like the hills, swamps and some forests that are considered community land. These open places

especially are mostly used for grazing activities but for the swamps which are used for rice cultivation with access strictly under the control of the Fon. With the closed and sacred places, access is very limited and only members of specific social groupings do have access into them. When it comes to the practicalities of ownership, there is a traditional process that one must follow for recognition and legitimacy. This process involves the use of five basic items; a branch of fig tree or peace plant, red oil, salt, cam wood and chicken. Those present during the occasion will depend on who and how you are acquiring the land. If it is the Fon giving you the land, it is the traditional council that will be witness to the scene and perform the ritual of handing over as delegated by the Fon. If land is bought from an individual, it is the person selling that will perform the rite which means handing over his piece of land to the buyer. When it comes to women acquiring land from her family, the father or head of the family will be in charge. Women can also negotiate and buy land elsewhere which was not a common practice but it is gradually gaining grounds. Note that sons begotten out of wedlock are considered the mother's sibling by her family. In all cases, the neighbours around the land must be present so that boundaries are properly defined and your witnesses will be your friends or whoever was invited to the scene.

On the designated day, all persons concerned go to the site with symbolic items; a fig tree branch or peace plant, red oil, salt, cam wood and chicken to enact the handing over rite. Whether it is the representative of the traditional council or an individual, the branch of the fig tree is pegged into the ground, rubbed with red oil, the fowl's throat cut and the blood poured over the branch; cam wood and salt are then sprinkled over. Some soil is then taken from the place and given to the person acquiring the land. This is a symbolic action meaning that the land has been handed over to the buyer. When this ritual is performed, the buyer could now lay claim on it as from that day. Symbolically, the blood from the chicken is a binding pact, the cam wood and salt for peace and fertility on the land (these items are essential during marriage ceremony as well) and the branch and oil for fruitful production. If anything goes wrong or is going wrong, the buyer could declare him or herself innocent by taking some soil in his/her hands from the land to swear or curse. The Papiakum people believe that if the buyer genuinely acquired a piece of land according to the traditional norms, whatever happens to the land, the buyer will be vindicated and the curse will fall on the culprit and vice versa (Traditional Council, 2009).

4.4 The Dynamics of Accessing Land in Baba I

Land like any other natural resources that embody value, has undergone a process that has made it a cultural resource. This is so because land has been adopted and imbued with symbolic cultural insignias and values that give it its meaning and place within the community. This cultural resource has been defined and redefined within specific contexts. This depends on the community and who is negotiating to acquire, use or own the land. The social life of things which is tied to personal, family and community comes as a binding force making it difficult to separate the social history and cultural biography of objects. Though land is fixed, it is highly mobile when looked at from the perspective of its socialness, 'for it is the social history of things, over large periods of time and at large social levels, that constrain the forms, meaning and structure of more short-term, specific and intimate trajectories' and also, shifts in the cultural biography of things may in the long run lead to shifts in their social history (Appadurai, 1996:36).

Berry (1989) and Ribot and Peluso (2003), carried out some work on access analysis which is the process of identification and the mapping out the different mechanisms, by which access is gained, controlled and maintained. Their work resonates with the findings

in Baba I. This is cognizance of the fact that access patterns have changed over time and they could be understood as processes. These mechanisms of access are placed under two broad categories. Firstly, the structural and relational access mechanisms which take care of technology, capital, markets, labour, knowledge, authority, identities and social relations. Secondly, right-based which include illegal access. These categories operate parallel to shape how benefits are gained, controlled and maintained. As stated by Ribot and Peluso (2003:155) 'benefits are important because people, institutions and societies live on and for them and clash and cooperate over them. These actions prompted by the socialness of land will further be expanded using concrete cases from the field.

4.5 Structural and Relational Access Mechanisms

The hierarchical structure of the Papiakum people have over the years created and recreated different ways by which benefits from land can be gotten. In order to illustrate this properly as postulated by Ribot and Peluso (2003: 160-164), we have to get into the structural and relational access mechanisms, 'exploring how technology, capital, market, knowledge, authority, social identities and social relations can shape or influence access. 'Benefits can be redistributed and captured in the course of changing social relations' and 'the ability to benefit from resources is mediated by constraints established by the specific political-economic and cultural frames within which access to resource is sought'. Through concrete examples I am going to illustrate how these different access mechanisms stated by Ribot and Peluso play out amongst the Papiakum people.

Access to Technology facilitates access to benefit from resources which otherwise could be impossible to gain, control or maintain. After countless, frustrating and costly trespasses by animals and people on one of his plots where he had planted over 2000 palms, Moh Tanghongho decided it was time to put a fence around the land. This restricted and controlled the movement of people and animals into the farm. This fence also made it possible for him to reinvest in the tree plants and giving breathing space for the other plants to survive, thus, regaining control over his investments. While he used barbwire fencing, others in the village simply demarcated their land by planting hedges, food crop trees or simply with stones collected around the area as these symbolised or communicated the intent to restrict access. Interestingly, there was just a house enclosed with concrete walls around it in Baba I (see Fig 4.1) unlike in the urban centres where these bushfallers reside.



Figure 4.1: The lone fenced house before 2014 in Baba I while this is a common sight in the urban centres as one of the visible signs of secured environment.

Source: Photo by Author

Still in line with Ribot's and Peluso's discussions, roads 'facilitate the ability to physically reach a resource', as well as weapons also 'facilitate the upholding of right-based and illicit access. In themselves, roads and weapons are less direct technologies to aid and/or deny access but the case of the roads in Mbaghangha quarter is a sure example of how roads have facilitated access into the swampy areas for rice cultivation and to the market. The grading of the road from the market square via the palace to Mbanka has also facilitated all the construction work taking place along this stretch as building materials now get to these sites with relative ease and at a reduced cost. There are also cases where weapons were used in order to exercise control, for instance, two brothers pulling out knives at each other over a particular piece of land.

Access to Market roads also made it possible for more farmers to be open for negotiation of prices and the transportation of their produce. During the harvesting season down at this major farming area, Mbaghangha, there are 50/100kgs bags of corn heaped at various pick-up points pending transportation to either the markets or farmer's houses. During this period also, most of the urban elite drive in with pick-up vans to transport their harvest to their stores or granaries. Also, during this period, a lot of buying and selling takes place on the farms between farmers and dealers who would preferably buy directly from the farms thus gaining the benefits of direct access to the resources. Through the weekly market which is an open space for people to sell and buy as they want except for the Fon's wives who are not allowed customarily to go around freely in the market but are well informed about market prices, lots of negotiations and social interactions do take place. Markets also served as meeting points for the exchange and dissemination of information as lots of

campaigns, health and politics do take place in this space. Though Fig 4.2 is indicating the directions to major rice farms, it also shows how the opening of the roads to these farms have led to access to the main farming belt of the village.



Figure 4.2: Farm to Market roads

Source: Photo by Author

Fig 4.3 shows the biggest built up granary, situated along the main axis into Baba I and quite close to the market square, where maize especially was kept after harvesting to dry off properly.



Figure 4.3: Granary at Meya Quarter

Source: Photo by Author

Having Access to Capital gives one an upper hand in the negotiation and purchase of land. This asset made it possible for Christian to renegotiate and buy the land (for his dream house in the village) from the rightful owner after having bought from an unlawful owner. In these negotiations which he had to navigate various institutions, he spent much more money than what he had envisaged as he also had to pay-off someone who had previously bought part of the land. This gesture of paying off this person was very important to him as he said ‘I would not want to settle here when everything is not at peace’. This land/house is situated along the Bamenda Ring Road meaning accessibility is very good and the value of land is very high as it lies in the most expensive stretch of land in the village.

Ribot and Peluso (2003:165) have noted that, ‘access to capital can be used for resource access control through the purchase of rights. It can also be used to maintain resource access when used to pay rents, formal access fees, or to buy influence over people who control resources’. Christian’s access to capital made it possible for him to benefit from this resource. These urban elite also have an upper hand over negotiations in deals to

get the limited number of construction workers unto their projects. Some of them actually sponsor workers from urban centres to come to their project sites for specific jobs within a given time frame. In so doing, these in-coming workers also win for themselves new contracts when job opportunities are available especially during the dry season which is the peak period for construction in the village. Christian's case is just an example of what many bushfaller partners and land holders from the urban centres as well as in the village is doing with their new found wealth to gain, control and maintain resource access.

4.6 Access to Labour and Labour Opportunities

In the Western Highlands (Baba I inclusive) of Cameroon, men showed off their wealth and riches through the number of wives and children they had who constituted their source of labour force. These persons under their control supplied the labour needed for their cash crop farms. Like Berry (1989:42), I ascertained that 'control over productive resources also depend on one's ability to dominate or influence others and could be claimed by all incumbents of a particular group or status category, irrespective of individual wealth. This makes everyday interactions a continuous process of negotiation which, in turn, paves the way for gaining, controlling and maintaining or blocking/denying access to land. This also goes to resonate the point raised with the Nso' people that the control of women's 'productive and reproductive labour ... has always been central to maintaining the hierarchies of male power and status', Goheen, (1996:8). This brings to mind Shipton and Goheen's three forms of social affiliations and distinctions that affect land use and control: 'groups (bounded units whose members are aware of common membership and may act collectively, networks (unbounded series of links between persons), and categories (unbounded sets of people with a common characteristic or interest) (1992:309).

A case in point is Lesley who controls job opportunities for the many projects he is supervising, thus, gaining for himself patronage relations as well as power to bargain wages. He became a major broker between workers and the bushfallers as he uses other access mechanisms like technology (mobile phones) to maintain contacts with the urban elite in order to keep his control over job/labour opportunities. There are however some of these workers who have gradually gained access to land through established friendships as workers per their own right on projects. These patronage relations have made it possible for some of these workers to gain residence in the village and started a family with access to farmland amongst others. Still through social affiliations and distinction as with the case of the rice fields in Mbaghangha, the Fon as custodian of the land does facilitate the procedure for others to benefit from the resource that normally would not have been via the quarter heads. In reference to Ribot and Peluso (2003:167-168) this simply illustrates that 'those who control physical access to resources may influence those who get there to work in the extraction or production'.

Access to Knowledge gives added advantage and it is crucial in the decision about who can benefit from resources. Through many examples I saw also with landholders in Baba I that 'access might be driven by more than economic or moral claims to subsistence rights, it serves the social, political and ritualistic purposes as well as representing kinship, power relations, or ritual harmony'. Most often than not, these landholders carry along its social history that could be used to their advantage when granting access to benefit to the resources under their control. When it came to information about what land was available for sale, the women had the advantage. Most of the bushfallers (especially those whose mothers are alive) reiterated this point that their mothers looked for land for them to buy through their various networks. Some of these urban elite also pointed out that where they

wanted to build their houses at the onset was rejected by their mothers saying that the land was either cursed or unsafe for habitation raising the issue of witchcraft and witch hunting. This goes to confirm and affirm that the centrality of questions about and around the identity and social relations are crucial for gaining access to resources as elucidated in several studies (Cf. Berry, 1989 and 1993, Shipton and Goheen, 1992, Goheen, 1996 and Ribot and Peluso, 2003) on land issues.

‘Access to Authority’ is an important juncture in the web of powers that enable people benefit from things’ (Ribot and Peluso, 2003:170). The above mentioned access mechanisms give vivid illustrations of how the Fon intervenes for some villagers to gain access on the rice fields as well as other farmlands and even land for construction.



Figure 4.4: Farmland in Meya and Mbaghangha

Source: Photo by Author

While on the field, a conflict that had apparently been simmering erupted between the Division Officer, Ali Anogu, Parish Priest (PP) of the Catholic Church, Fr. Frans Meulemans and the Fon, Fuekemshi IV, over the planting of pillars on a disputed piece of land owned by a widow, which the Fon objected. Through this conflict, it became visible how ‘legal, customary and conventional authorities may also compete or conflict in the sense of having overlapping jurisdictions of authority’ and how ‘such overlaps allow individuals to take advantage of different social identities to acquire or accumulate resources using different notions of legitimate or authoritative access’ (Ribot and Peluso, 2003:170).

‘Access through Social Identity’ is often mediated by social identity or membership in a community or group, including groupings by age, gender, ethnicity, religion, status, profession, place of birth, common education, or other attributes that constitute to social identity’ (Ribot and Peluso, 2003:170-171). Its centrality in access mechanism is encompassing making it the spring board for the discussion. It is through our social identity and relations that land loses its face as a mere thing. Through this mechanism, we bring to life the socialness of land which in turn unfolds its cultural biography. As mentioned earlier, women were mainly granted access to land through marriage and this was solely for the purpose of food production for the sustenance of the family. This access eventually passes from mother to children and/or daughters in-law. In most cases and as it is expected in Baba I, the daughter maintains access until she is married. This is so because upon marriage her husband and in-laws are supposed to grant her access to one of their pieces of land.

However, there are many cases where the daughters have continuously tapped from these resources though being married. Anyhow, no matter how long she uses this resource, she cannot claim ownership or total control over it nor pass it down to her offspring except

she is a lone child like the case a single mother with seven kids (5 girls and 2 boys). According to Papiakum customs, she was married off to her father in a sense as he paid her bride price to the mother's family. In her case, her mother actually did make provision for this symbolic marriage to take place as her father had passed away. This is to ensure the continuity of her father's name since all her children will be considered her siblings and the man who fathered them can lay no claim. Taking her current situation, she said, 'I am the only one managing with them (her children) because the man I begged the children from died in a motor accident'. Since she has this status of a female lone child, she controls and manages all her father's land and they are seen and considered as hers. In a way, the society sees her as a man due to the fact that her life condition has positioned her within men's sphere of dominance and control.

On the other hand, the male child does not only gain access but would eventually claim ownership and control over the land that the mother has been farming. Looking at some identity-based within Papiakum social groupings, some people were treated differently given their social status. When princes came of age and had to move out of the palace, they were handed to any family in the village. This family had the responsibility to settle this prince on a piece of land and support him to start his own family. These receiving families became connected to the palace and won favour through the hosting of these princes. Apparently, with rapid population increase, this practice is fast dying out as people are using other channels to access this authority to benefit from resources. According to the Babessi Council Development Plan: Draft Report (2011:22-23), the population of Baba I was at 24,268 from the 2005 census and projection from 2005-2011. Looking at population statistics of St. Monica's Catholic Health Centre 2016, the population stood at 33,450.

'Access through Negotiation of other Social Relations form critical strands in access webs and like identity, social relations are central to virtually all elements of access' (Ribot and Peluso, 2003:172). Every human society is stratified and in this stratification, social status maybe either achieved or ascribed. Through their ranks and files, they may become 'objects as well as instruments of accumulation,' thus reinforcing the fact and idea that access depends solely on one's social identity and relations. Friendship bonds, trust, reciprocity, patronage, dependence, and obligation are those critical strands. Through years of assisting and travelling with the Fon for business trips to Nigeria, Jungle earned for himself the title of 'Suifue' (friend of the Fon) to join the ranks of big notables in the village. His access to authority also made it easier for him to have an extensive piece of land where he is engaged in mixed farming and horticulture.

'People sought access to new sources of wealth and power through existing institutional channels and used their newfound wealth and influence in ways which served to restructure old institutions and social relations rather than to destroy them' (Berry, 1989:44). This is a vivid description of what these bushfallers are actively engaged in whether their social status are ascribed or achieved as they are returning home to gain access to resources. Berry (1989 and 1993), Shipton and Goheen (1992), Goheen (1996) and Ribot and Peluso (2003), have noted that, staying and keeping in touch with one's kith and kin are social investments which depend a lot on close-netted social ties cultivated and nurtured over time. It is the spring board of most of the changes taking place in Africa whether it is in its political, economic and social activities.

4.7 Right-Based Access

Ribot and Peluso (2003:162) help us to understand that there are different means or 'mechanisms of access' through which a person can gain, control and maintain access to

land whether they have a right to them or not. 'Rights-based means of access imply the involvement of a community (in the broadest sense of this term), state and government that will enforce a claim. Law-based property rights include access via the holding of titles or deeds of real property as well as permits and licences ... Customary or conventional access occurs via social acceptance of a given circumstance or practice by which people gain benefits. Customs and conventions do not depend on coercive enforcement mechanism though sometimes coercion is used for enforcement. This is true per the Cameroonian text as it is the right of every citizen to gain access to land in so far as the proper procedures are followed. This must be cognizant of the community's customs and conventions and the state via the holding of title deeds in any part of the country.

At the rural level, the customary laws are fully in place giving the populace a sense of being through their customs and norms. It is only through this that the right-based mechanism can be fully comprehended. For instance, among the Papiakum people, it is the right of the son to claim access to his father's piece of land especially that which is or was under the control of his mother. Likewise it is the right of the woman to be granted access over the husband's land whether he is dead or alive if properly married according to the norms and traditions. Women in general cannot sell land or lay ownership claim on it especially from their father or can a son begotten out of wedlock claim rights over land in his biological father's compound. It is considered a huge taboo if a woman does so or even plants trees on the land. Trees are considered as markers of permanency.

During one of the traditional council sessions to handle local disputes was the case of 'a daring' woman against her husband who had sold her farmland without her consent. When the man was questioned, he said it was his property and he had the right to do with it as he wanted but was gently reminded that he knew nothing of the land which had been under the management of his wife for over two decades. The man who bought the land was simply asked if it was a man or woman farming the land to which he responded, a woman. They were reminded of the rule of consent and that proper procedures were not followed. The woman was therefore asked to resume her farming activities and the husband to make a refund of what he had gotten from his negotiations.

The right of access to the land for the buyer was revoked as it was considered illegal as per their customs and norms. Illegal access therefore 'is a form of direct access defined against those based on the sanctions and custom, convention or law'. Through coercion and stealth though as I recorded in many cases and as pointed out in Ribot and Peluso (2003:164), access can be controlled illegally making it possible for people to illegally maintain access through relations cultivated or pose a threat to those controlling access. Most of these kinds of cases registered were amongst widows and wives who dared not challenge the authorities of their in-laws and husbands as the above case. When these women were asked, they simply responded with a sign of resignation that they were running away with their children's heads as well as theirs. These are some of the ambiguities that come into play with in-laws, customs and conventions. This will also cover the aspect of illegal access gained which is also right-based.

4.8 Land Conflicts in Baba I

One of the things that put pressure on land is population growth. When a population naturally increases, it pushes up the demand in land resource which, in a short while, will affect the supply which is inelastic. Due to the inelastic nature of land and the rising demand as a result of rapid population growth, scarcity sets in provoking all sorts of conflicts as people look for alternative and illicit ways to acquire or gain access to the

resource. This also affects the social norms of the society in the process of acquisition. A simple example is the allocation of family plots which become limited in the long run for the sons especially from big and polygamous homes. This has caused family conflicts with untold pains and sufferings. Brothers are forced to relocate by buying plots in other places, thus, becoming strangers to the other family members. Population growth also causes congestion on land due to the desire to acquire more space. This has made some people to move out of their native land in order to negotiate for new plots outside family designated areas.

The demand for land also increases when those born outside or who had migrated out are returning home to acquire land for one reason or the other. These persons might actually stir up conflicts at the family, quarter and community level as the lay claims or acquire access to land. They may not fully grasp the dynamics around and about the functioning of land related issues if not well informed. Mobility of persons and ideas are also contributing a factor which cannot be ignored and which is not limited to return migrants. These conflicts which are visible and invisible can manifest in different manners and if not properly handled, can even result to loss of livelihood, disposition or eviction.

4.8.1 The Sale of Land by Unlawful Owners

As one walks the streets of urban centres in the country, the signposts in Fig 4.5 and Fig 4.6 (Land/House for sale) is a common post on busy street corners and other strategic positions in town. This phenomenon is not yet in Baba I as they use different strategies to get information on the sales. The lived experience of one of my research partners will enlighten us on some of the complications that arise if not properly informed on a facet of land.



Figure 4.5: Sales signpost at Mile 2 Nkwen
Junction, Bamenda

Source: Photo by Author



Figure 4.6: Sales signpost at Veterinary

Junction, Bamenda

Source: Photo by Author

Christian is a young enterprising businessman based in Yaoundé where he deals mostly in men's wear and accessories. He was born in 1976 in Baba I where he did his primary education from 1990 to 1997 and obtained his General Certificate Examination Ordinary Level and General Certificate Examination Advanced Level from Government Bilingual High School, Ndop. He joined one of his elder brothers in Douala thereafter working and learning in his printing company. He got a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business Management in 2000 and 2002 had a short trip to Holland where he intended to continue with his education but things did not work out due to the lack of sufficient funds. Back in Douala from 2002 to 2004, he continued with his brother but decided to get into this business of men's wear and accessories and went away to try to establish independently in Yaounde.

After many years of struggling and acquiring some money, he decided to get for himself a piece of land in the village after having bought two others in Ndop; the administrative headquarters of Ngoketunjia Division. Born into a big family and being a younger person, their father's land was already experiencing pressure as the senior brothers had already acquired land from the family property. Not wanting to get into conflict with any of his siblings because he did not see an unoccupied place suitable for his dream house on the family property, he got a facet of land from a neutral source. With the help of his mother who had been pestering him over the years to build a house at home, he acquired land along the main road running through Baba I market square to Kumbo. This was to be the third piece of land he had acquired between 2005 and 2009. This is the part of the village where land is most expensive as it is along the Bamenda-Kumbo Ring Road.

After buying his land in Baba I, work started on the site two months after the purchase. Shortly after this project began, an injunction order from the palace was placed on the site for work to discontinue, an indication that there was a problem with the land. He explains the problem in the following words: "it was a land that was given out to a princess who settled in Mechacha. The Fon then, Fue Shangha gave the land to one of the daughters whom he gave out to somebody for marriage in Mechacha. So the woman settled there and brought forth children and grand children too and later she died. According to the custom of my place, this piece of land cannot be given out without going back to the palace to say, I have had problems of this nature that has pushed me into selling the land. So the son of the

princess sold the land to me without the consent of the palace. This information got to the palace and I was informed that all my workers had left the site and nobody was allowed to pass there because the place was owned by the Fon’.

From its history, the Fon had handed it over to his daughter to use as a farm land. The Fon died but his successor Fue Kemshi IV ordered that an injunction should be put on the land because it was still his property. This was done and I was called up. I went and spoke with the Fon like a brother and father. He understood me quite well and we negotiated and he was satisfied and gave me the go ahead. This time around he added a small piece of land that was in front of mine and that had been sold to another person too by the same person, the son of the late princess. So the boy now came up, took the matter to the police. Since I did not want to settle there when everything was not at peace, I proposed to hand him what he had paid for the place. I tried to arrange it in my own way because he had also spent money to acquire that land from the same person from whom I got mine. When the Fon came into the matter, he got the whole place as it was his. This time around he told me he had been there 4/5yrs before me and needed to make some profit from it. So after discussions with him we agreed that I was going to make it up to him even though the Fon said I should not give anything to him.



Figure 4.7: Christian’s project at Mechacha Quarter

Source: Photo by Author

He later on understood that the guy had spent money on it as well and asked that I should refund the money for things to go in peace. I accepted and did,” (Christian, personal communication, 20th January, 2010). Figure 4.7 illustrates the stage at which I saw Christian’s project in Mechacha in January 2010. This story brings to mind the issue of scarcity and congestion on family land, the lack of knowledge about the social history of land and the potential economic viability in the process of negotiation which are mechanisms of access that more often than not work parallel to each other. It is a taboo amongst Papiakum people for the children to sell any piece of land that belongs to their maternal family no matter how long their mothers have been farming on it. If this is done without the consent of the woman’s family by her children, it is believed to be a big curse on them and many of them can die because of that piece of land.

Daughters do not have ownership rights over land because it is believed that she will take it to another family which at the end will be creating a lot of problems. Since it was given her just for farming to feed her family, another generation will come and seize it

because they know that it is not right for her to take the family property to another family. Looking at this from the stand point of right-based access, her children did not have any right to sell the property even if there was a pertinent problem. They had to go back to the source and take permission before selling if there was no other option. The apparent lack of knowledge of the social history of the land made the sale illicit as it went against the customary norms. Though considered a prince begotten by a princess, this did not give him any right to land bequeath by his maternal family. It was therefore illegal for him to grant Christian access to his maternal grandfather's property. On the other hand, due to Christian's other social relations and viability, he was able to re-negotiate and gain back access to the land.

4.8.2 Conflicts over Commonly Owned Land

Boundary conflicts are said to be amongst one of the oldest conflicts in the world. Just looking at the aspect of demarcation and mapping of surface area gives one an idea of an inherent problem that human society at a point in time is trying to handle either socially or legally. All territorial boundaries of nation states had to be carved out and some, under serious conflicting situations. The Bakassi Peninsular is a case in point between Nigeria and Cameroon that ended up being resolved by the United Nations through the Green Tree Accord and handed over to Cameroon in 2005. The Grassfield region of Cameroon, Ngoketunjia Division has had its fair share of such conflicts. The focus here is land conflicts between siblings, relatives, families and neighbouring villages, some of which have ended up in court.

Between Siblings; when disagreement broke out between John and Peter who were apparently not the best of friends about boundary lines on the family property, daggers were drawn when the debate got heated. The matter was reported to the traditional council which summoned both parties. Some elders and women of this family had to be brought in since it is believed that women who know the in and out of the land on which they farm daily and so can accurately define the boundaries. These elders and women were questioned by the members of the Traditional Council to know who was encroaching into the other persons land. Council members including the quarter head had to visit the place to ascertain the border lines. Both parties were then summoned by the Traditional Council and the verdict given. Since they both had pulled out weapons (knives) to uphold their right-based access, the brother who was found guilty was asked to pay a fine of a goat and some drinks to the Traditional Council. He was reprimanded again of his action and asked to respect their boundaries as indicated by the family members. The penalty was to send the message that the live of any individual should never be put at risk by another person.

Between Families; Having seen no family member capable of managing his land before his death, Moh handed over the management of his property to the palace including his daughter with the instruction that when his young son came of age he should take over. Few years after his passing away, the Fon allocated part of this land to one of the princes. Yari being a prince thought he could move into the land, do as he pleases given his social identity and his economical viability without seeking anyone's opinion. When Moh's son came of age and asked for their property from Yari, it resulted in a conflict and litigation in court. The matter was reviewed by the court in Ndop and sent back to the village for the Traditional Council to resolve it. Yari who had over ridden this authority had to be reprimanded and told the truth about the ownership of the property. He was asked to vacate the place but he threw caution to the wind and both families kept going back and forth to the court spending time and money. When Moh's successor died and his children buried

him on the disputed land, Yari did not protest or contest their action thus bringing the matter to a close. Since he would respect neither the state nor the Traditional Council the burial custom prevailed. This case is a failed attempt of a situation where one uses his social identity, capital and access to authority to forcefully gain or benefit from land by undermining the less privileged. Though a prince, the verdict from the Traditional Council did not favour him as he must have thought would be the case. The grave, Figure 4.8, on this facet of land is a clear signifier of its ownership to the family concerned.



Figure 4.8: Graveside on a disputed piece of land.

Source: Photo by Author

4.8.3 Dispossession of Widows by In-Laws

There are quite a number of cases in Baba I of widows dispossessed of their farmland by their in-laws. Most of these women have quietly moved on to buy land from somewhere else or left the village to stay with their children in the urban centres in the name of protecting the ‘heads’ (saving the lives) of their children and themselves. For those who have dared to protest as mentioned above, their rights were given them by the Traditional Council so they could control and manage these farmlands. Successors also trying to redefine borders and take over property especially from widows are an old story as with the case of Sabiatou. Sabiatou is a widow with four kids who lost her husband in April 2002 after a brief illness. She had dropped out of school, married and followed her husband to Foubot in 1991. At Foubot, they were involved in the cultivation of tomatoes and other food stuff like corn, plantains, vegetables and coco yams for sale and subsistence. To generate her own income, she was frying and selling puff-puff as well. Due to jealousy and threats to their lives as they were striving well, they decided to return home to Baba I where they were given land for both farming and building by her father in-law as expected traditionally.

The land was not good enough for the cultivation of tomatoes. So they diverted into corn, groundnut and cassava. Though not as profitable as the tomatoes business they had been involved in, they were able to break even with it as they could take proper care of themselves and their three daughters until the cruel hands of death took her husband away. Sabiatou's in-laws decided to take the husband's corpse back to their main compound for burial beside the father though they had a place of theirs.



Figure 4.9: Sabiatou's home at Mbakwa Quarter Baba I, (from Thatch to Zinc Roof a sign of great achievement).

Source: Photo by Author

She was then asked to move closer to the family compound into another thatched roof apartment with her kids. The husband's brother, the successor to their father, later sold off their place without her consent which created a serious family rift. She did not follow this up as it was her right and place to do so but instead got a place of her own and successfully raised a structure in which she is staying with her kids as illustrated by Figure 4.9.

It was in this corrugated zinc structure above that her interview was conducted. I saw that she definitely did not want to dwell on the issue of land with her in-laws as her jovial mode became down cast. All she said about this issue of land with her in-laws is that she did not want more troubles for her children and herself. Conscious of the fact that she is basically the sole bread winner of the family and the third girl went to secondary school, she focuses her energy on raising money for their upkeep and education.

4.8.4 Conflicts over Grazing Land

This problem is becoming more frequent as more and more people are investing in animal rearing especially cattle. When graziers and their animals enter into a farmer's farm and destroy his/her crops, the farmer reports to the council for it to constitute a commission. The agriculture technician is a crucial member to evaluate the amount of destruction caused by the animals. The grazier (the owner of the herd) pays the farmer based on the evaluation made by the commission. Such has been the case with the Fon and the chairman of the Traditional Council because the Traditional Council had to handle the matter judiciously and fine the persons concerned irrespective of their positions. In the case where the animals were still in the farm, the council or Ngumba formed a commission of young men to go to the field to catch whatever animals they find there. In some cases, the angry farmers wounded the animals as was the case with Yoyo's animals. When there was resistance in paying the fine levied, the matter went to the Divisional Officer (DO) where the amount is doubled. The idea was that people should respect hierarchical structures especially within the traditional set up and villages should resolve matters at their level rather than always running to the civil administrators.

Generally, people were advised to constrain their animals and have the number of animals they can control. When you have many animals that you cannot control, it meant that you will not be the owner. The Ngumba or the council will move in and take many away when found destroying people's crops and you will not be the beneficiary of your animal any more. If this year your animals are caught and the next year again, your punishment will have to be increased despite the fact that you are being punished already by the seizure of your animals. You might even be banned from rearing animals in the village. Figure 4.10 illustrate the movement of animals within the farmland. There one sees a herd of cattle and they are usually closely followed by a herd of sheep.



Figure 4.10: Animals in Farmland, Mbaghangha Quarter

Source: Photo by Author

When Yoyo came into the communal grazing land where Mallam Djembare and his family had settled, they gave him a portion of land for his cattle. Since the cattle were not properly restrained, they destroyed Mallam Djembare's farm and the family took it upon themselves to cut a few of the animals. When the herdsman reported this to his boss he came down to the grazing land to see the extent of the destruction. Despite the wounds on his animals Yoyo was willing to settle the matter amicably by paying off the farmers' crops. The family was not satisfied with the settlement and wanted the animals out of the area completely. The presence of this herd of cattle had already started causing conflicts due to its number and the lack of proper control by its herdsman.

Being a communal land, their wish was turned down which flared tensions that turned into violence. Mallam Djembare's son left Bamenda with a loaded gun to the disputed area and got into a scuffle with Yoyo's herdsman. In their struggles, the gun went off and took the young man's life. The case had to be handled now by the state administrator, the DO. After all the evaluations they were asked to make a fence demarcating or separating the farm land and the grazing land but Mallam Djembare still turned it down and eventually quit the area. He is now in Douala with part of his family and the other still on the disputed land. With an erected fence and more supervision, the animals are grazing there with no complaints.

George's cattle are in a grazing area which has been his father's since 1972. This used to be a passage for transhumance and cattle from Oku and other places used the area until it was recently blocked by a farmer who settled there with his family. When he blocked this passage, the palace and not the Traditional Council was informed. Orders were given for it to be opened so that animals could pass with no disturbances. But he still continued farming and blocking the place. An injunction order was finally placed in the area and he was summoned to the palace but did not show up. Just like Mallam Djembare,

he left the area but leaving part of his family behind. It should be noted that an individual can take his/her problem directly to the Fon to be handled. The case is either handled by him or taken to the traditional council where he, the Fon is a member. For the moment the case is suspended and the area is free for grazing.

4.8.5 Multiple Sale of Land

This is a situation where a piece of land is sold to several people putting the various buyers at loggerheads. Selling land to many people is a crime punishable by the local and state laws. When you sell as such in Baba I, the land is seized from you and then you refund the money collected to all people who bought the land from you since you are using the land to crook people. The case of a place at Vemgang Quarter close to where the palace is situated drives home the point. This is the site of the most popular drinking spot towards the palace called 'No Shecking'. When Doda, one of the buyers of the place, found out that the land had been sold to almost twenty people with everyone claiming ownership, he decided to delve into the matter. For some strange reason, these persons had not discovered what was happening or were just reluctant to report the matter to the village Traditional Council.

When Doda came in and uncovered the scheme, he reported the matter to the palace and to the Traditional Council. They went into the matter and found out that the guy had really sold it to many people and was still trying to dupe Doda. The land was seized from the family since no family member had raised an eyebrow as one of theirs had been using this land to dupe people. When this happened, Doda went back to the Council stating his interest as he was anxious to set up his business. After due negotiations with the Traditional Council, the piece of land was handed over to him after the installation ritual as required. His dynamism and social relations won for him easy access to authority. This made it possible for him to present his case which finally facilitated things for him to gain access to the land.

4.8.6 Public Infrastructure Conflicts

Bringing public amenities through places where people have settled most often than not poses problems. There is a glaring example now with the construction of the ring road running through Baba I. The road has been expanded on both sides that have touched people's private properties as houses and farms have been torn down or infringed into as indicated in Figure 4.11.



Figure 4.11: Houses and Farms affected by road construction works.

Source: Photo by Author

There was very little compensation made to those who lost property because people had no land titles to lay claims from the government. This is another case where customary norms clash with state laws. To a certain degree, what families have now is theirs until there is the need of land for some developmental purposes. The only safe means through which somebody can own a piece of land which the village cannot still tamper with is by acquiring a land certificate.

Through the government, the village has the right to interfere into facets of land at any time for schools, hospitals, roads, community development centres and churches. Since it is known that land with no land certificate is owned by the village, any piece of land could be chosen at any time when the need arises for a developmental purpose. At times when the commission chooses a place, some families are hesitant to hand over the land like the current location of the Government High School, Vemngang, (Figure 4.12) situated below the palace on a facet of land that belonged to a prince.



Figure 4.12: A Cross Section of the grounds of Government High School, Vemngang, that witnessed resistance from some of its former occupants during the acquisition process.

Source: Photo by Author

If the resistance drags on, the commission will have to talk with the concerned families further explaining the need of this piece of land for the specific project. Most often, it is pointed out to the family concerned that it is for an amenity or facility which they have used on land taken from other people, for example, to locate a school or health centre or whatever. In few occasions, families have opposed by disturbing the work at hand. What the Council does is to call the family to order. If they persist the Council arranges for a fine to be paid by the family for obstructing development. On the other hand, if their resistance is due to dire need for a farmland, then the Traditional Council will make provision for that in another location.

4.8.7 Contested Administrative Procedures

There are a few of such examples in Baba I where the Divisional Officer (DO) of Babessi did not follow the procedure of planting pillars on the land as required by the law. One of the cases in point is that of the Parish Priest (PP) of the Catholic Church who thought the boundaries of the Church ground could be extended forcefully without the consent of the owner. Before carrying out such an action, he should have received an authorisation from

the Fon to attest that there was no bone of contention on the said piece of land. Furthermore, on the day of the planting of the pillar, the Fon and two notables are supposed to be present as well as the neighbours of the land and the owner being bought but this was not the case. The PP's activities on the land were reported to the quarter head and then to the Fon. So when the Fon was informed of the planting of the pillar, he intervened personally to stop the process. This caused a public scene, pulling a crowd as people were ready to take on the PP and DO for openly raising their voices to the Fon. This incident was reported to the Church hierarchy who came in to calm down the tension. These illegal administrative procedures normally cause clashes between the customary and state laws. It also shows the possibility of persons using their access to authority, social relations and capital to benefit from what they have no right over. In this particular case, the land was returned to the family concerned but the relationship between the PP and the Fon stayed restrained until he was transferred from Baba I. Figure 4.13 show direct views/angles of the Catholic mission grounds surrounded by barbwire fencing to demarcate their boundary as well as restrict movement.



Figure 4.13: St. Mark's Primary School, Church and Presbytery, Kengang Quarter

Source: Photo by Author

4.8.8 Inter Community Disputes

Moh Mbue's family and some Bamunka neighbours for some time have been fighting over their boundaries and this has ended up in court. When I asked the Fon about this dispute, he said, he did not know of any boundary issues between Bamunka and Baba I. This was considered as a dispute between individuals which would be settled among them to know who actually the first person who started farming there was. It is not something which should plunge the whole village into a problem with their neighbour, Bamunka. If it were to be a Baba and Bamunka matter, it should have been the Fons of Baba I and Bamunka talking not the people farming around that area as I was made to understand.

There is a case currently going on between Mr. Ngeng of Baba I and Bamunka tenants over a vast terrain of unused land that he had been given access to set up an agro industrial plant. Mr. Ngeng made quite an investment on the land and acquired heavy machineries for the farm. Unfortunately, this collapsed after a short while and the farm and the equipment were abandoned. This place has been laying fallow for some years now and Mr. Ngeng had authorised a Bamunka man to farm on it. This man later on brought in more Bamunka people to the place and sold some part of the land to another Bamunka man. This brought tension between him and the Bamunka people along boundary as they claimed that the land belonged to them. Mr. Ngeng has been asked to stay off the place as talks are going

on between the Fons of Bamunka and Baba I. Unlike the previous case above, this one attracted more attention because the sale of land in Baba I had been effected by a Bamunka man. Both parties had their Fons involved through the sale of land.

These cases above go to confirm what the Divisional Officer (DO) of Babessi said during discussions with him on this issue in 2011. 'Unfortunately there are areas where individuals have distorted the boundaries or have forcefully changed the boundary lines or are forcing to change the boundary lines and this is where conflicts always come in. They start between two individuals from the two villages and then it becomes a problem between two quarters, then two villages and it always results in skirmishes, bloodshed and all what not', (DO of Babessi, personal communication, 26th August, 2011). To manage this crisis if it escalates into a quarter or village issue, a Land Consultative Board Commission will be formed made up of the DO of the area concerned as the chairman, Divisional Chief of Land Tenure as the secretary, Divisional Chief of Surveys as member, the Fons of the two villages concerned and four notables, two from each village, to examine the matter determine the boundaries between the two villages. The Fons are the auxiliaries of the civil administration and custodians of the land so whatever thing that is being done with the land must be done with their consent. According to the DO, natural boundaries between villages have been in place before now. They are documented and the civil administration has always called for the respect of these boundaries.

When I asked the DO of Babessi to comment about land disputes between villages under his jurisdiction, he said: 'that one is the most frequent and very delicate issue especially here, in the case of Babessi Sub-Division boundary in particular and in Ngoketunja Division in general. Inter village boundary disputes are the order of the day and that is where we have many complains coming'. During fieldwork, the villages around this area were and are almost always on news because of inter-village conflicts. I was even opportune to attend one of the conflict resolution meetings at the DO's office in Babessi between Babungo and Baba I. This was a dispute over a piece of land where Baba I farmers were chased away by the Babungo people who took over their farmland. During the meeting, it was basically the Fons and the DO talking and the exchanges were not very pleasant. One could feel there were some underground currents. Both communities were requested to get the colonial maps from the archives in Buea as the one available during the meeting was rejected by the Fon of Baba I.

This meeting called up by the DO was a plea for the Fon of Babungo to withdraw the case from the court so that it could be handled at the local level. . The external elite had also gone into the case trying to bring both Fons on a common platform in order to withdraw the matter and resolve it out of court. However, after over a year in court Baba I won the case against the people of Babungo who in turn threatened to go in for an appeal. Before this researcher left the area, no court hearing had been programmed. It is worth noting that this case has caused an uneasy relation between both palaces. For some time now their reciprocal exchanges through visits or 'palace bags' have ceased. There is however a certain degree of cordiality exercised between them when they do meet as auxiliaries of the government during public functions.

4.9 Conclusion

There is an enormous pressure on land and this is due to population growth and the rising need and competition for the construction of houses, opening of large farms and urban facilities. This has pushed up the monetary value of land bringing into play various mechanisms of access. This chapter has also illustrated how the quest for land can lead to

the 'proliferation of channels of access which promotes and is reinforced by diversification, investment in social relations and a preference for rapid turnover and liquid assets; and that perpetuation of access via social identity leads to further investment in institutions as potential channels of access' (Berry, 1989:51). These social webs have led to new phenomena in gender relations as more and more women are becoming silent brokers in the negotiations and sales of land. This is because they want their sons to come back home and build. When their sons are constructing, they become the general supervisors of the building projects or they farm the land until when their sons are ready for the construction work. In their struggle to acquire land, the politics of belonging becomes heightened as people's identities are put into question to give and gain validity to access land. The materiality and immateriality of land as a natural resource that visually and virtually bind people together to a place becomes a crucial element in the discussion on the politics of belonging. The next chapter will further delve into how mobility from and in Baba I of these urbanites intrinsically remain connected to home to attest their belonging as members of the community through investments.