

## DEMOCRACY IN CAMEROON DURING THE MONOLITHIC PERIOD: A CONTRADICTION

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### Abstract

Theoretically and empirically, democracy and monolithism do not go together. This contradiction is depicted in the early governance structure of Cameroon which was centralized, autocratic, but with regular elections which basically provided no real choices. Diversity is both natural and important for a democratic government to exist. While the complexity of life affirms the absurdity of unanimism, social complexity affirms the imperative of pluralism. But the monolithic government did everything to curtail avenues of protests. The structure of the society was accepted than criticized. There were no possibilities of popular protest as the party helped the government to ensure that the people were hemmed in and immobilized. Since unanimity and consensualism are not natural, the government had to use force to ensure support under the monolithic system of governance in Cameroon, which in effect constitutes a gross violation of principles of democracy.

**Keywords:** democracy, monolithism, violence, institution, one-party, rationalisation, marginalisation, one-dimensional, unidirectional.

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## 1. Introduction

Though democracy is subject to varying interpretations, the concept has some universally accepted principles. It is that form of government where there is power sharing within the ruling class and the society in general. Checks and balances should be ensured not only within the ruling class, but also between the rulers and the ruled. From this standpoint, pluralism is *a sine qua non* requirement for democracy. There should be political, organic, and social diversities and the people have to be the ultimate holders of power. But in Cameroon during the monolithic era, powers were concentrated in the president's hands to the detriment of other state organs. Unique organizations were imposed, critics were repressed and elections were a formality. The people were expected to be one-directional and one-dimensional. "Support" was coerced from the people and they became passive and powerless. Declarations by politicians that there was democracy during this era were therefore illogical.

## 2. Democracy versus Monolithism

Democracy is a pervasive concept, one of the most promiscuous and fascinating words. Etymologically, the term democracy originated from two Greek words "demos" meaning people and "Kratos" meaning rule or power. Therefore, it simply means rule of the people. At various points in time, diversified types of democracy have been preached and practiced especially the liberal and the centralized democracies.<sup>1</sup> According to Abraham Lincoln it is the government of the people by the people for the people.

Literally, monolith simply means a single upright block of stone. It depicts something that is "one" "only". In politics, this is a logical consequence of the state as "one and indivisible." Historically, we can think of the Russian experience, where after the 1917 Revolution the Marxist democracy was proclaimed. Here, the emphasis was on the economy rather than politics, on the classes not the individuals. Democratic centralism as it was termed favoured a

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<sup>1</sup> Okwudiba Nnoli, *Introduction to Politics* (1986), p. 116-126. Ibadan: Longman Publishing Group.

unanimous, classless society with a unique party and ideology. Democratic centralism implies two things: the sovereign power of the people, and administration from the “center.”<sup>2</sup>

In the aftermath of independence many African countries adopted political pluralism in accordance with their colonial masters’ systems. But once the new leaders tasted power, all attempts were made to consolidate it. There was the gradual disappearance of pluralism, and many reasons were given to justify this turn of events.<sup>3</sup> A series of monolithisms emerged as an attempt to control all power centres. In Cameroon, the monolithic era can be said to have started in the mid-1960s, reached its peak after 1972, and “ended” with the declaration of pluralism in 1990.<sup>4</sup> Throughout this period, powers were concentrated in the president’s hands, all associations became unique, and the people powerless.

### 3. Conflicting Concepts

In spite of varying interpretations and vagueness, the notion of democracy meets with almost universal acclaim. There is a common acceptance that it is desirable, commendable, and progressive. Nowadays, all leaders, even dictators proclaim themselves democrats because it is the form of government regarded as the most legitimate.<sup>5</sup> There has been a general failure of democratic centralism due to its inherent contradictions. In addition, the recent changes in Eastern Europe and Africa are indicative of the fact that pluralist democracy has meet with almost universal acclaim.<sup>6</sup> From this standpoint, pluralism is a *sine qua non* for democracy to exist, as there must be political, organic, and social diversities.

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<sup>2</sup> This distinction was fashionable during the Cold War, but with the collapse of the socialist bloc, its experiential-empirical importance has diminished.

<sup>3</sup> Michael T Aletum, *Political Sociology* (1992), p. 54. University of Yaounde (unpublished). Aletum discusses the evolution from multi-party to mono-party systems.

<sup>4</sup> Law No. 90-53 of 19 December 1990 relating to the freedom of association. The monolithic era therefore concerns Mr. Ahidjo’s and part of Mr. Baya’s reigns.

<sup>5</sup> Okwudiba Nnoli (note 1 above), states that under these circumstances it becomes difficult to fully understand the meaning of the concept, p. 116.

<sup>6</sup> Today, the Marxist democracy is practiced in few countries as China and Cuba.

While democracy can be contextualized, it can also be conceptualised.<sup>7</sup> There are some universal principles that can serve as guidelines for this system of government. These include multiplicity and diversity of organizations and power centres, checks and balances between the three state organs, free and fair elections, declaration and guarantee of rights and freedoms, an independent judiciary, strong organized opposition, rule of law, and democratic (participant) culture. Democracy is a system of government where the people are the ultimate holders of power which should be exercised for their interest.<sup>8</sup> This extends beyond participating in elections and to the day-to-day management of state affairs. For the above guidelines to exist, there must be pluralism (organic, ideological, and political). During the monolithic era in Cameroon with the concentration of powers in the president's hands, and the proliferation of unique organizations on the other, to talk of democracy was a contradiction of terms. This is because the core aspects of a democracy were non-existent.

During the monolithic system in Cameroon the President was almighty and his impact felt at all strategic levels of political life. In Africa at large and Cameroon in particular, there has been the borrowing of legal techniques from parliamentary and presidential systems which helped to reinforce the status of the president. The negro-african presidentialism is a deformation of the parliamentary and presidential systems in a dictatorial sense.<sup>9</sup> The president's rights and powers were emphasized and obligations neglected. This has been baptized the "Presidentialist Regime." This excessive presidentialization led to the reduction of the powers of the other state organs. The institutional models borrowed from the Western regimes by the modern states were gradually altered.<sup>10</sup> Many third world

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<sup>7</sup> Democracy in France, Britain, U.S.A, Canada, Cameroon etc cannot be exactly the same. This is so because these countries have different historical, cultural, social, economic, and political environments.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard-Raymond D Guimdo, "Reconnaissance des Minorités et Démocratie: Duel ou Duo?" in *Annales de la Faculté des sciences Juridiques et Politiques* (1997), p.125. Université de Dschang.

<sup>9</sup> Thierry Michalon, *Quel Etat pour l'Afrique?* (1984), p. 59. Paris: L'Harmattan.

<sup>10</sup> Roger-Gérard Schwartzenberg, *Sociologie Politique* (1977), p. 294-299. Paris: Editions Montchrestien.

countries, including Cameroon, witnessed constitutional instability that was essentially the result of the inadaptable nature of the constitutional rules to the socio-economic environment.<sup>11</sup> The general tendency was towards the growth in the president's powers in the new arrangements.

#### 4. The Gradual Growth of Presidential Powers in Cameroon

After independence, the constitution of March 5, 1960 of *La République du Cameroun* was inspired by the French 1958 constitution. A political regime was adopted which was more parliamentary at the governmental level, and more presidential at the level of the head of the state.<sup>12</sup> During this time, Ahmadou Ahidjo, President of *La République du Cameroun* did everything to consolidate his powers. When Southern Cameroons, which was under the British administration decided through a referendum to join *La République du Cameroun*, there was a necessity for a new constitution. But a simple revision of the 1960 constitution was done, and according to President Ahidjo "legally, reunification can be analysed as simply a modification of frontiers."<sup>13</sup>

The federal constitution which resulted instituted a complex regime, presidential at the federal level and parliamentary at the level of federated states.<sup>14</sup> The constitutional transformations rendered necessary by reunification risked reducing the presidential prerogatives. This was so because the Anglophones were inspired by parliamentary and particularistic tradition.<sup>15</sup> Paradoxically this episode of reunification was a fundamental stage in the maximization of the president's powers, both at the institutional and political levels.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Michael Aletum (note 3 above), p. 160-161.

<sup>12</sup> Francois Mbome, *Régimes Politiques Africains*, Class Reading Pack (1986), p. 38. University of Yaoundé.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-François Bayart, *l'Etat au Cameroun*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (1984), p. 97. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques. See also article 50 of the 1961 Constitution.

<sup>14</sup> Francois Mbome (note 12 above), p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-François Bayart (note 13 above), p. 96-97.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1972 President Ahidjo convoked a referendum of the Cameroonian people who had to answer to the following questions - “do you approve the aim of consolidating national unity, and accelerating the socio-economic and cultural development of the nation, the constitutional project submitted to the Cameroonian people by the president of the federal Republic of Cameroon, instituting a Republic, one and indivisible under the denomination United Republic of Cameroon?”.<sup>17</sup> From the way the question was framed and mindful of the coercive environment at the time, the citizens had no choice but to “vote” in the affirmative. Consequently, the constitution of June 1972 was adopted institutionalising a real presidentialist regime. But why this turn of events? Almond and Powell underline four principal problems that have to be solved by developing political systems - construction of the state; construction of the nation; ensuring the participation of the citizens; and the satisfaction of general interest (even distribution).<sup>18</sup> Surely all these reasons have their place, but the fact remains that underlying them was an insatiable quest for power. The president became all-powerful and logically anti-democratic.

## 5. The Extent of the Powers of the President

During the monolithic era Cameroon, there was the simultaneous existence of the double phenomenon of “personal power” and “personification of powers.”<sup>19</sup> The first is an institutional reality where one person controls, concentrates, and masters the state apparatus. The latter is psychosocial, where an authority symbolizes and incarnates the nation, state, party, etc. Concretely, the president is head of state, party, armed forces, magistracy, and indeed head of government. The head of state, in other words, formed a ruling class which identified and owed allegiance to him. He was generally seen as infallible and described as “father of the nation,” “messiah,” and “charismatic.”<sup>20</sup> In a democracy institutional relations are favoured to personal, but in Cameroon the

<sup>17</sup> Francois Mbome (note 12 above), p. 43

<sup>18</sup> Gabriel A Almond and Bingham G Powell, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (1966), p. 35. Boston: Little Brown Series

<sup>19</sup> Roger-Gérard Schartzberg (note 10 above), p. 306

<sup>20</sup> This is “spurious charisma” for there is no genuine sense of calling or exemplary character.

pre-eminence of the president was a fact and unfortunately was not counter-balanced by other powers.

The President appointed discretionarily and controlled all the important posts.<sup>21</sup> The creation of the post of the Prime Minister changed nothing as far as the predominance of the president was concerned, as President Ahidjo did state clearly that the regime in Cameroon remain Presidentialist and as such “the Prime Minister will only be responsible to the President of the Republic, who as in the case of other members can appoint and put an end to his functions.”<sup>22</sup> No doubt, the Ministers were simply executors without scope and were responsible only to the President. Consequently, appointments were made following subjective, partisan, and discretionary appreciation of the President.<sup>23</sup> Professor Gonidec has rightly underlined that “the importance of ministerial functions depend on the nature of the political regime.”<sup>24</sup> On his resignation therefore in 1982, President Ahidjo transmitted to President Paul Biya this heritage.

Monopolizing power is dangerous to the society. The temptations of power are too great for it to be left in the discretion of any men.<sup>25</sup> Democracy is not the exercise of power; it is rather its limitation.<sup>26</sup> As propounded by John Locke and further developed by Montesquieu power has to be separated. This implies that “in order to avoid a situation in which no one branch of government obtains a monopoly of power which is almost certain to result in arbitrary rule the three functions should be kept entirely separate.”<sup>27</sup> The Legislative to make laws, executive to apply them, and the judiciary to adjudicate. There should be

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<sup>21</sup> Unlike the case in the U.S.A where appointments to important posts have to be confirmed by the Senate.

<sup>22</sup> Press Conference, Ahmadou Ahidjo, 16 June 1970.

<sup>23</sup> Abel Eyinga, *Introduction à la Politique Camerounaise* (1984), p. 286. Paris: Editions l'Harmattan.

<sup>24</sup> Roger-Gabriel Nlep, “l'Administration Publique Camerounaise”, *Contribution à l'étude des Systèmes Africains d'Administration Publique* (1986), p. 54. Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence (LGDJ).

<sup>25</sup> Robert M MacIver, *The Modern State* (1962), p. 202. Oxford University Press.

<sup>26</sup> Zahir Fares, *Afrique et Démocratie: Espoir et Illusion* (1992), p. 47. Paris: l'Harmattan.

<sup>27</sup> Tom Brennan, *Politics and Government in Britain: An Introductory Survey* (1972), p. 197. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

reciprocal controls, mutual restraint, multifunctionality but not to the extent of challenging the independence of any organ. In Cameroon, the executive's head usurped much of powers that *ceteris paribus* belong to the other state organs. The parliament was rationalized and the judiciary marginalized.

### 5.1. Rationalization of the Parliament

In the majority of contemporary political regimes, there has been a reduction in the powers of the parliament.<sup>28</sup> It is logical that the primacy of the executive is proportionally inverse to the weakening of the parliament. However, if the weakening of the parliament is a general phenomenon, it is more marked in presidentialist regimes. Cameroonian authorities went beyond techniques of parliamentary "rationalizing" enshrined in the French 1958 Constitution. The manifestations of this belittling of the parliament are many and varied. The domain of the law was limited and defined in a precise manner, the legislative domain was therefore the exception,<sup>29</sup> and as if this were not enough the President of the Republic was empowered with the unreciprocal right to intervene in the legislative domain through ordinances.<sup>30</sup>

Further, the executive enjoyed important prerogatives in legislative procedures. The agenda of parliamentary sessions usually had as priority the discussion and proposals accepted by the government. The Cameroon parliament during the monolithic era has been variously described as "yessy," "house of registration," "rubber stamp," "hand clappers," etc. One begins to question what really was the *raison d'être* of this parliament? This situation can be explained by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary factors.<sup>31</sup> In presidentialist regimes, the executive power is endowed with vigour and splendour, while parliament is obliged to consecrate its decisions. Under such conditions it is difficult for the parliament to serve as a check to the powers of the executive. No doubt in Cameroon between 1960 and

<sup>28</sup> Constantin Georgopoulos, *La Démocratie en Danger* (1977), p. 240. Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence (LGDJ).

<sup>29</sup> Article 20 of the Cameroon Unitary Constitution of 1972.

<sup>30</sup> Article 21 of the Cameroon Unitary Constitution of 1972.

<sup>31</sup> Constantin Georgopoulos (note 28 above), analyzes them as illiteracy, politicization, time, etc.

1979 out of 505 laws promulgated only 8 were private members bills, while 497 were government bills.<sup>32</sup>

## 5.2. Marginalization of the Judiciary.

The judiciary was marginalized as a state organ. With the accumulated powers of the President, it was difficult for the judiciary to resist the executive's pressure.<sup>33</sup> In any democratic nation, it is the judiciary that ensures the rule of the law. As a protector of human rights and freedoms, it has to intervene when administrative systems fail to guarantee check and balances. The authority of the state, according to the 1972 Constitution had to be exercised by the President of the Republic and the parliament.<sup>34</sup> Logically, it talks of the president of the republic as a person and not the executive as an organ. No doubt, the judiciary was not a power but a simple authority.<sup>35</sup> The inability of other organs to exercise control over executive power breeds Presidential Monarch.<sup>36</sup>

The democratic state goes hand in hand with the rule of Law.<sup>37</sup> For the latter to exist, the judiciary must be independent and impartial. As an important third power controlling the constitutionality of laws and legality of the executive, Bernard Muna notes, "it is important that those who make up the judiciary should be free from coercion, intimidation or pressure..."<sup>38</sup> It is only in such situations that judges can implement the law objectively, indiscriminately and with audacity. In a democratic state, the state does not create law for others, but for everyone,

<sup>32</sup> Jean Claude Kamdem, *Institutions Administratives et Droit Administratif* (1988/89), p. 24, Reading Pack, University of Yaoundé.

<sup>33</sup> Abel Eyinga (note 23 above), p. 286-287.

<sup>34</sup> Article 4 of the Cameroon Unitary Constitution of 1972.

<sup>35</sup> Although title V of Law No. 96/06 of 18 January on the Revision of the Constitution of 1972 talks of the "Judiciary Power", with the era of democratisation, this has not changed much.

<sup>36</sup> Phrase used by Abraham (M.F): *Perspectives on Modernization: Toward a General Theory of Third World Development*, Washington DC, University Press of America, 1980, p.43.

<sup>37</sup> Maurice Kamto, *L'urgence de la Pensée: Réflexions sur une Précognition de Développement en Afrique* (1993), p. 100-101. Yaounde: Edition Mandara.

<sup>38</sup> Bernard A Muna, *Cameroon and the Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1993), p. 67. Yaoundé: Tama Books.

the state itself included. In fact, the law is not only an instrument of state action; it is above all a factor of power limitation.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, the Cameroonian Judiciary was in chains and was expected to act with prudence. Criminal provisions to the effect that “whoever being a legal or judicial officer issues an order or prohibition to any executive or administrative authority shall be punished” certainly conditioned the judges psychologically.<sup>40</sup> By allying with the executive the judges lost the function of impartiality in administering laws and became agents and justifiers of repression. Discussing with his colleagues during the solemn opening of the Judiciary year of 1966 Marcel Nguini, the then president of the Supreme Court declared:

“The duty of discretion and reserve of the magistrate implies that he should be and remain faithful and loyal to the regime; that this loyalty can be shown in all his actions and behaviour, as regards his judicial function as well as his public and private life.”<sup>41</sup>

## 6. The Proliferation of Monolithisms

Pluralism has to be manifested in all domains of life. According Maurice Kamto, democracy is essentially pluralist.<sup>42</sup> A pluralistic or democratic society is one with organizations, power centres, and diversity of ideas.<sup>43</sup> Democracy involves power-sharing not only within but also without the ruling class. It implies above all the intervention of the people themselves through various ways and means so as to ensure that no person, organ or even the government itself should concentrate power and its benefits. But with the imposition of a one-dimensional and unidirectional society by the government, “support” was forced from the people (the ultimate sovereign), rendering them passive and powerless. Using the ideological apparatus to force support for the political regime has been

<sup>39</sup> Conférence des Ministres Africains de la Fonction Publique à Cotonou-Benin (Novembre 1991), Collection Focal Coop, 1992, p. 219.

<sup>40</sup> Section 126(b) of the Cameroonian Penal Code.

<sup>41</sup> Abel Eyinga (note 23 above), p. 298.

<sup>42</sup> Maurice Kamto (note 27 above), p. 71.

<sup>43</sup> Peter F Drucker, *Managing for the Future: The 1990s and Beyond* (1992), p. 173-174. New Delhi: Tata-McGraw.

commonplace in Cameroon. The imposition of a series of monolithisms led to untold undemocratic effects on the Cameroonian polity.<sup>44</sup>

### 6.1. Imposition of Unique Associations

Cameroon was a one party state between 1966 and 1990.<sup>45</sup> The single party had as justifications national unity, socio-economic development of the state, and the fact there were no classes in Africa. However, the party achieved none of the above goals. The mundane reason for the one-party rule was simply the desire for politicians to remain in office.<sup>46</sup> The argument that there was democratisation within the unique party is not rational. Even if it existed, democracy at the micro-level without one at the macro is an illusion. Yet the unique party was nothing than an illusory expression of the unanimity of the citizens. As a corollary to monopartism, there was the centralization of the state.<sup>47</sup> The change from a federal to a unitary form of state was a logical consequence.

The centralized state directed everything, controlled everything, and imposed everything from above. It was an instrument of forging the nation. On the myth of national unity, all must pass through the state and converge towards it.<sup>48</sup> Such is “integration from above”<sup>49</sup> a syndrome of a ‘soft state’ according to the expression of Gunnar Myrdal, which is authoritative but less efficacious, fragile, and vulnerable.<sup>50</sup> This state and the unique party formed a ‘hegemonic alliance’

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<sup>44</sup> Maurice Kamto (note 37 above), p. 26.

<sup>45</sup> 1966 – 1985 (the C.N.U), 1985 – 1990 (the C.P.D.M)

<sup>46</sup> Peter C Lloyd, *Africa in Social Change* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (1975), p. 233. London: Penguin Books.

<sup>47</sup> As Jean-François Bayart (note 13 above) comments satirically, everything that divides Cameroonians was fought against, p. 183.

<sup>48</sup> Thierry Michalon (note 9 above), p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Jean-Pierre Fogui, *l'Intégration Politique au Cameroun* (1990), p.336. Paris: Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence.

<sup>50</sup> Thierry Michalon (note 9 above), p. 10.

that controls all the poles of power.<sup>51</sup> There was governmentalization of opinion party, trade unions, media, and dissent was not tolerated.<sup>52</sup>

## 6.2. Absence of Alternatives or Opposition

Democracy is a government of alternance and alternation, and a strong opposition is therefore indispensable.<sup>53</sup> Thoughts are expected to be diverse or contradictory - the nation is blessed which cherishes its heretics.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the monolithic period in Cameroon, the people lost their sense of truth to the profit of permanent illusion. They were drogued with slogans and fed with words. All public events were seen as infinite acknowledgement and a motion of support.<sup>55</sup> Not surprisingly during this period, failure to possess one's party card or to turn out for public ceremonies, to stand and cheer ones leaders, were grave omissions in the Cameroon polity.<sup>56</sup>

The unique party reduced developing societies to those of clapping, singing, acclamation, dancing and canalized collective ecstasy.<sup>57</sup> It ruined intellectualism, and for the elite the only choice was being co-opted to the single party or go on exile. The party was instrumental in mollifying and muzzling the Cameroonian citizens. Unquestioning absolute loyalty and uncritical patriotism were expected from the citizens. The opposition was not seen as an alternative government but as wrecking, sabotage, or hooligans.<sup>58</sup> In fact the opposition leaders were seen as heresies,<sup>59</sup> they were co-opted, imprisoned, exiled, or killed. The spoils of the

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<sup>51</sup> Robert M MacIver (note 25 above), p. 165. The party was a powerful instrument for coercing the people to "support" the government, non-possession of the party card was at times sanctioned.

<sup>52</sup> Abel Eyinga (note 23 above), p. 299. These were violations of the freedoms of expression, association and especially the necessity of organized opposition.

<sup>53</sup> Maurice Kamto (note 37 above), p. 76.

<sup>54</sup> Herman Finer, *The Theory and Practice of Modern Government* 4<sup>th</sup> ed (1961), p. 953. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.

<sup>55</sup> Maurice Kamto (note 27 above), p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> Abel Eyinga, "Government by State of Emergency" in Richard Joseph (ed) *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon Under Ahmadou Ahidjo* (1978), p. 39. Enugu Fourth Dimension Publishers.

<sup>57</sup> Maurice Kamto (note 27 above), p. 25.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Lloyd (note 46 above), p. 234.

<sup>59</sup> Valentin N Mbarga, *Ruptures Et Continuités Au Cameroun* (1993), p. 97. Paris: L'Harmattan.

state were shared on the basis of party faithfulness - patronage became commonplace and politics became the most highly rewarded of all professions.

Democracy is founded on popular control.<sup>60</sup> Normally, the electorate should control periodically the leaders through elections. Negative vote is seen as a sanction for ineffective government. In Cameroon, the use of the word “election” during the one party era was simply due to lack of better word.<sup>61</sup> Elections were a formality, probably a joke. People had to choose between “oui” or “yes” on single issues and single candidates. No doubt, no matter his performance President Ahidjo and later Paul Biya was always sure of 99.99% votes, as refusal to vote for the president was a crime that merited punishment. There was general public feeling of powerlessness.<sup>62</sup> The private newspapers were victims of seizure, blackout, and harassment. Some journalists who attempted to make constructive criticisms were detained or imprisoned. For example, Joseph Atemengue was arrested for questioning the predominance of the northerners in one sector of government. Likewise, the detention of the Cameroon calling crew in 1990 for discussing especially in favour of multipartism is still fresh in our minds. The elite who did not belong to the privileged stratum often preferred to join it than fight it. The main reason for the restriction of criticisms was the control exercised by government over employment and resources.<sup>63</sup>

## 7. Support by Coercion in Monolithic Cameroon

The belief of legitimacy of the authorities or regime is usually the basis for support. It is the acceptance or recognition by the masses of those in office as their rightful leaders. The authority must constantly justify its existence to the

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<sup>60</sup> Zahir Fares (note 26 above), p.106. People the ultimate holders of sovereignty have to control the representatives through formal and informal means.

<sup>61</sup> Abel Eyinga (note 23 above), p. 343.

<sup>62</sup> Nfor N Susungi, *Crisis of Unity and Democracy: Can a Country which has Pronounced Itself Dead be Saved by Democracy?* (1991), p. 246-247. Abidjan; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1991), p.171. Translated by F Constance. New York: First Evergreen Edition. Fanon notes that there were no possibilities of popular protest as the party helped the government to ensure that the people were hemmed in and immobilized.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Lloyd (note 46 above), p. 237.

people.<sup>64</sup> Only the citizens can grant legitimacy to the rulers. Authority is usually delegated by the consent of the masses.<sup>65</sup> It cannot be forced out of the people. In Africa in general, especially during the monolithic era, there existed a 'maginot line' between the political and civil society, and between the rulers and the ruled.<sup>66</sup> The state was suspended between the sky and earth, lacking popular support.<sup>67</sup> The government attempted to force people to like it, which led to dictatorship and disorders. One of the chief arguments in favour of the democratic state is that with it, government is less dependent on the psychology of power.<sup>68</sup> But in Cameroon coercive means were used to compel support that led to adverse impacts on the society.

### 7.1. Coercive Means Used to Compel Support

Violence is all forms of constraint exercised on a person making him to act contrary to what he would have done if he were to act freely.<sup>69</sup> In addition to psychological, there was also physical violence. DeLancey comments that force, whether legitimised by laws or not, was a major factor in Ahidjo's efforts to build a national political system and maintain that system.<sup>70</sup> This tendency continued throughout the monolithic era, and even during democratisation to fill the legitimacy vacuum or face disorders. The use of force, rightly or on pretext was to maintain public law and order. In democratic countries, public order refers to the minimum conditions necessary for the maintenance of normal social life. This includes security of persons and property, sanction, peace, and tranquillity. On the contrary in Cameroon, it was transformed around two fundamental principles - the maintenance of political status quo and the retention of power.<sup>71</sup> While

<sup>64</sup> Okwudiba Nnoli (note 1 above), p. 90.

<sup>65</sup> G Desauay, *Comment Gérer Intelligemment ses Subordonnés* (1984). Paris: DUNOD.

<sup>66</sup> Maurice Kamto (note 27 above), p. 189.

<sup>67</sup> Jacques Giri, *L'Afrique en Panne: Vingt-Cinq Ans de Développement* (1986), p. 190-191. Paris: Editions Karthala.

<sup>68</sup> Robert M Maclver (note 25 above), p. 229.

<sup>69</sup> Abel Eyinga (note 23 above), p. 330.

<sup>70</sup> Mark W DeLancey, *Cameroon: Dependence or Independence* (1989), p. 63. London: Westview Press.

<sup>71</sup> Abel Eyinga (note 56 above), p. 101.

democracy emphasizes the guarantee of fundamental freedoms, the judiciary in Cameroon was built on the primacy of public order at the expense of freedoms.

Monolithic regimes designed strategies to keep power at all cost and by all means. Consequently every person was subjected to the Presidential faith.<sup>72</sup> The state's repressive apparatus - the gendarmes, police and even the army were used to molest the citizens. More so, the government had two special units to carry out intelligence and security: the *Service de Documentation* (SEDOC) which had informants both inside and outside of the country and served as a political police force; and the *Brigades Mixtes Mobiles* (BMM) which was responsible for torturing and imprisoning those considered suspicious by SEDOC.<sup>73</sup> The ordinance N° 62 of March 1962 on the repression of subversion was not clear in its stipulations; as such the detection or appreciation of subversion was done discretionarily by the Head of State and his agents.<sup>74</sup>

The state of emergency became generalized during Ahidjo's fight against "rebellion." This weapon has been used frequently during the monolithic era to destroy with ferocity some progressive or opposition tendencies. During such exceptional circumstances, the military administrators replace the civilians - house arrests, imprisonments without trials, and killings were commonplace. These excessive and undemocratic powers have been termed 'constitutional dictatorship'.<sup>75</sup> In such circumstances, the Cameroonian state was seen by many as absolute and dictatorial with profound negative effects on the community.

## **7.2. Adverse Effects of Support by Coercion on the Society**

Emphasis in the use of force is diseconomical. It is expensive for any people to accept a regime or its authorities based on force. According to the World Bank, in all developing countries, national defence absorbs at least a fifth of the state

<sup>72</sup> Jean-François Bayart, "The Structure of Political Power" in Richard Joseph (ed) *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon Under Ahmadou Ahidjo* (1978), p. 80. Enugu Fourth Dimension Publishers.

<sup>73</sup> Mark DeLancey (note 70 above), p. 65.

<sup>74</sup> Abel Eyinga (note 23 above), p. 300-301.

<sup>75</sup> Authorized by article 11 of the Cameroonian 1972 Constitution without precautions and Limits.

budget.<sup>76</sup> President Ahidjo demonstrated its oppressive and repressive nature by using 54% of the state budget for the upkeep of the police, military personnel, and other forces.<sup>77</sup> This view may be exaggerated but demonstrates the tendency. A democratic and legitimate government makes it easy and cheap for authority to be accepted by people, which enables authority to act with minimum costs ....<sup>78</sup> The use of force also instilled fear on the society. In a democracy, men reflect and participate freely for common good. In Cameroon, fear paralysed the society. In January 1968, the catholic newspaper *L'Effort Camerounais* mustered the courage to publish that:

“Fear is a bad thing. It empties man of all he is and all he has. It inhibits intelligence, annihilates the will and chases away what makes him a man; freedom. What was a man now becomes a robot, automation with conditioned reflexes ....”<sup>79</sup>

The Cameroonian regime therefore, has been characterized by a tendency of reinforcing the President’s powers that is monarchy.<sup>80</sup> This represents a particular regime in which sovereignty, that is the supreme power, is in the hands of an individual who uses it as a personal property. In the presidentialist regime such as that in Cameroonian, the constitution is nothing than a façade, behind which the politico-administrative system animated by the head of state, supported by the party, the administration, the police, and the army, govern without any hindrance. Other organs of government and state apparatuses of constraint are rendered powerless and the masses, the real holders of sovereignty became objects of politics.

## 8. Conclusion

Democracy is that form of government where there is effective distribution of power and resources among the citizens and public welfare is the main and

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<sup>76</sup> Zahir Fares (note 26 above), p. 39.

<sup>77</sup> Abel Eyinga (note 80 above), p. 131.

<sup>78</sup> Okwudiba Nnoli (note 1 above), p. 90.

<sup>79</sup> Abel Eyinga (note 80 above), p. 131.

<sup>80</sup> Abel Eyinga (note 23 above), p. 281.

continuous preoccupation. For a regime to be democratic, good governance and pluralism are indispensable. During the monolithic era, there was concentration of power, imposition of unique organizations, emphasis on force, which led to the passiveness and powerlessness of the people. To say therefore that there was democracy during this era can be attributed to ignorance or hypocrisy. Monolithism with its inherent contradictions is believed to have been the main cause of misgovernance and consequently economic crisis. When matters deteriorated to unbelievable standards, both internal and external forces imposed liberalism and pluralism in the 1990s.<sup>81</sup> But in spite of the democratisation, the monolithic syndrome still persists.<sup>82</sup> Future researchers can compare the monolithic and pluralistic eras to discover continuities and differences. Let us hope that this time pluralism has come to stay.

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<sup>81</sup> Lawyers, students, intellectuals, churchmen, political leaders, east wind, aid donors, etc served as catalysts and accelerators to the democratic flames.

<sup>82</sup> Many believe that there is still confusion between the ruling party, state and government.