

## **DEVELOPING VIABLE INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN CAMEROON**

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### **Abstract**

This article analyses the role of the state in what may be described as manufactured violence in the democratisation and development of Cameroon. Social violence in Cameroon is on the rise due to moral decay, failure of the state to meet obligations to the people, rival interests in the quest, grapping, and retention of power. For these reasons, organised violence by the state has been on the increase following the return to pluralism in the 1990s. This article departs from the premises that weak state institutions and over-zealous officials hamper development and fan “manufactured or random violence.” Instead, random violence is the product of politics, law, economic, and social settings. I conclude by stating that a constructive turnaround is needed for peaceful and sustainable development in Cameroon. This requires building a development state on the principles of democratic values, people’s participation, rule of law, and equitable shared-prosperity.

**Keywords:** democracy, violence, institution, state-building, unity, participation.

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## 1. Introduction

The Republic of Cameroon has a chequered, compound, and complicated historical past. It was a German colony, a League of Nations Mandate, and a United Nations Trust-Territory as two entities under British and French administration. The former French Cameroon known as East Cameroon and former British Cameroon known as Southern Cameroon re-united on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1961 as the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Multi-party political structures were abolished in 1966 following the formation of the Cameroon National Union (CNU) as the country's lone political party. In 1972, the political leadership of Cameroon staged a pretended referendum, the pre-arranged results of which they claimed authorised them to abolish the Cameroon federation. In reality the ploy was a farcical quest to legitimise its Germano-Austrian *Anschluss*-type annexation of Southern Cameroons. The resultant controversial entity was the United Republic of Cameroon, which was then transformed twelve years later as the Republic of Cameroon, the very name and style by which French Cameroon achieved independence from France on 1 January 1960.<sup>1</sup> The Republic of Cameroon returned to multiparty politics in 1990.

## 2. The Quest for Political Pluralism

The ascendancy of Paul Biya to the presidency in 1982 has been described as a “great loss for the Grand North and a blessing for the rising Beti power which has continue to develop in leaps and bounds and appears to have adopted a kind of winner-takes-all attitude.” As Nzoh-Ngandembou and Adolf Dipoko have noted, “the apparent Beti domination in the administration, in the military, in important parastatals and financial institutions has been viewed by critics and cynics with suspicion that there is a secret Beti agenda which targets the exit of Biya”<sup>2</sup> The return to political pluralism in the 1990s was not easy because those in power did not want a change in the *status quo*. The transformation from a centralised

<sup>1</sup> Carlson Anyangwe, “Anyangwe Vows to Wage Liberation War”, *The Guardian Post*, No. 0278 of January 2008, p. 21-27, Yaoundé - Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup> Zachee Nzoh-Ngandembou and Adolf M Dipoko, “Whiter Cameroon After Biya?”, *Eden Newspaper*, No. 0156 of 5-7 March 2007, p. 3, Limbe - Cameroon.

authoritarian hegemonic governance to a people-oriented democratisation process was resisted with all forms of military arsenal. The formation of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) on 26 May 1990 saw the brutal killing of six unarmed innocent citizens.<sup>3</sup> The Ghost Towns and Civil Disobedience campaigns launched by a coordination of opposition parties were intended to force Biya into introducing democratic reforms through a sovereign national conference. During this period the military engaged in direct confrontation with civilians.<sup>4</sup>

Although political pluralism exists in Cameroon today, in practice, it is still based on the centralised dictatorial and monolithic system of governance adopted by President Biya's predecessor – Ahmadou Ahidjo. While Cameroon's democratisation process since the 1990s has witnessed some progress, it has constantly suffered major setbacks. Multiparty elections conducted since the 1990s lacked fairness, transparency, and have been plagued by the government flagrantly abusing its position of player and constitutional judge. On many occasions, electoral victory did not depend on the votes of the people but the deftness at rigging by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation (MINATD) and its agents across the country.<sup>5</sup> In essence, though Cameroon is said to be a place of peace and stability within a turbulent Central African sub-region, dark clouds of uncertainty looms heavily on the future of the country.<sup>6</sup> It is clear that uncertainty breeds violence, which in turn beclouds

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<sup>3</sup> The Social Democratic Front (SDF) was one of the first opposition political parties launched in Cameroon in the early 1990s.

<sup>4</sup> Peterkins Manyong, "Biya and the Military – A Dangerous Marriage", *The Post Newspaper*, No. 0916 of 14 December 2007, Buea: Cameroon, <http://www.postnewslines.com/2007/12/new-analysisbiy.html>, accessed in October 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Hammadina Hamza, "Cameroon's Democracy Suffers Major Setbacks", *The Guardian Post*, No. 0276 of 7-13 January 2008, Special 2007 Retrospective Issue, Yaoundé: Cameroon.

<sup>6</sup> Tazoacha Asonganyi, "Biya's New Year's Speech: The Gauntlet has been Thrown Down", *The Guardian Post*, No. 0276, Special 2007 Retrospective Issue of Monday 7-13 January 2008, p.10, Yaoundé – Cameroon. "It is usually said that if you dig into politics and their relationship to the military problems of the day, you will understand the nature of manoeuvre, of keeping options open, of always having a reserve plan in case the preferred tactic failed, of the nature and fallibility of human decisions and of the springs of ambition. Starting the 2007/2008 speech by invoking a military problem calls for deep reflection on the future of our country in the face of these manoeuvres towards the end of the reign in Cameroon politics." Perhaps with "avec un

Cameroon's national polity. Likewise, ethnic conflicts, flawed elections, weak and divided opposition parties, politics of exclusion, declining quality of livelihood, growing state of poverty, corruption and affluence juxtapose the political realities of a country endowed with vast potential resources.

### **3. Post-colonial Pessimism**

Cameroon's post-colonial state was inappropriately crafted to meet the developmental challenges and needs of society. Internal contradictions backed by external pressures have contributed to crisis perverting the developmental process. As a result, democracy is either misunderstood or frequently undermined, and the rights and freedoms of the people constantly violated. The emergence of centralised authoritarian hegemonic regimes ferments widespread "Cameron-pessimism" of the state as the liberator of the people.

The euphoria for reunification in early 1960s later converged into frustration and despair particularly among Anglophones who were instrumental in reconstructing the nation after the United Nations plebiscite of 11 February 1961 which reunited the former UN Trust-territories under Britain and France. Even with the fresh wave of democratisation in the 1990s, the new optimism that emerged quickly brought about disappointment, destructive frustration, and betrayal. Multiparty elections of the early 1990s demonstrated the act of pathological violence against certain segments of society resurrecting the politics of hegemonic assimilation of the Anglophones into the French culture. As a result, the state was gradually losing its legitimacy, credibility, and capacity to govern and uphold its social contract obligations to its citizens. Likewise, the hope of the people for democratic governance and visionary leadership dwindled as the social fabric became constantly gripped by panic and uncertainty.

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coup de tête tu n'es plus là" translated, 'with a nod of the head" Cameroon may be finished or prosper- following the famous first interview by the Head of State to Eric Chinje, News Editor of Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) in 1987."

Random or manufactured violence refers to instances of violence in the public realm that do not occur from the perspective of extrinsic motives such as robbery, financial, and gain.<sup>7</sup> Manufactured violence could be seen in respect of structurally imposed different cultures and values on a people who share quite a different culture, moral, ethical, political, and administrative upbringing. The label manufactured institutionalised violence is indicative of an apparent lack of constructive democratic governance or culture backed by ignorance, fear and super-imposed or self-acclaimed superiority over other groups, especially minorities. One may also interpret the concept as an illustration of unwillingness of the majority to understand the underlying aspects of the basic tenets of the democratic value following their political upbringing.

The politics of assimilation practiced by the French in East Cameroon was a kind of “top-down” governance system. No one dared challenge state-authority. The politics of “indirect rule” practiced by the British in West Cameroon could be interpreted as a kind of “bottom-up” developmental approach, with grassroots participation in the developmental process. The reunification of the two Cameroons under different administrative structures out-rightly implied a clash of cultures and with the use of majority inherent rights to crush the minority.

To begin with, the establishment of the Federal Republic of Cameroon was wrongly negotiated. First, the political union of East and West Cameroons was to say the least, fraught with problems of an integrative nature from the very beginning. Second, the two Cameroons were very unequal in both size and population, hence the gap between the two contracting parties widened following the option and decision of British Northern Cameroon to join Nigeria thereby compromising the situation of West Cameroon.<sup>8</sup> Third, West Cameroon was a

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<sup>7</sup> Joel Best, *Random Violence: How We Talk about New Crimes and New Victims* (1999), Berkeley: University of California Press; Willem Schinkel, “The Will to Violence”, *Theoretical Criminology*, Vol. 8, Iss. 1 (2004), p. 5-31.

<sup>8</sup> Bongfen Chem-Langee, “Anglophone-Francophone Divide and Political Disintegration in Cameroon: A Psychohistorical Perspective” in Paul Nkwi and Francis Nyamnjoh (eds), *Regional Balance and National Integration in Cameroon: Lessons Learned and The Uncertain*

divided entity following the plebiscite results. It did not speak with one voice during the negotiation process.<sup>9</sup> Fourth, those who supported the reunification did so with the understanding that the new nation-state would be a confederation bordering on the ideals of the Commonwealth and that the ensuing state would preserve their cultural heritage, identity, and language as well as promote the development of West Cameroon in all aspects of life. In fact, anything short of this was anathema to them and which could induce sentiments and actions of a reconsideration of the presence within the new political establishment.<sup>10</sup>

Circumstances leading to the reunification of the British and French Cameroons had inbuilt tendencies of manufactured and institutionalised conflict and violence. Tendencies of the acquisition of a new territory and extension of hegemonic domination loomed high among French Cameroon politicians and Francophones in general, who saw the creation of the new state as a means of transferring the subjection suffered under French colonial rule to the Anglophone population. Apparently, they were now the new colonial masters, setting new rules and forms of adherence to state system.

#### **4. Manufactured and Institutionalised Violence**

The path to state manufactured and institutionalised violence in Cameroon could be seen from the earlier phase of the return to political pluralism when leading members of the ruling party began perpetuating two fundamental divisive concepts “enemies in the house” and “return to where your belong.” These statements directed at the Anglophone community have never been rebuked by

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*Future*, (1997), p. 88-99. Yaoundé: ICASSRT Monograph; Edwin Ardener, “The Nature of the Reunification of Cameroon” in Arthur Hazlewood (ed), *African Integration and Disintegration: Case Studies in Economic and Political Union* (1967), p. 285-237. London: Oxford University Press; Neville N Rubin, *Cameroon: An African Federation* (1971). New York: Praeger Publishers; Victor T. Le Vine, *The Cameroon Federal Republic* (1971). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

<sup>9</sup> John W. Forje, “Unification and After: A Study of the Federal Republic of Cameroon”, Masters Thesis, Lund University of Lund, Sweden (1972).

<sup>10</sup> John W. Forje, “The One and Indivisible Cameroon: Political and Economic Integration in a Fragmented Society” *Department of Political Science* (1981), Lund: Lund University Press; See also Bongfen Chem-Langee (note 8 above).

the leader of the party and President of the country. Therefore, these statements can be postulated to have received the blessings of the ruling class. Manufactured violence was thereafter institutionalised by the state following the various events that ensued in the country. Events which could be described as fanning tendencies towards establishing a “mini-holocaust or genocide” directed at a people who engineered and shaped the new Cameroon nation.

Manufactured and institutionalised violence can also be seen from the ideological orientation of the politics of divide and rule. Under this approach, the following elements play a vital role: (a) regional balance and national integration; (b) ethnic hegemonic factors influencing state-building and democracy; and (c) inclusive politics and the absence of shared prosperity. These factors continue to be of relevant particular interests to Cameroon’s changing political landscape and acquiring new urgency and dimensions in the aftermath of political dispensation and restructuring.<sup>11</sup> The notion of perceived manufactured institutionalised violence is itself the clearest expression of an underlying idea that violence grows for a number of reasons, including the actions of the government, perception of the people, increasing tension between and within people. This is also indicative of the idea that violence grows both qualitatively and quantitatively.

In Cameroon, violence has been continually perpetuated against vulnerable and marginalised group in a variety of forms with Anglophones as the main targeted group. New kinds of violence are appearing for varied reasons. Social, political and economic exclusion are used as tactical strategies designed to destroy the values of those who refuse to condone to malpractices or poor governance system. In the face of all these, many pertinent questions arises - what is the role of civil society in the process? How should the management of power be organized? Which political system should be adopted - unitary, centralised, confederation, regional or federal? Should we summon wisdom and courage to tackle the Anglophone problem once and for all? Should we have the temerity to

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<sup>11</sup> John W. Forje, *Here The People Rule* (2008), Forthcoming - Nova Publishers.

redefine Franco-Cameroon relations against the current overdue French hegemony? Would the Centre-South-North concordat be maintained? How do we combat inertia in public life? Should we move from advanced to a functional democracy?<sup>12</sup>

Events since the reunification of Cameroon, the institutionalisation and collapse of the monolithic party system (1966-1990), and the return to political party pluralism in 1990 bring to fore vehement conflicts not only between East and West Cameroon, but also between and within various provinces and ethnic groupings in the country. Poor government policies are contributing factors to grievances and conflicts of various kinds within the society. Cameroon has had its share of violence since independence though not the scale as witnessed in other countries like Liberia, Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. No one entertains such outcomes for Cameroon, but the future cannot be predicted when policies are articulated on the premise of 'self-interests' and not the '*collective interest and common good*' of the people.

The absence of a democratic and developmental state, alongside leadership deficiencies, can be attributed to the dramatic increase of manufactured violence. Recourse to democracy, good governance, constructive and sustainable development in Cameroon is imperative for peace building and conflict resolution. In addition, emphasis on state-building and democracies rest on strong institutions and administrative capacity and capability. Cameroon needs to restore confidence and legitimacy of the state as the custodian not oppressor of the people. Institutionalised violence on the pretext of national security betrays the purpose as acts of violence are directed mostly against those who hold different political opinions to that of the ruling ethnic group and governing party. As Mkandawire notes, there is no shortage of things a state can do to curb manufactured institutionalised violence, especially effective protection of

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<sup>12</sup> Zachee Nzoh-Ngandembou and Adolf M Dipoko (note 2 above), p. 3.

fundamental human rights and providing quality services delivery to citizens.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, state legitimacy must build on the foundations of democratic values, competitive political systems, empowerment, popular participation, and engagement of citizens in all matters of governance.

The return to political pluralism in Cameroon was marked by a series of manufactured institutionalised and ethno-social violence. Although the state has the responsibility to maintain law and order, the excessive use of force against unarmed and innocent population remained the stumbling block of government actions. The state used coercive force to molest opposition political leaders in order to frustrate political empowerment. Since supporters of political oppositions were seen as enemies to state-building, public authorities strategically developed “divide-and-rule” tactics to silence democracy advocates. Needless to say, institutionalised manufactured violence with the deployment of armed forces plays a significant role in the process of establishing a centralised hegemony. For those who have often adopted the stance of change through peaceful democratic process, this argument seems to be losing relevance in the growing wave of institutionalised state sponsored violence.<sup>14</sup>

In Cameroon, public policy and national development initiative are slow to implement. Interestingly however, the state is known for its rapid deployment of “*armed rapid intervention forces*” even against peaceful demonstrators. Meanwhile, acts of despise and violence against one ethnic group by another do not come under state scrutiny, especially when the perpetuating group provides reliable for support for political leaders. Though articulated by individuals motivated by self-interest and greed, such violence is “codified” state organs and other political elites in the name of national security. Given existing centralised

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<sup>13</sup> Thandika Mkandawire, “From Maladjusted States to Developmental States in Africa,” paper presented at the International Policy Conference on the Potentials for and Challenges of Constructing a Democratic Developmental State in South Africa, held in Magaliesburg - South Africa (June 2008).

<sup>14</sup> As Carlson Anyangwe (note 1 above) state, there is a very strong and well-informed conviction by a large and active argument of our people that Cameroon Republic’s addiction to violence can only be cured by a commensurate response.

system of government in Cameroon with all the facets of institutionalised violence, only the principles of democratic governance, a strong independent professional apolitical bureaucracy under visionary leadership that serves the people can change the course and plight of what may rightly be described as a *requiem for democracy* in the country. Structural changes are also required to convert manufactured or institutionalised violence into developing the public service and administrative capacity of the state for sustainable development.

### **5. Democracy as an Imperative of Strong State Institutions**

In democratic terms, a capable state requires a functional and accountable administrative system to oversee state activities in the general interest of the people, not the particular interest of individuals or political factions. Society needs “servant leaders” not “served leaders,” a vibrant civil society, and a productive and competitive private sector that enables the government to effectively transform society within a relatively short-time frame and for the common good. The trajectory of post-colonial democracy both towards dictatorship and new forms of democracy has also seen fundamental changes in the structure of Cameroonian institutions. In other words, the post-reunification Cameroon state was inappropriately structured to meet the challenges of addressing the plight of the people.

In this respect, Jua notes:

“The state in Cameroon is a hiatus between pre-colonial and the post-colonial state and the fixed, fast-frozen relations, with the train of ancient venerable prejudices, which from the colonial era were not thawed as a result of this. For instance, in the wake of independence the ruling class adopted a modernising discourse that was predicated on the secular discourse of reason positing a morality purportedly critical of the ‘pathological’ [in the Kantian sense] and stressing a new conception of individual rights... The ruling elite helped to endorse prevailing power structures by reproducing beliefs that provided the

social and political frames of intelligibility and allegiances necessary for their uncontested functioning.”<sup>15</sup>

The extractive institutions inherited from former colonial powers have influenced the current state of weak institutions, and have contributed to the unfavourable condition of economic growth and democratisation. Democracy and a functional government are the missing ingredients for sustainable growth in Cameroon. The current state system has mistakenly perceived authority for legitimacy, and has regularly invoked its purported authority as a licence to freedom of action. Yet, legitimacy only comes with consensus when the governed consent to the dictates of those at the helm through acclamation of their good governance, usually through democracy and free suffrage. It is earned and coercion can only bring further alienation of the governed. Adversarial contrivances like disenfranchisement before elections, marginalisation, gerrymandering, and ballot box stuffing remain the hallmarks of the current system of government in Cameroon. Therefore there is an urgent need to foster the creation of an independent, fair, open and inclusive government apparatus, supported by a vibrant civil society, an effective, productive, and competitive private sector to provide oversight of government policies and actions.

A politically oriented bureaucracy misguides the ruling power for its articulate interests. Cameroon leaders inherited a country through French machinations plagued with the problems of national integration, political and social malaise. Unfortunately, because of articulate self-interests (rather than collective interests) backed by neo-colonial dependent policies, the system adopted from colonial rule and perpetuated in Cameroon has failed to provide a constructive basis for engaging Cameroonians and foster transformational strategies to deal with problems of national integration, socioeconomic development, pervasive

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<sup>15</sup> Bernard N Jua, “Interested Meanings: Rulers, Subjects and National Integration in Post-Colonial Cameroon” in Paul N Nkwi and Francis B Nyamnjoh (eds) *Regional Balance and National Integration in Cameroon: Lessons Learned and the Uncertain Future* (1997), p. 63. ICASSRT Monograph 1. Yaounde: Cameroon.

corruption, cronyism, and election rigging. In addition, the state needs to strengthen its institutional capacity beginning with the restructuring of the public service. The development of a strong professional and apolitical public service is clearly a key imperative for a fragmented political entity like Cameroon.

A professional, merit-based bureaucracy is a key condition for preventing collaboration from degenerating into collusion and corruption. But such a bureaucracy must equally be stepped in a strong code of conduct and code of ethics. These codes need to be implemented and rigorously enforced. Cameroon needs strong institutions that will tear down the wall of manufactured institutionalised violence, exclusion and marginalisation; institutions that foster popular participation and empowerment and equitable shared prosperity. Kleptocracy at the top stunts the growth of poor countries including Cameroon. As Tim Harford notes, “it is not news that corruption and perverse incentives matter. But perhaps it is news that the problem of twisted rules and institutions explains not just a little bit of the gap between Cameroon and rich countries but almost the entire gap. Countries like Cameroon fall far below their potential even considering their poor infrastructure, low investment, and minimal education. Worse, the web of corruption foils every effort to improve the infrastructure, attract investment, and raise educational standards.”<sup>16</sup> To hide the state of plutocracy, manufactured and institutionalised violence comes to play and labels like “enemies in the house”, or return to where you belong” or branding an opposition political party as ‘South West or North West’ party is tantamount to manufacturing institutionalised violence and creating a state of disunity among the population. Regarding the complexities of Cameroon’s problems, Harford observes that:

“We still do not have a good word to describe what is missing in Cameroon. But we are starting to understand what it is. Some people call it ‘social capital,’ or may be ‘trust.’ Others call it ‘the rule of law,’ or ‘institutions.’ But these are just

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<sup>16</sup> Tim Harford, “Why Poor Countries Are Poor: The Case of Cameroon - Bandits, Bandits Everywhere”, *EDEEN Newspaper*, No. 0178 of 28-30 of May 2007, p. 6-7.

labels. The problem is that Cameroon, like other poor countries, is a topsy-turvy place where it is in most people's interest to take actions that directly or indirectly damage everyone else. The incentives to create wealth are turned on their heads like the roof of the school library."<sup>17</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

In the context of the complicated, confusing, complex, and confronting historical past of Cameroon, the politics of assimilation entrenched a governance system that instils false values on the people, one of which is manufactured and institutionalized violence. Therefore a developmental state is needed in the country to confront and solve the key challenges of institutionalised violence, corruption, poverty, governance, peace, security and to hold the government accountable for its actions. The country needs strong institutions and a system of public service and administration that will allow the administrative apparatuses of the state to effectively play its role in the transformation of society.<sup>18</sup> The current system of governance in Cameroon constructs hate not love, disintegration not unity or national patriotism. Cameroon must revert to democratic principles, virtues of moral, ethical standards, and the culture of choosing their leaders in a free, transparent and competitive electoral process. In addition, the building of accountable and effective strong public institutions will enhance the possibilities of moving Cameroon towards the path of political and economic development.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Harford notes that unfortunately, "Government banditry, widespread waste, and oppressive regulations are all elements in that missing piece of the puzzle. During the last 10 years or so, economists working on development issues have converged on the mantra that 'institutions matter. Of course, it is hard to describe what an 'institution' really is. It is even harder to convert a bad institution into a good one."