



Premature Democracy: The Root Cause Of Lack Of Political Participation In Cameroon

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Abstract

The paper sets out to investigate premature democracy and identity politics as the foundation of disorder in Cameroon. This study explores survey approach with the use of primary and secondary sources. The finding revealed that Cameroon has witnessed a fail democracy in both micro and macro states of Cameroon. The faraway democracy has contributed to endemic poverty, corruption and political intimidation which discouraged youth's participation in election. The hindrance has given emergence to survival of fittest as young people engaged in feymanism and presently digital scamming. The study further found out that, the miscarriage democracy has equally facilitated bushfalling phenomenon which has tarnished the image of Cameroon home and abroad. The paper recommends that, the type of democracy suitable for multi ethnicity state like Cameroon is consociational democracy. Secondly the government of Cameroon should empower the youths by giving more opportunities for youths in position of leadership, voting age should be reduce to 18 years and appointee should not be more than 10 years in office.

Key Words: Cameroon, Premature Democracy, Politics, Participation

Introduction

The turn of 1960 was seen as the beginning of glorious years for Africans as African states witnessed independence but was soon trap in the web of civil and military unrest, largely provoked by premature democracy and ethnicity politics. Yet Africans dreams for democracy were in a steadily increased. The concept democracy originated from the Greek words “demos” meaning the people and “krateia” meaning rule or government, hence democracy means citizens rule. Lawyer; define Democracy as a political form of government in which power is derived from the people by direct consensus or by means of elected representatives. It is true that democracy is the government of the people by the people. At the wake of 1990s the Briton Wood institutions as the police of the world’s democracy set criteria for loans to be granted, democracy was one such criteria. It spread to many African states with Cameroon inclusive and she was forced to change from one party state embraced in 1966 to multi-party politics in the 1990. This concept has been metamorphosed in different shapes and forms depending on the legacy of colonial power. While others embraced parliamentary type democracy others referred presidential type democracy. (lawyer, 2017) But the context of this paper defines Democracy as a situation where citizens consents are sought through free and affair elections, freedom of press and the absence of human right violation. Micro nations here refer to *fondoms* and chiefdoms while Cameroon as a Macro state refers to Cameroon after independence. Cameroon is situated at the extreme north eastern end of the Gulf Guinea in the African continent. It is bounded to the south by Equatorial, Gabon, Congo; to the west by Nigeria; to the east by Central Africa Republic and Chad; to the north by lake Chad. This paper seeks to provide explanation on premature democracy as the root cause of the lack of Political Participation.

Democracy in the Micro Nations of Cameroon

Before the European contact with Africa and Cameroon in particular, democracy was practice in Cameroon. According to Ankiambom every democracy has a history and therefore growth out of existing custom and practice, administrative set-ups and assumptions sum up to form a continuous and stead system of government. (Lawyer, 2017) This view has been share with that of David Mokam and Ngoh who say that democracy is not strange in Cameroon as was embedded in Cameroon traditional societies. (Mokam 2012) According to Augustine Ngom Jua 1967, a s cited in Mokam 2012, he articulated that “*the concept of total democracy has its roots in the Cameroonian traditional culture where government for centuries had been the concern of all the people, by all the people and for all the people.*” Zakania, 2003 explained that the essence of democracy in the epoch before colonialism was to solve controversial problem that surrounded human life by coexisting with multiculturalism. Oral history testified that democracy had a place in the Cameroon Micro States. These Micro Nations were made up of multi ethnic group migration and settlement that needed democracy for the nationhood to survive. This argument has been corroborated with that of Langhee’s writing in 2004 who argued that tribes and chiefdoms function like a republic with the three arms of government, the executive, legislative and the judiciary (Langhee,B.C.2004). Such democracy worked with unwritten laws and code of ethics like case of most chiefdoms and *fondoms* around the Grassfield, for example Nkwen: Bafut, Mankon, Nso and Kom yet they function with very little problem. It was this traditional democracy that has glued the *fondom* and chiefdom from disintegration. For instance the leaders of the Micro Nations like chiefs and *fons* were not elected but the manner in which these chiefs were to be chosen was by kin makers before they could ascent the throne, portrays an aspect of democracy. This fact could be substantiated with that of Nkwi, 1976 who argued that high centralized and powerful societies were checked to avoid absolute power control. (Nkwi1976). It was equally the case of advanced democracy like in Britain where power is shared between the monarchy and the parliament

with unwritten constitution. In spite of this traditional democracy some of these *fondoms* still witnessed governance problem like the case of Bafut *fondom* in the Mezam Division.

Democracy at the Macro level of Cameroon

Cameroonians had fought the colonial power with all might to see a free and just society. Cameroon had witness the existence of four constitutions which the first was borne and promulgated by the then Prime Minister of la Republique du Cameroun Andrew Marrie Mbida which was recognized and accepted by President Ahmadu Ahidjo government. After the plebiscite of 11 February 1961 the same constitution was used with a slide modification as two federated States were created (1972 Constitution Cameroon). On May 20 1972 President Ahidjo came out with a solid argument that Cameroon was at the state of decay as a result of the two federated state whether he was right or wrong a new name emerged. It was changed from the Federal State of Cameroon to United Republic of Cameroon and again from United Republic of Cameroon to La Republique du C ameroon in 1984, a name Francophone Cameroon had before reunification. (1996 Cameroon Constitution, Art.1, Sec. 1) This ushered Cameroon in to a difficult era since a name is part of an identity. The British Southern Cameroonians were not comfortable with such an appellation since their own identity was not projected. Hence, it plunged Cameroon into confusion as the Anglophone demanded a revisit of the history of Cameroon to redress the wrongs. Unfortunately, this constitution of French Cameroon has constantly maintained the one and indivisible nature of Cameroon.

Youths and democracy in Cameroon

The participation of youths in the democratic process in Cameroon over decade has been in the spotlight. The Ahidjo's regime took in a snail pace to encourage youths' participation in the democratization of Cameroon. The rise of Biya to the president of Cameroon was greeted with euphoria by Cameroonians in general and youths in particular as they believed in a better tomorrow but regrettably this euphoria did not last for long. At the closed of the 1980s youths instead saw themselves been orphans of the reign of President Paul Biya. This was projected by the lack of democratic reforms, corruption was in the steadily rise with many of Biya's long-time allies languishing in detention for alleged corruption. (Jude Fokwang 2016). The corruption could not stop as it was estimated that above 36%, of youths were unemployment. (Fokwang, 2016). With the frightening statistics, it discourages youth's participation in the political process of Cameroon. When multi-party politics reemerged in 90s, the goal of the youths in the opposition party was to ensure the departure of Paul Biya which has not yielded fruits. It should be noted that Biya encouraged multi-politics against the wishes of the militants of his party. After the 1992 election they have been a dramatic change in election turnout in Cameroon. The aspiration and ambition that had preceded this election faded away as it led to frustration amongst this segment of population. This scenario provoked an unprecedented shift of youths' engagement to youth's disengagement in the election system in Cameroon. The research carried out globally and Cameroon in particular, tries to answer the question of cause of youths declined in election participation. Sloam (2007) argued that the crisis of legitimacy across democratic system had pressed for a negative shift from constitutional to no constitution. This attitude was considered by members of the CPDM regime as mature democracy. The paradigm shift was further facilitated by elitist politics which elite wedge a war to flush any attempt by the youths to nurse any political participation. However it is very complicated to actually determine who is a youth in Cameroon. Political parties and organisation define youths to suit their context. Going by Dze-Ngwa as cited in (Rendall 2013) in an article titled *Assessing the Senate: Political Opinion Among Cameroonian Youth*; says youths according to World Health Organisation are people aged fifteen to twenty five. According to the African Union youth are people aged fifteen to thirty five. The CPDM has agreed with the definition advanced by African Union but the Cameroon Democratic Union disagreed with view to focus on the aged ten to thirty as a youth. This disparity in the definition of youth has actually made it difficult to

draw a line between youth voters. Unfortunately only the age of twenty, is recognized by the Cameroon electoral code as the voting aged while Cameroonian National Identification Card are issued at the aged of eighteen making the electoral participation controversial. In 2009, Rendall put the statistics of youths' population at 40% between fifteen to thirty two years old. According to him this has not given a true reflection on youths' participation in Cameroon electoral system.

Also, of four constitutions that had existed in Cameroon history none of them clearly spelt out the position of youths in the political organization of the government. If we go by the definition of CPDM maximum aged of the youth which is twenty five; this meant youths have automatically been eliminated from the presidential race since the aged limit of the presidential candidate is thirty five years. The worst is that under the present dispensation no youth had ever been appointed as senator or minister. Even the ministries charged to assist the youths climbed out of poverty like ministry of Youths Affair and Ministry of Sport and Physical Education are managed by the octogenarian government. It has been very difficult for the old to understand the plight of the youths because of the evolution of the society. Youths were very active in the fight for democracy in Cameroon. This was seen when the SDF party was launched in Bamenda as six youths were shot to death by soldiers to intimidate youths of the newly launched party. (Fokwang, 2004; 81). In spite of the participation of the youths in the democratization process of Cameroon, they have been relegated to the background with little or no achievement to boost off. Policies and laws are tailored to youth crucifixion rather than motivating them. However the lackadaisical attitude of the youths needs much to be desire in Cameroon as youths are not to be trusted in terms of state affairs. This is because *feymania* popularly known in Nigeria as 419 and alcoholism are some of the vices amongst youths that have wedge them out from ministerial ranks to spectators. This rising phenomenon amongst youths in Cameroon derailed them from political participation. This spiraling down of electoral youth engagement was systematically unequal when compared to the levels of participation of adults. It could be argued that youth electoral participation in Cameroon has received very little attention because of poor treatment. Schumpeter (1942) argued that higher turnout does not imply a higher quality of democracy. This opinion was upheld by Verba, (2003).

Furthermore, in 2018 Gänsler provoked the same debate in an article title "*Cameroon's Youth and their Old President*, Quoting Cosmas Cheka, a law Professor at the University of Yaounde, interviewed by Katrin Gänsler, to DW news who expressed the view that "*The young people are very passionate and excited about the elections, Yet, I'm worried because in a democracy, you can't achieve your goal until you have registered to vote. And I fear that most young people who show much enthusiasm in public are not registered to vote.*" (Gänsler 2018) This confirm to the fact that there exists electoral registration apathy amongst youths. **In a Country of 24 million just 6.6 million register** according to the electoral body ELECAM. This prove that Cameroon citizens cannot trust the system. This could have been the task of the opposition parties to educate the youths on this aspect of registering. In 2018 the main opposition SDF went on to talk on no election campaign and therefore did not enforce election campaign but on the eve of election youths were called to participate. This was contrary to the CPDM elite who were active in the field to woo potential voters but yet only 6.6 million registered to vote. This scenario contributed immensely to low election turnout. Nyamnjoh (1999) accused youths in Cameroon for not taking their destiny in their hands but wanted democracy to be served on a golden plate. He further state that; *The failed democracy in other part of Africa ignited conditions that led to violent outbreaks, massacres and changes from bad to worse or better, but, in Cameroon, the contrary was seen. These moves simply indicate that the entire country was the victim of a hypnotic spell by the sorcerer state.* (Nyamnjoh 1999). While the Cameroon government is blamed by the near absent of democracy, the youths could also be held responsible to have done very little to see the daybreak of democracy.

The failure of democracy in Cameroon could not go on unnoticed as it provoked the policy of survival of the fittest. A difficult choice in a fail democracy has encouraged young people to select the choice of

migration, known in Cameroon as *bushfalling*, *feymanism* and in recent times digital scamming. This was an argument held by Nyamnjoh in 2005 and further buttressed by Pelican in 2011. (Nyamnjoh 2005, 2011; Pelican 2011) This rising phenomenon among young people in Cameroon has proven juicy with many undertaking the adventure to Europe, America and Asian countries. To confirm this, Malaquais (2001), maintains that youths in Cameroon since 1990 have indulged in *feymanism* as it was embraced as fully-fledged profession. It might have been triggered by frustration. From anonymity youths mounted strong argument that they were collecting back what the Whiteman stole from Africa at large and Cameroon in particular. It was an indication that *feymanism* and scamming was just game for those who were interested. However, interest has facilitated the research for recognition in the field of politics in Cameroon.

Identity Politics in Cameroon

Election has taken the form of ethnocentrism which could be linked to the politics of identity. The electors in Cameroon chose their candidate base on ethnic affiliations. For example the politics of identity was witness in Bui Division in 1980 when Nseh Benjamin changed his name from Benjamin Cham Shang to benefit politically from the Kumbo-centered votes. (Fjellman and Goheen 1984). He had realized that with such name the elector might not vote for him and therefore, on 23 April 1980, Benjamin Fonnseh used 3000 Cameroon francs to change his name. (Fjellman and Goheen 1984). The period of 1980s and 1990 was seen by political analyst as a transitional era of political intimidation, especially with the emergence of President Paul Biya unfortunately nothing changed. The view on politics of identity was once more proven by Christian Fung Nchia in 2016 in an article title, "*The Social Democratic Front 1990-2011: Struggle for Democratic Change in Cameroon*", where he discussed that, authoritarian rule and mass trial characterise the transition of the monolithic episode to multipartism in 1990. (Nchia2016) It was within this context that, the consortium of 89 b oth Anglophone and Francophone led by Barister Yondo Black and Albert Womah Mukong met to draft a manifesto that would shape and adjust the democratic destiny of Cameroon. The act of dictatorship was portrayed as the group of activists like Mandge Yondo Black, Albert womah Mukong, Henrriette Ekwe, Francis Kwa Mountome, Charles Rene Djon Djone, Rudolphe Bawanga, Regina Manga, Julienne Badja and Anicent Ekane were all arrested by the secret service *Bridgade Mixtes Mobil*. (Nchia, 2016) This was to put a stopped on any democratic reforms that would eased the transfer of power from the CPDM regime to a new regime. Despite the intimidation of political activism the Social Democratic Movement braved the odds and launched the party in May 26 1990 under the leadership of Ni John Fru Ndi. Cameroonians had been yearning for changed for long which the party exploited to ascertain legitimacy yet there was no change. The euphoria that characterized this period did not last as the plight of the masses could not be achieve through a political party. Nyamnjoh (1999) as cited in Fokwang (2003), state that; *Cameroon's democracy could be described as pseudo, a package of recycled monolithic misrule, or rather a sort of t-shirt slogan democracy where the power elite set the agenda for the masses, 'use them to serve their ends and at the end of the day, abandon them to the misery and ignorance to which they are accustomed'* (Nyamnjoh, 1999:115). The inability of the changed of regime was blamed on the electoral system put in place by the Biya's regime. The constant criticism by national, international press and organisations brought to a halt the mission of the Ministry of Territorial Administration as the organ charged with election in Cameroon. A new election body emerged known as National Election Observatory in 2002, a nother in 2004 with the same appellation and in 2006 Election Cameroon was created to replace the latter yet no one has been able to defeat the incumbent President Paul Biya. The political institution charged to manage elections like the National Elections Observatory, was a body copied from the Senegal but stripped off of all meaningful powers to enforce or replace undemocratic rule. No matter the excuse the government gave, the reputation of Cameroon was a corrupt state in the face of the international community. This magnitude of dishonesty has assisted to facilitate disorder in Cameroon.

Also, the regime had developed strategies of politics of identity to lured potential voters to its favoured. This could be justified by the fact that, when Ni John Fru Ndi became famous in the political arena of Cameroon, Achidi Achu was identified and appointed as a means to persuade supporters and dilute any intention preempt by John Fru. Such political tactics became very successful in nearly all Subdivisions, Divisions and Region where CPDM had member and members of government. It was against this backdrop that Achidi Achu developed the political dictum *politics na njangi*. This dictum has only assisted in precipitating anger and bitterness as those who were not part of that *njangi* were left out as beneficiaries. However some elector have equally exploited this politics of *na njangi* to better their life and improve on their political carrier. This explained why party members decamp either from CPDM to joint SDF vice versa or other political parties which inflamed chaos in Cameroon. This was further witnessed, in the middle of 1990 and 1991, were students of the University of Yaounde with opposing factions to defend the interest of the opposition or the ruling CPDM. This was seen either in the *Parlement* or Auto-defense which was an attachment of ethnic background. An example of students who backed political liberalization struggle and the auto defense were mainly, students of the Beti ethnicity who galvanized support to President Paul Biya. (Fokwang 2003) The mission was to resist any attempts to undermine the Biya regime. Permitting to Forwang view (2003), the *Parlement* was a respond to the porosity of the Cameroon economy at the day break of 1990 while the Auto defense wanted President Biya at the helm of Cameroon as their Beti father.

Furthermore, mark of identity politics was meant to have a bargaining power through grassroots politics. This philosophy had gain prominence in Cameroon with the birth of associations like *Laakam* created to preserve Bamileke identity in Cameroon, the friends of President Biya. The creation of the SDF was seen as a threat because of the fear of the Anglo-Bamileke alliance. It was the same view held by Orock, who argued in a study title, *South West Elite Association, ethnicity, and democracy in Cameroon's patrimonial state: An anthropological critique*. In present-day Cameroon ethno-regional politics is the handmaiden of democratic politics. (Rogers Tabé Egbe Orock 2014) This was constantly used by elites as a strategy of popularity and to remain relevant in the political arena. Such strategy could only work well when you identified yourself with a community or ethnic group. This argument fell in line with Nicolas Van de Walle as cited by Orock, who argued that ethnicity and ethnic politics established stronger link between political elites and the citizenry. (Orock, 2014) Unfortunately, this strategy has not only weaken Cameroon but made it very volatile for disorder.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to examine premature democracy as the origin of lack of political participation in Cameroon. From the forgoing analyses, it was evidence that Cameroon has witness fail democracy. The practice of democracy in traditional societies has its own problems because at time some of these *fondoms* and chiefdoms are unstable. The near absent of democracy in Cameroon has contributed to endemic poverty, corruption and political intimidation. Cameroon political terrain has not been very encouraging for the youths' participation in election. With the frustration of the political system it has given way to survival of the fittest as youths engaged in *feymanism* and the very recent scamming. Secondly, the failure of democracy has equally facilitated *bushfalling* phenomenon among youths. Such malpractice has tarnished the image of Cameroon home and abroad. This exposes the lapses of the type of democracy practice in Cameroon. Therefore, the type of democracy suitable for multi ethnic society like Cameroon was (is) consociational democracy. If modern Cameroon founding fathers had dodged the British and French model democracy and face the peculiarities of Cameroon then, the nation would have been a model in the world. On the basis of this that the paper recommends that in a complicated society like Cameroon with multi ethnicity, the best type of democracy that needs to be encouraged and promoted is consociational democracy. This type of democracy had worked very well in Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and Austria, predominant communities with multinational,

multi ethnicity and multi linguistic states. Such system could be a panacea to stabilise Cameroon. If the government of Cameroon was serious to manage minority disputes they would have adopt consociational democracy. Instead, the government has maintained the option of decentralization as the magic solution to solved multiculturalism and bijural nature of Cameroon. Such option justified why the Cameroon has been in disorder. If the government of Cameroon wants to come out of this dilemma then they should empower the youths by giving more opportunities for youths in position of leadership. The age limit of voting in the Cameroon election should reduce to 18 years. The maximum term of office in a ministerial appointment positions should be more than 10 years. Once these propose recommendations are put in practice, it could help to in steal confidence amongst the youths to participate in Cameroon election.

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