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From Monolithism to Monolithics: A failed transition to liberal democracy in Cameroon, 1966-1992

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Abstract

Western democratic culture introduced in Africa with the advent of imperialism, remains one of the most unsuccessful ventures of Western imperialists in Africa. For, of the many Western values thriving in Africa, Western democracy to date remains the only value that has encountered and continue to experience significant difficulties in its effective integration within the African socio-political space. This paper, which expounds on the difficult transition to liberal democracy in Cameroon since 1966, assesses the practice of democracy in post-independent Cameroon with the aim of unveiling the impediments that have long thwarted all efforts towards an effective liberal democracy in the country. With particular emphasis on Monolithics as a fundamental barrier to effective liberal democracy in Cameroon, this paper sustains the argument that the 1990 return to pluralist democracy was nothing but a farce which projected a strong democratic ideal but remained in its core, a mere display of monolithism with plural actors. To drive through this research paper we opted for a qualitative research approach, and to effectively capture the intentions, attitudes, opinions, mind-sets and facts on the conduct of pluralist politics in post-independent Cameroon, we privileged data from newspaper accounts and reports, not living out oral accounts from interviews and documentaries spotlighting key political actors of the period. The findings revealed that the democratic base planted in Cameroon before independence, survived through the pre-independence period and was totally swallowed up in 1966 by Monolithism which eventually gave way to Monolithics as the new approach to pluralist democracy in Cameroon.

Keywords: Monolithism; Monolithics; Political Pluralism; Democracy

1. Introduction

Political pluralism and liberal democracy which had been under permanent construction in the democratic process and political evolution of Cameroon before independence, (Awah, 2015) had their smooth and safe ride into the Post-independence era and successfully shaped the political institutions of the new independent Cameroon state in 1960/1961. Faced with the challenge of preserving the multifaceted diversity of the new independent state, its first President Ahmadou Ahidjo, instead of capitalising on the erstwhile consolidated democratic advances of the past, chose to adopt a Jacobinist-styled Presidentialist system of governance which in every dimension suppressed pluralism to magnify autocracy. (Gaillard, 1994) With the triumph of autocracy in an apparent democratic republic, political pluralism gradually ceded the political scene to a *de facto* autocratic and dictatorial regime that fully affirmed itself in 1966 with the dissolution of all political parties and the suppression of liberties to uphold a one and unique Cameroon National Union (CNU) ruling party (Gaillard, 1994). The advent of the one-party system which consolidated autocracy in Cameroon for close to 3 decades, suddenly gave way by the end of 1980 with the emergence of a strong liberal upsurge which imposed itself on the autocratic regime provoking the re-emergence of “political pluralism” in a monolithic form which has remained consolidated since 1992. Following this episodic survival of Western Democracy and political pluralism in Cameroon since independence, we were prompted to investigate so as to establish the consideration behind

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Cameroon's failed transition to effective pluralist democracy. This in effect brings to light the fundamental argument in our discourse which postulates that; the introduction of Western democracy in Cameroon as an ideal rather than an element of culture remains the principal reason for its difficult implementation. Having said this; our principal concern will be to examine the evolution of Western democracy in Cameroon, assess the praxis of liberal democracy and establish the considerations behind the failed transition to effective liberal democracy in Cameroon throughout post-independence.

2. Sources and method

To carry out this investigation, the qualitative research design was engaged in an interactive and documentary research approach. In this approach a wide range of data was collected from primary and secondary sources. We specifically exploited newspaper accounts from; *La Presse du Cameroun*, *Cameroon Tribune*, *Le Messager*, *Kamerun Times* and *The Cameroon Champion*. Data was equally collected from specialised published books on Cameroon, Africa and global politics. Scientific articles, dissertations and thesis on the political evolution of Cameroon, political ideologies and development were not left out. To fill up the gaps inherent in newspaper reporting and other secondary data so as to ascertain and establish the facts, oral interviews were conducted. Altogether, fifty (50) persons were interviewed, amongst them we have politicians (actors), Traditional rulers, academics, and civil society actors. The principal research tool put to use so as to carry out this investigation was the question guide and simple observation. This was carefully guided by the methods and techniques of oral historical investigation which eased the analysis of data and the establishment of the findings/results.

3. Results and discussions

3.1. Evolution of Western Democracy in Cameroon.

Democracy remains a “*one size fits all*” concept, that is; a concept that means many things to many people. According to Monica Ferrin and Hanspeter Kriesi, democracy could be broadened to embrace 6 dimensions which include; the electoral dimension, the liberal dimension, the social dimension, the direct dimension, the inclusive dimension and the representation dimension. (Ferrin and Kriesi, 2014) These 6 dimensions can be grouped into 4 democratic traditions: the African Traditional democracy, the Liberal (Western) democracy, the Socialist democracy and the Communist or Guided democracy (Eri-Platform). For the sake of this paper attention will be focused on liberal democracy which will be interchangeably expressed as Western Democracy so as to better assess its core values principles and evolution in Cameroon. Liberal democracy in its holistic package encompassing; the rule of law, respect for fundamental freedoms, protection of basic rights, popular participation and accountability/Transparency was systematically unveiled in Cameroon in 3 distinct phases or periods.

3.1.1. The Contradiction Phase (1885-1945)

The transfer of Western democratic values in Cameroon officially started as from 1885 with the introduction of German colonial administration in the territory. The setting up of German institutions in Cameroon contributed greatly deal to the valorisation of Western Democracy in the territory, as, in principle they had the fundamental goal of institutionalising the rule of law, participatory and representative governance and promoting equality in all dimensions. The surprising thing about these newly created German administrative structures in Cameroon is that they all projected and valorised Western Democracy in a contradictory manner. In short they all presented Western Democracy as an Ideal (what ought to be) and not as a socio-political reality (what is). A close analysis of the gubernatorial management of the territory leaves much to be desired as far as the valorisation of democratic principles is concerned. The racial segregations in the law courts, the persistent human rights abuse of the native and the native exclusion in decision-making spoke volumes about the German atrocities in Cameroon. (Rudin, 1983)

After the Germans, came the British and French in 1916 who were eventually conferred the territory Cameroon as a League of Nation mandate in 1922 and later UN trust Territory. Under the French mandate, an elaborate centralised or direct system of administration was set up. (Abwa, 2010) With this direct system put in place several repressive and constraining laws were elaborated with the aim of compelling Cameroonian natives to pay allegiance to France. They even went as far as categorising the natives into two distinct classes: the “*Assimilé*” and “*the Sujet*”. (Gaillard, 1989) Such a discriminatory system was well fashioned to single out all those who still proved unreceptive vis-à-vis French presence and values, thereby treating them with the greatest cruelty as defined by the *Code d'indigenat*. (Merle & Muckle, 2019)

Throughout the French mandate in Cameroon repressive laws were highly propagated which at the end completely deprived the people of political expression and freedom.(Gaillard, 1989) By so doing the values of Western democracy which they brandished were all contradicted in their policies and actions. (Awah, 2023)

Though the British through indirect rule made it relatively easier for the people of British Cameroons to express their political rights and democratic freedom, the association of British Cameroon to Nigeria provoked serious problems that had to put to question the political right and freedom of the people of British Cameroon. (Awah, 2015) This was evident with the promulgation of the Clifford's constitution, (Ngoh, 2001) whose provisions gave no room for British Southern Cameroons representation of which British Cameroon was administratively attached to Nigeria and not completely annexed. Also striking was the fact that, of the 19 African members provided for by the constitution, none came from the British Cameroons. A sign that the people of British Cameroons had completely lost their fundamental political right to decision making thus contradicting a core value in democracy. (Awah, 2015)

3.2. The Electoral and Representative Phase (1945-1966)

This period which was marked by great political reforms had significant impact on the evolution of Western democracy in Cameroon. With the implementation of the 1944 Brazzaville conference resolutions in French Cameroon and the 1951 Macpherson constitution in British Cameroon it was evident that Western democracy in its representative and electoral form was to take full effect. From an apparent, curtailed or restricted democracy we gradually saw a switch towards liberal democracy in Cameroon. This was the case as from 1945 in French Cameroon with the setting up of *Assemblée Représentative du Cameroun* (ARCAM) and the creation of the UNICAFRA to serve as the mouth piece of the Cameroonian people before the French administration relating to the latter all its plights and frustration with the aim of pressing for better conditions for the indigenous population. (Tchoumtchoua, 2006) Following political agitations within UNICAFRA which led to the emergence of the *Rassemblement Camerounais* (RACAM) and later *Union Des Population Du Cameroun* (UPC), (Abwa, 2010) which became the first indigenous political party in the territory. It was evident that electoral and representative democracy will take new dimension. (Abwa, 2010) With the growing influence of party politics and representative democracy which was gradually providing a platform for free expression and attainment of the people's wishes, the French authorities in their determination to control the democratic pace in the territory had to place a ban on the UPC so as to easily manipulate elections and representation.

Democratic freedom and representative democracy evolved in British Cameroon even faster than in French Cameroon. This was due to their early contact with the democratic institutions of Nigeria and the putting in place of the 1951 Macpherson constitution which increased Southern Cameroons representation in Nigerian legislation from 2 to 13. This institutional reform had great impact in the evolution of liberal democracy in the British Cameroons as it offered them an open platform to express freely their thoughts and aspiration. The process of selecting these 13 representatives which was elective sparked up a new dimension of political freedom and democratic participation of the people in the governance of their territory. Unfortunately the 13 representatives seeing themselves totally marginalised within the Nigerian Legislation saw their democratic rights curtailed and in a majority of 9/4 chose to steer clear of Nigerian politics and returned to Southern Cameroon in 1953 to launch the KNC as the first indigenous political party in the territory through which they pressed for a separate legislature for the Southern Cameroons and successfully won the 1954 elections which marked a great step in the attainment of their goal as the territory was granted quasi-federal status with its own assembly. (Eyongetah & Brain, 1974) With the effective take-off of the Southern Cameroon House of Assembly electoral and representative democracy became even stronger within the territory and influenced the multiplication of political parties with conflicting ideologies. (Dze-ngwa, 1996) Unable to agree on a common ideological platform for the effective attainment of the independence of the territory, the various parties remained in a permanent political competition characterised by regular democratic elections as was experienced in 1957, 1959, 1960 and 1961 when the UN decided to impose on them a plebiscite with two questions.

With the finalisation of constitutional talks after the plebiscite and the eventual kick-off of the Federal Republic of Cameroon on October 1st 1961, a new experience in the practice of representative democracy was opened to post-independent Cameroon and its people. The introduction of new democratic institutions like the Federal Assembly and the assemblies of the Federated States, magnified representative democracy in Cameroon though heavily influenced by the high-handedness of the president of the Federal Republic who at the time had put in place a centralised Presidentialist mechanism to oversee monitor and even influence the business in the Federated States and their parliaments. This new reality in the practice of democracy in Cameroon was to bring forth new challenges, new power relations as well as new struggles in the race for power. While the weakened and dominated opposition political parties in East Cameroon saw the birth of the Federal system as an opportunity to reposition themselves, enter new alliances and Overturn the UC domination, Ahidjo and the UC on their part remained very much preoccupied with the challenge of imposing and sustaining their influence and supremacy over the Federal system. To this effect, two political

tendencies immediately surfaced in East Cameroon politics: the first tendency corresponding to Hamilton's "Politics of Liberation" (Kwame Ture & Charles Hamilton, 1992) was led by the opposition, while the second tendency which we termed "Pre-eminence politics" was led by Ahidjo and the UC party.

Like in East Cameroon, Ahidjo's policy of centralisation and domination was also at work in West Cameroon following the appointment of Jean Claude Ngoh as the Federal inspector for West Cameroon. This heavy concentration of power in the hands of Inspector Ngoh was to suppress the politico-administrative autonomy of the Prime Minister of West Cameroon hence facilitating the materialisation of his policy of National Unity through the institutionalisation of a Grand Unified National Party. By exploiting parliamentary rivalries and political difference in West Cameroon House of Assembly, (Mbile, 1999) Ahidjo successfully pushed through his agenda of institutionalising monolithism in Cameroon with the creation of the CNU in 1966 which completely disrupted liberal democracy in the territory.

3.2.1. The Transition Phase (1990)

Confronted with the dynamics of international politics of the early 1990's, the Monolithic regime installed in 1966 had no choice but to accept what Samuel P. Huntington called the "Third wave of democratisation". (Huntington, 1991) This new spirit of liberal Democracy which blew across the globe caught many Cameroonians in its web thereby provoking a political transformation of mind-set which caused many to rise above their fears and challenged the existing old order and forcing it to align with the new order which had become indispensable for the survival of young states in the international community. In doing this, the Cameroon political class had completely shifted from Conformism to embrace Dissidence which became a potent weapon for effective democratisation and the reinstatement of multiparty politics as well as the affirmation of an independent and vibrant civil society in Cameroon.

This transition which was triggered in the late 1980's by a rising Anglophone nationalism characterised by a strong mobilisation of Anglophone elites in the major cities of Cameroon, leading to the birth of pressure groups and civil society organisations like the Anglophone Patriotic Alliance (APA) the Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM) and the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM) set the pace for a transition to liberal democracy. (Dze-ngwa, 2006) As if to say Anglophones unleashed the spirit of liberation, other Cameroonians of Francophone background joined the rising movements of contestation to demand freedom and democracy. This was the case with Yondo Mandengue Black who openly came out of the silence of conformism to set up the *Comité de Coordination pour le Multipartisme et la Démocratie*. This platform which was to steer the movement toward an eventual return to multipartism in Cameroon never had the opportunity to materialise its goal as the leader Yondo Black and its members were all arrested on the orders of the Monolithic regime on the 19th February 1990. (Boulaga, 1997) With the democratic wind already blowing in full gear across the territory, this act of repression by the monolithic regime rather provoked a democratic upsurge within the civil society that was effectively exploited by John Fru Ndi who in May 1990 Launched the Social Democratic Front (SDF) Party hence marking the return to multiparty democracy. (Interview with Kah wallah, 2020) As Fru Ndi set the pace for the return to political pluralism by forcefully launching the SDF in total dissidence and defiance of all "illegal" administrative restrictions and military repression it became clear that the chains of fear which had held Cameroonians captive since 1966 were broken (interview with M. Fru, 2020). Evidence to this was the massive adherence of the population who challenged forces of the repressive regime in a public demonstration in Bamenda (interview with J. Ngayi, 2020) thus symbolising the beginning of a democratic revolution that caused a massive switch over of the political class and civil society from an age long politics of conformism to a new politics of dissidence for total liberation and democratisation.

Though monolithic regime had made some concessions by the end of the parliamentary session of December 1990, in which important laws on liberties were passed thus guaranteeing freedom of press, Association and the abolition of exceptional laws. This was welcomed with a lot of reservation by the Cameroon Civil Society which still did not see the governments' demonstration of good faith in effective liberalisation (interview with Ekane, 2020. For at the same time they put in place press freedom, censorship of the press still remained the order of the day. For at the same time they put in place freedom of association, NGO's and trade unions could still not operate freely (Boulaga, 1997). As if to test the good faith of the regime, Celestin Monga published in *le Messager* an article titled "Rigged Democracy" on the 27th December 1990. (*Le Messager*, 1990) Failing to respect its own laws of Freedom the regime proceeded in arresting Celestin Monga and Pius Njawe on the 1st January 1991 (Boulaga, 1997) This in effect was a strong signal that the transition to effective liberal democracy in Cameroon was still very far from reality.

3.3. Considerations for a Difficult Transition to Effective Liberal Democracy

Despite the multiple actions in defiance and in non-conformity to the ruling status-quo, combined with growing international pressure, the struggle for a transition to democracy in Cameroon remained stalled throughout 1980's. When the ruling monolithic status-quo couldn't bear the pressure any longer, in the early 1990's it succumbed to the

pressure and made some concessions in favour of a return to democracy. These concessions that were pushed through in the 1990 liberty laws were received with a lot of doubt and resentment by the civil society who did not see any demonstration of good fate on the part of the ruling monolithic status-quo, as all the concessions made in the liberty laws were constantly contradicted in their implementation. This in effect thwarted the transition process to effective democracy in Cameroon and some of the considerations for this failed transition are amongst others;

3.3.1. Western Democracy: an evolving universal ideal incompatible with forms and specificities of Cameroon's socio cultural space

The universalisation of Western democratic ideals such as the rule of law, respect for fundamental freedoms, and protection of basic rights, popular participation and accountability/Transparency continue to divide scholars and analyst along two boundaries which I call the "Western and Southern boundaries". While the global West has standardised democracy and built a thought pattern that gives a universal dimension to the ideals and praxis of democracy, the global South has been on a defensive and passively resisting Western democratic ideals by opposing to it some socio-cultural specificities which contradict the fundamental values of Western democracy.

Cameroon in its socio-cultural diversity regroups two prominent political cultures which have shaped as well as influenced governance and power relations within the territory even before its exposure to Western colonisation. These cultures were no other than the culture of Centralisation and Decentralisation. These two political cultures that were well implanted within the territory that became known as Cameroon greatly fashioned the people's attitudes and response to Western democratic ideals. Though diametrically opposed to each other in terms of governance principles, they shared a common ideal of power that celebrated Powerful men at the helm of strong institutions. Be it in the centralised polities of the north and grassland regions of Cameroon or in the decentralised polities of the coast and forest regions power was wielded by great and powerful men or women. While in the centralised polities this power was sacrosanct and hereditary, in the decentralised polities it was elective and restricted to family and lineage heads.

This political culture that rendered power and its attributes very uncommon and reserved for special persons inadvertently built a culture of Monolithism within the society and as a result, every effort put in by the Western occupying forces to liberalise access to power through popular or liberal democracy received stiff opposition from both centralised and decentralised polities. (Awah, 2023) These polities who were imposed Western liberal democracy through conquest and repression had no choice but to adhere to a political culture that was different from the one they had known. Familiar with a form of democracy that protected strong men at the helm of strong institutions, they found it difficult to adapt in post-independence to Western democracy that rather protected strong institutions at the detriment of strong men. The evidence of this difficult adaptation could be seen in the ease with which Cameroonians in post-independence quickly referred to the head of state as "father of the nation" thereby transposing elements of their political culture that reserved power only to the heir or the family head who was considered as father to every member of the society. The perpetration of this African political culture by the post-independence leaders of Cameroon contributed enormously in retarding the development and progress of Western democracy in Cameroon. This in effect remains one of the fundamental considerations for a difficult transition to Western democracy in Cameroon.

3.3.2. The Cold War and Western Normalisation of Democratic Contradictions

The slow pace in the effective development of Western democracy in Cameroon is to greater extent due to the politics of the Cold War era. In their struggle to expand their influence and power across the world, the East and Western ideological blocs found fertile ground in Africa for the spread of their ideologies. While Western Democracies had already consolidated a greater influence in Africa through colonisation, they saw this influence gradually reduced by the Eastern Bloc in the late 1950's and early 1960's with the rise of radical Nationalism. These radical Nationalist who were hunted by the West found refuge in the East with whom they consolidated relations and secured technical and logistic assistance for the nationalist fight.

Mindful of the popularity enjoyed by radical nationalist in Africa and Cameroon in particular, they became a big threat to Western democracies and their interest. As such it became a matter of urgency to bloc all means of communication and collaboration existing between radical nationalist and the Eastern bloc. The best means adopted to realise this task was to urgently grant independence to these African states and place at the helm of these independent states Western collaborator to whom they gave all support and facilities to trample on the rule of law, institutionalise repression and completely limit fundamental freedom for all, just to frustrate the radical nationalist and deter any form of dissent within the state. This was the case in Cameroon with the rise of Ahidjo to power in 1960 following the independence of French Cameroon which was contested by the radical nationalist of the UPC party. Endorsed by France and conscious of the strategic role he had to play in pushing back communism and consolidating Western democracy in Cameroon, Ahidjo under the watchful eyes of France and the West started putting in place a series of political reforms that conferred

on him absolute powers, and the leverage to suppress the rule of law by creating the *Loi d'exception*, institutionalising repression, and completely curtailing political rights as well as fundamental freedoms. These measures which were seen as effective arsenals to fight Eastern Allies in Cameroon and totally silence communism rather normalised “Democratic contradictions” in Cameroon. In effect, all the celebrated virtues, values and principles of liberal democracy were totally silenced. After over 20 years of reign under Ahidjo, Western democratic culture already in evolution in Cameroon experienced a sharp regression. With the arrival of Paul Biya to power in 1982 there was great optimism that democratic progress will be realised but unfortunately the stakes of the Cold war were still very present in the continent thus pushed Paul Biya like his predecessor to consolidate democratic contradictions by upholding Monolithism, repression and the suppression of the rule of law.

In effect from Ahidjo to Biya Cameroon has never known effective liberal Democracy all because the culture of democratic contradictions nurtured and consolidated throughout their reign as presidents was deeply implanted in the minds of the Cameroonians such that they have become very insensitive to these abuse of democracy. Even with the collapse of the Berlin wall and the end of the cold war in 1990 when everyone was looking forward to total freedom and the rapid progress of Western Democracy, the culture of democratic contradictions still remained very strong and violently opposed the forces of freedom and effective Democracy in Cameroon. With this it was evident that there was no solid base on which the transition to effective democracy could take its course thus from Monolithism, Cameroon dived into a democracy served in its contradictory form which we have termed Monolithics

4. How Monolithism Transitioned to Monolithics.

A seed sowed in the ALCAM session of October 22, 1959 which voted in favour of the *Pleins Pouvoirs* bill of Ahidjo, (Abwa, 2010) Monolithism slowly gained roots in Cameroons' political ecosystem in the guise of an anti-terrorism measure to safeguard the independence of Cameroon which at the time was considered under threat by UPC nationalist. The use of *Pleins Pouvoirs* to counter UPC “Terrorism” was later transformed into a political tool by Ahidjo to silent political contradiction and push through his policies and reforms. This was the case with the pushing through of his political project of the *Grand Partie Nationale* (Gaillard, 1994) which compelled opposition militants to massively decamp their parties for adherence into the UC. Since at the time, power and authority could only be exercised through the UC party, for fear of being tagged as dissident and terrorist, many political leaders and parties decided to adhere to the UC party.

Not very satisfied with the gradual process with which monolithism was gaining grounds in Cameroon Ahidjo decided to speed up the process by putting in place this time the project of a *Grand Partie Nationale Unifié* This project which aimed at uniting all political parties in the Federal Republic of Cameroon around a common political programme which he claimed was to help blend efficiency with democracy and freedom of thought, was in effect a manoeuvre to silent contradiction and institutionalise Monolithism in Cameroon. With the attainment of this goal in 1966 following the birth of the CNU and the complete disappearance of pluralism and contradiction, monolithism was effectively institutionalised in Cameroon. The challenge now faced by the regime was that of consolidating monolithism and democracy at the same time. To do so there was no other means than upholding democratic principles but applying their contradiction, thus introducing **Monolithics** (the manifest will to silent political contradiction while upholding democracy) in Cameroon's political landscaped. The consolidation of Monolithism in the guise of democratic transition could only have been successful through a transition to Monolithics and this was made possible by the following means;

4.1. The dictat of the CNU/CPDM on pluralism

With the successful introduction of Monolithism in 1966 in Cameroon, its consolidation within a “democratic republic” could only be realised through manoeuvres that down play democracy while projecting democratic progress (Monolithics). One of such was the imposing influence of the CNU/CPDM and its president over the state and state institutions. The CNU which later became CPDM had built a strong hegemony over and above the state which permitted it through its president to set rules out of the margin of democratic norms and forced all within the country to abide by those rules. A case in point was the fabrication of the notion of “One-party Democracy” a notion which was forced down the minds of Cameroonians to believe that democracy was best expressed only in a unique party and there was no need to fathom any idea of holding a contrary view out of the CNU/CPDM. This notion was strongly affirmed by CNU militants in the likes of NN. Mbile who stated clearly in his memoire that the One-party system was more productive for our democracy than the Multi-party era. (Mbile, 1999) Such a rhetoric spread widely across the country silencing all contradictory voices and pulled all opposition within the CNU/CPDM where they were opposed against each other in the fight to benefit appointments which were coated in elections and democratic procedures. Within the One-party system, Clientelist and egoistic ambition of militants continuously fuelled dissensions and disagreements within the party's organs. Such dissensions usually emanated from political competition among the militants (Elites) to occupy

strategic positions within the ranks of the party which usually determined their chances and hopes of high political appointments in the government by the national president of the party who doubled as the president of the republic (Tafah, 2020). In such competitions, political losers usually back out of the party and those who emerged victorious with prospects of tapping dividends, also back out when such dividends of power didn't come forth. Some simply defected the party and abandoned their post as was the case in Wouri section in 1976 where El-Hadj Tanko Hassan CNU divisional president for Wouri (Douala) had to reorganise elections in 4 of the sub-sections of the party in Wouri so as to replace elected militants and officials of the party who had simply abandoned their functions and were no longer engaged in propagation of the party's ideals. (Cameroun tribune, 1976)

With the rise of Paul Biya to Power in 1982 represented great hope for effective liberal democracy in Cameroon. Unfortunately this hope gradually died down with the passing of time as the anticipated democratic progress he announced was totally swallowed up in the new CPDM hegemony. Though the Biya regime succumbed to popular pressure for effective democratisation in 1990 with the re-introduction of political pluralism and contradiction, this pluralism was systematically trapped in Monolithics which consisted of raising several more parties with contradictory policies and views thus dividing the opposition apart and ensuring the triumph of a single CPDM party in all electoral competitions. Though initiatives were taken to federate these plethora of parties under an umbrella organisation (*Comité Nationale de Coordination des Parties de l'Opposition*) (Boulaga, 1997) as a form of coalition against the dominant ruling CPDM party, divisive Clientelist tendencies were injected within such coalitions by the regime causing disagreements which only favoured a continuous proliferation of political parties to the advantage of the dominant CPDM party and to the detriment of the Pluralism and effective democracy in the country. (Sambaka, 2020)

4.2. The Shift from People-based politics to Individual-based politics

Beyond the regular organisation of elections which gives room for the people to participate and shape their governance system, a strong democracy according Michael B. Aleyomi does not just require pluralist elections but rather needs strong and sustainable political parties as well as political institutions with the capacity to represent citizens and provide policy choices that demonstrate their ability to govern for the public good. (Aleyomi 2013) Cameroon in its democratic construction since independence has continuously placed emphasis on Monolithics; (pluralist elections while down playing fundamental democratic values of freedom tolerance and alternation). This perception of Democracy in Cameroon which upholds pluralist elections instead of pluralist ideas has rather exhibited a strong quest for individual recognition and self-preservation than the greater purpose of service to the people and the nation as true democracy will demand.

Individualism which had become a trade mark in Cameroon's political system throughout 1960-1966, was to further intensify in the one party era as political competition this time around totally did not depend on the people. The people who had been taken hostage by a monolithic regime which did not welcome contradiction, were forced to legitimise the actions of the regime through regular elections that were organised within the various organs of the One-party. Within this institutionalised Monolithism, political competition which was now all about personalities continuously orchestrated dynamics in militancy as the various political personalities who struggled for "Power" often did not win the favour of "Power" and out of disappointment such usually defected the party or abandoned militancy as was the case in the CNU Meme Section (la Press du Cameroun, 1972) and in the Wouri section (Cameroun Tribune, 1976) where laxity among party elites and rampant abandonment of duties within the party were recorded. This craving for political recognition among militants of the party which pushed them to be inconsistent with their militancy and political engagement greatly projected and exhibited individualism and personality based politics in Cameroon. Since that which interested them was power dividends and not power itself, many simply abandoned militancy as it was very clear to them that Power or alternation was an impossible and suicide mission. It was until 1982 with the rise to power of Paul Biya and with the promise of liberalisation that many had to renew their commitments and engagements as militants of the unique party. As if to say they understood so well the call for liberalisation at the time which was nothing else but a kind of call for disentanglement with the old Ahidjo order for effective alignment with the new Biya order, most of them reengaged into competitive politics. This perfectly corroborates with the analyse of F. E. Boulaga who said;

Autour de la personne d'Ahidjo et sous son égide, une classe dominante promeut et anime un état autoritaire... Lorsque son successeur parle de « Renouveau » de « Moralisation » et de « Démocratisation » c'est à cette couche qu'il s'adresse, pour lui signifier que l'alliance hégémonique se fera autour de lui et que la prépondérance sera donné au membres de son cercle personnel (Boulaga, 1997)

With this, remobilisation within the CNU by 1983 just like before, was all about the struggle for personal political recognition and not power itself. Thus the erstwhile incessant internal battles and division among elites struggling for recognition persisted. This was the case in the Wouri, Fako and Mfoundi sections of the CNU/CPDM where stern battles

for political recognition continuously divide political actors as witnessed in Douala between Dooh Priso and Jean Jacques Ekindi, in Mfoundi between Ndongo Alega and Emah Basile and in Fako between the Litumbe camp and Endeley camp. In these battles for personal political recognition, many were those whose efforts were in vain as their line of action and policy embraced contradiction instead of alignment. For such there was no political future in the CPDM unless they aligned, and with the opportunities given them by the wind of democratisation blowing across Africa at the time many took the risk to intensify contradiction and opposition to the point of creating a rival party as was witnessed in Bamenda with the launching of the SDF in 1990 which became the first opposition party to emerge in the monolithic era thus inaugurating the return to multi-party politics.

Since throughout 1990, personality politics prevailed over the struggle for Power, many of those who didn't receive political recognition within the CPDM instead chose to create their own parties for greater visibility by those in power and not for the conquest of power. This clearly explains why with the launching of the SDF in 1990 there immediately, a strong explosion of parties was witnessed all over the territory clamouring for political space and recognition. Instead of working out contrary ideologies to the dominant ruling party to effectively bring about alternation and win Power, political actors were rather fighting for individual space so as to easily gain recognition by power and partake in the sharing of political dividends. (Asongwe, 2020) Even when efforts were made to mutualise the forces of contradiction in a *Comité Nationale de Coordination de Parties de l'Opposition* (CNCPO) so as to better reorganise the political game and put the people at the forefront, the cravings for self-preservation and recognition still resurfaced among political actors thus orchestrating dissensions and disagreements which influenced further multiplication of parties.

This in essence, marked the start of a new era in the Cameroonian political landscape which was baptised "*L'ère de la dictature des parties*". With government policy codified in the law excluding independent candidates from vying elections, a wide door was opened for any individual to form his or her party such that the latter could easily be lured by the regime to align without any consideration of the people. As Boulaga puts it;

Il suffit que des individus obtiennent administrativement le statut de parti politique pour avoir le pouvoir de mettre hors-jeu le peuple. Ils reçoivent et perdent leur mandat du parti. Et celui si peut entrer dans les combinaisons avec le régime, former des coalitions en fonctions des intérêts de ces dirigeants... Le destin de la nation est livré, par eux à l'exécutif... (Boulaga, 1997)

The outcome of this was the total disintegration of the opposition as in the space of just one year (1990-1991) Over 52 Parties were legalised, there by sacrificing the sovereignty of the people for individual aggrandisement as was witnessed in the 1992 legislative elections wherein several parties did not yield to the call for boycott as was championed by SDF, UDC, UFDC, MDP and UPC just because they had chosen to place their individual quest and aspirations above the nation and people. With this it became very clear that Monolithics as propagated through the individualisation of politics in Cameroon which enhanced egoism, individualism and self-preservation as standards in the country's political system, went a long way to consolidate and perpetuate monolithism in Cameroon .

5. Conclusion

The Democratic evolution in Cameroon from our assessment is one which has remained since 1966 on a permanent struggle and quest to Transit into an advance stage of liberal democracy. This quest for democratic progress which was continuously expressed by Ahidjo and later by Paul Biya has in effect not been followed by concrete policies and actions which privilege democratic progress. Rather democratic progress has remained a mere political expression lacking in concrete political will to effectively progress. With the institutionalisation of Monolithism in 1966 all hopes for democratic progress was lost as pluralism became elusive and all forms of contradiction and freedom were taken hostage by a monolithic system with no expressed will to bring back power to the people. With coming of Paul Biya to Power in 1982 great hope was rekindled in Cameroonians who saw in him the liberator. Unfortunately like his predecessor his political program that privileged liberal democracy also remained as a mere political slogan and expression. All efforts put in place to ensure a successful transition to effective democracy were swallowed up in Monolithics well calculated and designed to perpetuate monolithism and maintain Cameroon's democratic journey on a stand still. With this bleak democratic balance sheet exposed by this paper it becomes urgent for researchers and think tanks to throw deep reflections on the question of the Politicisation of the masses in Cameroon. For, the hope of a grounded and effective democratic transition in Cameroon can only come about if the masses are sufficiently politicized and politically socialised to play their role as key actors in the democratic process and progress of the country.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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