



The changing character of democracy in the pre and post colonial Cameroon: An old practice, a new word

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Abstract

Aim: This article aims to chart the development of democracy in Cameroon over various historical periods. Since the dawn of time, democracy has been practiced worldwide. Because of this, whether you're talking about Athenian democracy or the democracy in the United States, both have their roots in the past. This was the case with the African and Cameroonian democracies, which predated colonialism.

Methodology: Data is collected using an interdisciplinary strategy, and the past is analyzed using a functional framework.

Findings: The data gathered using historical research methods led to the conclusion that democracy is a work in progress and not a perfect system. Cameroonians can incorporate new democratic norms into their country's established system. Customs.

Novelty/Implications: The results of this study demonstrate that the Cameroonian culture before colonization was governed fairly well. Both historical and modern Cameroonian societies were inclined to pursue some form of social progress. It is analyzed, and recommendations are made for Cameroonian and African societies.

Key Words: Cameroon, Democracy, Culture, Changing Character, Party Politics

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INTRODUCTION

Demos, which means people, and krateia, which means rule or government, are the root words of democracy. Democracy, therefore, entails the rule of the people. Democracy is a political system in which authority rests with the people, either directly or through their representatives in government. Democracy truly is the rule of the people, for the people. This requires as much participation as is humanly possible. Instead of electing representatives, citizens in a direct democracy cast their votes directly on public policy issues. A system known as indirect democracy is one in which voters choose the politicians who will represent them. Direct democracy, as practiced in the Greek city-states, is, however, not possible today. The locals gathered to make all the important decisions and see that the laws they passed were enforced.

The majority of countries, including Cameroon, now use representative or indirect democracy. The democratic system in Africa, particularly Cameroon, reflects the culture and history of its traditional societies and, ultimately, the state. Because democracy has been developing continuously, it is a never-ending process. Democracy is more than just a theoretical idea; it also refers to cultural presumptions and values.

In Cameroon, however, there has been little to no study of this topic. Therefore, the purpose of this work is to chart the development of democratic rule in Cameroon in light of the traits and principles of liberal democracy. This work will discuss democracy as a political practice in Cameroon, not as a Western invention. The Greeks came up with a term that both described and defined democracy.

It is necessary to provide a brief overview of Cameroon to facilitate an understanding of the country's democratic development. The Central Africa's Republic of Cameroon. It shares borders with Nigeria, Chad, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, and the Congo. It was a German colony from 1884 until 1918, but after World War I, the League of Nations partitioned it and put it under the mandate system. After the

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First and Second World Wars, the French and British governments administered the two halves as mandated and trusted territories. Independence for Cameroun, the French-speaking region of Cameroon, was declared on January 1, 1960. On February 11, 1961, the British Cameroons, a region of Cameroon under British control, gained its independence from French Cameroun. The Federal Republic of Cameroon was created when the two Cameroons united. The United Republic of Cameroon was adopted as the country's new name on May 20, 1972. The Republic of Cameroon was renamed in 1984. (Meyo 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Democracy as a political ideology became most popular in the twentieth century thanks to President Woodrow Wilson between 1913 and 1921. Wilson began by reforming the United States Government and continued by his struggle to characterise the World War I as a war to defend democracy. By 1975, 30 countries in the world were seen as democracies, in 2005, 119 had democratic political systems. According to data compiled by Freedom house, in 1950, 14.3% of the World's countries were democratic; the percentage rose to 62.5 by 2000. The number of people living in democracies rose from 31% to 58.2% between 1950 and 2000. Hence, the number of democratic countries with people living under democratic governments has steadily increased (Riemer, Simon, and Romance 2011). Today, Cameroon counts as one of these democratic countries. However, in order to better understand, appreciate and examine the practice and evolution of democracy in any given state, it is important to master the ideals of democracy as viewed by previous researchers.

Durant and Durant (1968) share the view of Winston Churchill that democracy is surely a bad system of government, but it is the best we have so far. It has done less harm and more good than any other form of government. It has opened great opportunities for the human mind to excel and achieve political operation and growth. Osborne (2011) likewise sees democracy as humanity's finest achievement. It is a lifestyle and a system of government in which human beings find the opportunity of constructing lives of real meaning. Democracy does not seek to attain perfection: it stays in a continuous state of adaptation. Democracy constantly evolves and in the process new methods are developed and old ones modified. It aims at achieving the general welfare of the governed. It is not an event and no democracy has attained a level of perfection.

According to Lasch (1996), democracy involves a vigorous or strict exchange or a propagation of democratic ideas and opinion especially by the elite population of the state. Democracy works more when people do things for themselves not depending very much on the state. Bacevich (2008) thinks along the same line that democratic states develop the democratic techniques of a free society and place checks upon the power of the ruler and administrator and thus prevent it from becoming vexatious. Therefore, democracy constantly strives to avoid dictatorial moves by their leaders. This is relevant to the present research as the democratic element of power check runs through the history of democracy in Cameroon since the precolonial period.

According to liberals, democracy is a legal system that makes it possible for people to live with their differences. It is the inclusive nature of political institutions that makes democracy successful. They combine the ideals of liberalism and democracy, they see Liberal democracy as a constitutional government characterised by popular rule, respect and protection of basic rights, political and economic competition, and dynamic or opened to continual reinterpretation. Liberalism is a political policy that insists on government intervention in the interest of public welfare, social justice and fair play (Zakaria 2003; Azhar 2015; Pradhan 2016). This argument will justify the continuous adaptation of Cameroonian democracy to change and for the interest of its people especially from the 1980s.

According to Shively (2011), the level of participation of citizens varies across democracies. Similarly, Mandelbaum (2007) and Guinier (1994) expose the differences in democracies across the world depending on their historical and social contexts. He claims that even though the United States of America and Great Britain are seen as the most recognisable democratic governments since the late 18th century, their women only got the right to vote in 1920s and citizens of African descent in the USA only got the right to vote in the late 1960s. This is important to our work as it illuminates the fact that women in Cameroon have always enjoyed voting and elective rights as opposed to these great democracies. This study will therefore focus on the level of participation of Cameroonians in their democratic evolution.

Kombi (2015) and Meyo (2015) define democracy as a form of governance which respects the rule of law, the protection of human rights, and reinforces electoral transparency. They see the democratic order in Cameroon as pluralist and liberal as well as the modernization of political life. They contextualize democracy in Cameroon as a form of government put in place in order to consolidate national unity and to promote peace and stability. A democratic state is one which organizes periodic and transparent elections. All citizens and political parties have the same level of freedom to participate in the elections. The evolution of democracy in Cameroon has been pertinent and coherent during the reign of President Paul Biya. During his reign he has adapted democratic ideals to the political needs of his people which resulted in peace and stability.

Theory

This work therefore upholds the theory that democracy is an old political practice and an adaptable form of government. It is a product of its political, economic and cultural context and is not exportable or importable. It evolves with the culture of a people in a given context, provides and requires human freedom, not through pure reason or logic, but in service to others in a given time and space. That democracy is a process and not an event and democracy has never attained a level of perfection. Even in participation there is no perfect participation. That democracy is defined and evolves differently in different societies based on their social context. A balanced democracy is a result of its environment.

METHODOLOGY

We made use of an interdisciplinary approach in data collection given that the subject cuts across disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, political science, law and history. The functional method was used to examine the historical past that informed us of the practice of democracy through the way our society has been governed since the pre-colonial times.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outcome of our analysis is drawn from three different historical periods and presented in three main parts, each with its own characteristics. The first part discusses democracy from the ancient point of view and how functional it was in the precolonial period. The second part of this paper analyses democracy within the context of colonial supremacy in Africa and in Cameroon in particular. However, this historical era was a transition between ancient and modern democracy. The third part of this paper is focused on post-colonial democracy otherwise known as modern democracy in Cameroon.

Democracy in Precolonial Cameroon

All primitive communities no matter their size or their importance were based on a minimal system of organisation or government for daily survival. Every democracy has a history be it Athenian or American democracy. Democracy grows out of existing customs and practices, administrative set ups and assumptions which sum up to form a continuous and steady system of government. It seeks to solve the great dilemma of human life by coexisting with different elements of cultures (Zakaria 2003).

Oral history reminds us that democracy flourished in the precolonial societies of Cameroon. The people did not belong to one homogenous group but to different tribes. The tribes ranged from chiefdoms with state-like institutions to village republics (Langhee 2004). Some of these tribal states were well-organised: legislative, judiciary and executive branches of government. It is important to state that those branches of government existed even though they were not as clearly defined as one would find them in modern written constitutions. These were well-structured societies with chiefs whose authority was controlled by the legal or religious codes of their people. Chiefdoms were an amalgamation of lineages and sometimes clans but with leadership institutionalised in the hands of a leading lineage. The state delegated powers to the judicial and administrative units to achieve government efficiency. For example, in the Grassfields of Cameroon there were kingdoms. The Bamum, Kom, Nso, Bali and Bafut emerged as traditional kingdoms or tribal states before the 19th century. These kingdoms practised a reasonable degree of democracy in their governments (Nkwi 1986).

Democracy always existed in Cameroon even if it was not as sophisticated or as developed as today's modern democracy. In the pre-colonial period, there existed participatory Government. Democratic governments were part of the natural order of human affairs. This is because participation is a natural human desire. People who lived in a community desired to be part of what the community was. They sought to improve on the wellbeing of the community in order to improve theirs. Democracy was effective in these precolonial societies because it was a product of their social context. Traditional African politics had no written rules, it possessed cultural norms. These were practices which resulted in checks and balances exercised by the people to ensure that the chiefs did not become dictators or oppressors. Democracy's two parts were liberty (individual freedom) and popular sovereignty (rule by all the people) (Mandelbaum 2007).

In the Cameroonian precolonial society, the traditions of the people limited the authority of their leaders. The chief was the political and spiritual leader of all his people. Although the office of the chief was hereditary and not elective, there were some democratic elements in the choice and installations of successors to chiefs. A chief was chosen by the tribe's kin-makers and the choice confirmed by the Councils of Notables and Elders. The chiefs were constantly checked by the Queen Mother and the Council of Elders. Even in tribes where power was highly centralised, it was at the same time checked by the people (Nkwi 1976).

The chiefs were assisted administratively by palace notables and sub-chiefs who formed an incipient bureaucracy (Aletum 1974). Power in the precolonial governments was regulated as the people understood that if given absolute powers, the government would die in chaos. Chiefs consulted their tribes (represented by the elderly men) before taking important decisions. This was a similar practice in Germany around the end of the first century AD (Osborne 2011).

Traditional councils or assemblies existed among various African tribes including Cameroonian tribes. The precolonial chiefdoms and kingdoms in the Grassfields area of Cameroon and the Mafa of the Extreme North Region of Cameroon put in place a political organisation where the chief consulted the masses through their representatives before taking important decisions. This is described by Perevet (2008) when he states that:

"In the exercise of his functions, the clan head does not take important decisions concerning the people until after concerting with the council of notables, the most popular family heads among the indigenes. This is usually the eldest of each quarter of the clan concerned and the eldest of the traditional priests. The decisions of the council are imposed on all who lived within the clan. To this effect, it appears that the Mafa society is a democracy" (Perevet 2008, p. 40).

This practice was also an integral part of government among the Beti and the Grassfields tribes of Cameroon. The council of notables was composed of village heads; lineage heads as well as intelligent and influential men whose age and wisdom had seasoned them for political role in village affairs. Each lineage, clan, and/or village chose their leader who represented them in the traditional council which was generally presided over by the chief. The notables understood the laws and tradition of the land and sat in traditional council to deliberate village issues on behalf of their people. The chiefs discussed all important issues with the council of elders and without this council, the chief was powerless (Nkwi and Warnier 1982).

Legitimacy, as an element of democracy, was also observed in traditional politics in their councils or assemblies. Decisions taken during traditional council meetings were only adopted after the endorsement of the majority of the council members. Council members spoke freely to issues concerning their chiefdoms and were listened to by the chief who presided the council meetings. Through consensus, the councils also discussed and agreed on issues without voting (Khoza 2006). In those tribal states, voting was generally avoided (when possible) because it produced a winner and a loser which could lead to conflicts in the future.

The rule of law as a democratic principle was ensured in pre-colonial societies through a judiciary system that regulated life in every chiefdom, kingdom or clan. There was a court system which heard and decided cases. The precolonial Cameroon societies maintained their internal peace and governance through the observance of moral codes which differed slightly from one community to the other but were universal or similar for the most part. Laws and regulations were based on morals which the society imposed on its people for their security and growth (Durant and Durant 1968). The judiciary was made up of elders who met in well-known sites (under trees and rocks). Only elders who were supposed to have attained a high level of moral maturity were invited to sit for court

sessions. The most recurrent issues at the time brought to the court were dominant problems like family quarrels, marital/conjugal problems, theft, witchcraft, adultery, and murder. The chief played the role of the supreme judge (Nkwi and Warnier 1982).

In the Grassfields area of Cameroon, women were represented in traditional administration by the queen mother. The queen mother was generally appointed and enthroned before the enthronement of every new chief. Generally the mother or sister of the chief, the queen mother was the highest female personality in her chiefdom. She was a member of the traditional council and the judiciary. She ruled over the women of her chiefdom beginning with the chiefs' wives and was in charge of settling disputes between them. During court sessions, she defended women and pleaded for clemency in case of sanctions. The queen mother's services were also solicited by dissatisfied litigants. She pleaded on the behalf of such victims to have a re-sit of the court session for their cases and litigations to be reviewed (Ateh 2003).

Democracy was also visible in the ability of different tribes to tolerate and interact with each other. Cameroonian tribes since the precolonial period coexisted peacefully with their neighbours. For example, the Mafa related peacefully with the Mandara by jointly looking for solutions to problems they faced in common. They started by jointly attacking and killing the beasts that were a problem to their crops like monkeys, porcupines and elephants. This led to intermarriages which further united the two tribes (Perevet 2008).

Cameroonian precolonial states performed certain traditional rituals together and even entered into oral treaties or agreements with each other. This was common among the Beti, Bulu and Fang tribes and other tribes along the coast of Cameroon like the Bakweri, Mungo, Duala, Batanga, Bakossi, Balong and Isubu. These tribes shared an ancestral and historical origin. The Grassfields Chiefdoms especially maintained peaceful relationships with their neighbours by exchanging royal gifts, arranging inter-chiefdom marriages and mutually returning slaves and wives who ran away from other chiefdoms (Nkwi 1986).

Democracy During the Colonial Periods

When the Germans colonised Cameroon in 1884, they discovered fairly well-organized societies. The opinions of the village heads were still seen as those of his villagers while the pronouncements of the chiefs still represented the opinion of their societies as a whole. However the German colonial rule was short-lived as Cameroon ceased to be a German protectorate after the World War I. According to Woodrow Wilsons new world order, he proposed that former German colonies should become mandated territories under the League of Nations. The period after 1918 marked the coming of the British and the French. Hence East Cameroon became a French mandate while British Cameroon joined Nigeria under the British mandate. In 1918 when the League of Nations was created, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States of America continued to promote self-determination. This influenced the politics of many young countries and territories including Cameroon. In fact, self-determination was seen as an opportunity for people to exercise their democratic rights (Macmillan 2002).

However, it is difficult to assert that democracy was practiced during the mandatory and trusteeship periods in Cameroon. Colonialism was undemocratic because power was not in the hands of Cameroonians but in the hands of the colonialists. That is, Cameroonians did not have ultimate sovereignty and responsibility for the conduct of their own affairs. During the French and British mandatory and trusteeship eras, the authorities and decisions of the chiefs were still largely a representation of the local opinion. This was because until 1958, less than 20 percent of the local indigenes had been affected by Western ideas and education (Algeo 2001). Cameroon was not yet a state and government was by the colonial masters for the people. It could rather be asserted that self-determination and modern democracy were the end results of colonialism. Colonialism therefore, prepared Cameroonians psychologically and mentally for their future independence or self-rule and democratic activities. This resulted in the granting of independence to French Cameroon by the French on 1 January 1960. On 11 February 1961, the British organised the plebiscite whose results led to the reunification of the French Cameroon and the British Southern Cameroons (Langhee 2004).

Modern Democracy in the Cameroonian Context

In Cameroon like in many young nations, the state does not only play an important role in a democratic

society but introduces and institutes democracy as a form of government (Ministry of Information and Culture 1982; Langhee 2004). One of the main constitutional responsibilities of the state of Cameroon is to guarantee the democratic process. Even the evolution of democracy depends on the state because it is the state that educates its people about popular citizenship (Elshtain 1993).

After reunification in 1961, there was the need to achieve national unity and integration as a prelude to modern democracy. This became a continuous struggle both during the rule of President Ahmadou Ahidjo and that of President Paul Biya. After his accession to power on 6 November 1982, Biya insisted that national integration was his main objective for all Cameroonians. This was absolutely necessary for the introduction and practice of democracy in this relatively young state (Abrecht 1961). It therefore became a permanent issue that required the efforts of all the citizens.

The 1990s marked the introduction and manifestation of modern democracy in most African states including Cameroon after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This was the third wave of democratisation that went from 1974 to 1991. The first wave was between 1828 and 1926 while the second wave was between 1943 and 1962 (Huntington 1993). Cameroon fell within this third wave of states engaged in the modern process of democratisation.

On 20 September 1991 in Douala, Paul Biya during his political tour made the following declaration:

“We have laid the foundation of an advanced democracy. Today we are embarking on a transitional phase which requires adapting to new realities... Democracy is an attitude of the mind. It requires the civic and political education of all [...] Cameroon is a complex country with its own specificities. Indeed, Cameroon is Cameroon - a country like no other. Let us explore solutions based on our own realities (Kombi 2015, pp. 47)”.

Cameroon like every other country evolved democratically following its own track traced by its history, culture, its context and the challenges it faced as a nation. In the modern world, the term democracy has come to mean more than simply allowing people to vote. The evolution and manifestation of democracy differ from one historical context to another.

Party Politics and Multipartyism

Multipartyism existed in both the French and British Cameroons before independence. It continued in French and British Cameroons after they both gained their independence in 1960 and 1961 respectively. Political parties brought together people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds for the promotion of their interests. The parties therefore pressed for the rights of the people they represented. Political parties also upheld particular ideas or a collection of ideas or ideologies to improve on their government's political system (Abrecht 1961).

The Federated state sought to create opportunities for all the political parties to make meaningful contributions towards ensuring the effective unity of the country through the creation of a unitary party system. Cameroon sought to create one people, one nation and one prosperous future. A young nation in search of itself had to capture, cultivate and retain unity for political purposes. According to Ahidjo, a unified party was going to embrace the different tendencies of all Cameroonians who would freely join it. The minority would join the majority to ensure efficient democracy and freedom of thought and speech (Guiffo 2009). This was the case with a few democracies including Italy which had a single party from 1945 to 1994 (Shively 2011).

On 1 September 1966, the CNU (Cameroon National Union) became the single unified party. All the other political parties came together and created the CNU as one unified party. The parties that merged to form the one-party state were the UC (Union Camerounaise), KNDP (Kamerun National Democratic Party), CPNC (Cameroon People's National Convention), and CUC (Cameroon United Congress) (Mukete 2013; Ministry of Information and Culture 1982). It has been argued that this was undemocratic but it is worth noting that article 3 of the constitution said nothing about the one-party system. It stated that political parties were allowed in Cameroon. The political leaders agreed freely on this, they were never held down by any constitutional requirement that there be only one party (Gaillard 1994). The CNU remained a successful unified party which lasted till 24 March 1985. On this date, the CNU was replaced by the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) in a party congress in Bamenda. The congress was convened by the CNU but by the end of it, a new party replaced the CNU. The name of the New party (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement) was in itself an indication that President Paul Biya had the intension of effectively introducing democracy in Cameroon (Meyo 2015). Following the law passed

by parliament in 1990, multiparty politics was reinstated in Cameroon. Law no. 90/056 of 19 December 1990 authorised the creation of associations and Political parties in Cameroon. As of today, 282 political parties have been legalised (Kombi 2015). Out of this number only about five parties are represented in parliament. They participate regularly in both municipal and presidential elections.

However, the democratisation process of Cameroon in the 1990s experienced some uprisings. Opposition parties engaged in civil disobedience practices instigating strikes and provoking states of emergency in the main provincial capital cities. According to Huntington (1968), this reaction is common with societies that come face to face with the modernisation of their political system (Huntington 1968). This happened because the opposition wanted a sovereign National Conference (Nanga 2013, p. 200). This request was resisted by Biya because Sovereign National Conferences had failed in many African countries.

In response to the political upheavals, President Paul Biya undertook a tour of the country visiting the ten provinces (now regions) of the country. He began in the Extreme North province on 28 August 1991 and ended in the Central Province on 4 October 1991. During the tour, he explained to the population what democracy was about while emphasizing the fact that it demanded the civic and political education of all Cameroonians. The message was that modern democracy was supposed to be a unifying factor promoting dialogue and not violence. It was the restitution of power and complete sovereignty to citizens (Kombi 2015).

Peaceful Transition of power

Democracy was characterised in the context of Cameroon by a peaceful transition of power. Despite the fact that the transition of power in Cameroon has been experienced only once, it stood out as an example of a peaceful transition of power. While other African countries used coups d'états to overthrow and take over power, Cameroon simply moved from one president to another without any strife. On 6 November 1982, President Ahmadou Ahidjo voluntarily resigned as president and handed over his office to the Prime Minister Paul Biya. Ahidjo's decision to resign was made public on 4 November 1982. According to the constitutional amendment instituted by law no. 79/02 of 29th June 1979, Biya (as the Prime minister) became the Constitutional successor of President Ahmadou Ahidjo (Kombi 2015).

When Paul Biya took power and became President on the 6th November 1982, his New Deal policy paved the way for the effective introduction and practice of democracy in Cameroon in the years that followed. In his New Deal Government policy, Biya expressed his plan to democratise politics in Cameroon and to introduce social and economic liberalisation through rigour and moralisation. He also advocated for national solidarity, the modernisation of the state and the maintenance of close cooperation ties with other countries of the world (Gaillard 1994).

At the June 1990 congress of the ruling party (CPDM), President Paul Biya called upon the militants of his party to prepare themselves for competition. In November 1991, the tripartite meeting was held with a representation of the state, the civil society and all the political parties. This was aimed at resolving the political crises that characterised national politics at the time including the reintroduction of multipartism (Meyo 2015).

The Rule of Law

The Constitution of Cameroon which was seen as the supreme law of the country was drafted and adopted on 4 March 1960 with the independence of French Cameroon. It defined the fundamental rights of each Cameroonian citizen. The document consisted of a preamble and 13 Parts, which were divided into Articles. It served as a framework for all other national laws and policies. According to the Cameroonian constitution, Sovereignty was placed in the hands of the people, and political authorities were put in place by direct or indirect universal suffrage through secret ballot. The constitution foresaw elections as a cardinal practice in Cameroon. The constitution also outlined the responsibilities of political parties, and state power was given to the president and the parliament (Kombi 2015). The constitution could be changed or amended only through a democratic process.

A new constitution was framed on 1 September 1961 after the independence of British Southern Cameroons and its vote to join French Cameroon. Here, the country was named the federal Republic of Cameroon. This made Cameroon a federation of two states with a single president and a vice president. The constitution stated the

ideals upon which the nation was built as “fraternity, justice and progress”. On 2 June 1972, a new constitution was drafted which renamed Cameroon as the United Republic of Cameroon turning it into a unitary state (Guiffo 2009). The Constitution was again revised in 1984 changing the country to The Republic of Cameroon. This was further amended on 18 January 1996, Law Number 96/06 which enacted a new Constitution in Cameroon. The new constitution established the Senate as the upper legislative house of the National Assembly and the Constitutional Council. The most recent amendment of the constitution was done in 2008 allowing the president to run for unlimited re-elections among other changes (Nanga 2013, p. 163).

Free and Fair Elections

In Cameroon, each individual including potential candidates had the right to vote for a political opinion, hence taking part in the decision making process. Cameroonians were given the right to directly or indirectly elect their political leaders based on the universal adult franchise. The right to vote was extended to Cameroonian citizens resident abroad in 2011 (Republic of Cameroon 2012). The first multiparty presidential and legislative elections were held in 1992 and were administered by Cameroon’s Ministry of Territorial Administration. In 1997, parliamentary and presidential elections were again organized. The next presidential election was held on October 11, 2004, with President Biya receiving 70.92 percent of the votes. This was followed three years after by the legislative elections of July 2007. The latest Presidential elections took place in July 2011 with Biya emerging victorious with 77.989 percent (Kombi 2015). The last legislative elections (parliamentary and municipal) took place in 2013. The peaceful management of elections in Cameroon could be used to measure the evolution of democracy in Cameroon. Following the continuous complaints from the opposition parties, the government of Cameroon decided to create a neutral organisation for the management of elections. This led to the creation of National Election Observatory (NEO) on 19 December 2000. In 2006, an independent organism known as Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) replaced NEO. Apart from the violence that characterised the 1992 elections, elections in Cameroon have increasingly been carried out in serene and peaceful atmospheres (Nanga 2013, pp. 217-220). Another politically democratic practice in Cameroon has been the right to contest elections. A glaring example of this was the contested elections of July 2007. Following petitions from some opposition parties to the Supreme Court for declaring results from five districts as null and void, by-elections were organised on September 30 2007 to fill the vacant seats.

Legislature

Another very significant democratic practice in Cameroon was the work of the parliament or National Assembly. During the post colonial period where we had parliament in a system very similar to those in British and France, its members were elected every four years and they represented the legislature of the country. Legislative texts were examined and agreed upon by the parliament, and presented to the government for approval. The parliament also examined and adopted the budget of the country each year. Since 1992, political parties are easily created and represented in parliament and in the municipal councils.

The Reign of Peace and the Democratic Peace Theory

Cameroon has been relatively peaceful and politically stable. Democracy is directly related or linked to peace. This democratic peace theory leads to the prediction that the world will be more peaceful if more countries become democratic. Cameroon has experienced an attempted coup d’etat in April 1984, civil disobedience in the early 1990s, and in 2008. However, the state was able to manage these grievances and political turbulence and still maintain stability or avoid violence and war (Kombi 2015). Cameroon has succeeded in avoiding civil wars and border or international wars. A perfect example was the exercise of tolerance exhibited by Cameroon during the border crisis between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsula. Cameroon’s sovereignty over the Bakassi peninsula was finally declared in 2002 (Andela 2015, pp. 256-257).

Majority Rule and Individual Liberties

One of the glaring functions of the Cameroonian democratic society has been the protection of some basic

human and fundamental rights. These include the right to free speech, freedom of religion and equal protection under the law (Guiffo 2009). The press and media play a great role in influencing the freedom of expression in Cameroon. Following the advent of the law of freedom of social communication, in 1990, press organs, news papers and journals have grown in number in the country. About 235 news papers and at least 12 recognised television channels exist in Cameroon today. The state guarantees and sustains this activity by providing subventions for the private press. Journalists exercise the freedom of investigation, expression and opinions which are sometimes very critical of the government and individuals. However this is done under the strict regulations of the National Communication Council. This organisation was created in June 1991 and reorganised in 2012 (Kombi 2015). The council is involved in a process of applying ethical rules and deontology of the media.

The fight against corruption, which posed as a socio-political problem in Cameroon, was also a sign that democracy adapted to the particular problems of Cameroonians. Democracy could only be effective through the practice of good governance, transparency and accountability. The government came up with structures and institutions for the fight against corruption. They include among others: the National Anti-Corruption Commission was created in 2006; the National Finance Investigation Agency in 2005; the Public Contracts Regulatory Agency. There was also the reorganisation of the supreme state audit in 2003 and the creation of an Audit Bench in the Supreme Court. Since the late 1990s, the judicial system has continued to trap down and prosecute all Cameroonians who are accused of embezzlement (Kombi 2015).

The democratisation process in Cameroon considered the promotion of the participation of women in politics and other spheres of life. Women represent 51 percent of the total population of Cameroon. The Cameroonian government ratified or adhered to several international agreements on the rights of the Woman. The Maputo Protocol which provided for equal rights in politics was ratified in Cameroon in 2003. In his campaign speeches in 2004, the President insisted on the importance of the political empowerment and the rights of women in Cameroon. This resulted to an increase in the number of female parliamentarians and senators. In 2004, there were 10 female mayors and 327 male mayors. The number of female mayors rose to 24 in 2007. The number of female parliamentarians in 2007 stood at 19 and rose to 25 in 2012. The number rose to 56 women on 180 parliamentarians in 2013 (Meyo 2015). This puts Cameroon at 31 percent female presence in parliament which is above the standard of 30 percent fixed by the Beijing plan of action. There are 20 female senators in the senate out of the 100 members.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research has proven that the precolonial Cameroonian society practised reasonable good governance. Cameroonian traditional and modern societies had a tendency to seek social improvement or advancement. In order to achieve this, they sought to involve as many people as possible in their governance. That made for participation which created checks and balances. The powers of those who governed were under control. Effective political checks and balances stroke a delicate balance between the rights and obligations of the rulers and the ruled. That happened whether or not there were written constitution and laws. Democracy was a part of their political culture even though it had no name or a specific word (democracy) that described its practice like did the Greeks or Western countries. The precolonial societies developed democratic practices from their social evolution and used them for the good of their political systems. This is a sign that Cameroonian indigenes are capable of fine-tuning these democratic practices as their culture evolves. Cameroonians are capable of using democracy to improve on their political and socio-cultural organisations.

Cameroonians can learn new democratic practices and adapt those new mores to their existing democratic customs. The political and democratic evolution of Cameroon should also be seen as the evolution of Cameroonian civilization. It is important to highlight the fact that our traditional values and politics have contributed and will continue to contribute to the advancement of democracy in Cameroon. Cameroonians can make their societies flourish while avoiding the disappearance of their cultural identity. Traditional democracy exhibited how the governed and the government worked together in order to move their societies forward. Hence the history of democracy in African traditional politics should stand out as a source of future democratic development practices in Cameroon and in other African countries. Democracy in Cameroon and in other parts of Africa is always a dynamic process.

In our study of democracy in Cameroon, it can be suggested that modern democracy evolves slowly, or rapidly and sometimes even seems to stop evolving. Sometimes the democratic machinery seems to stop completely. That is not true. The democratic forward movement in Cameroon never stops. The democratisation process in Cameroon met with some resistance which resulted in political instability in the early 1990s. However, Cameroonians ended up embracing democratic change as a part of their political landscape. The society adjusted itself to all the changes that came with democracy. The process of democratisation in Cameroon has largely improved governance and brought greater security and respect for fundamental human rights. There is only a problem if those who govern and the governed refuse to make adjustments to the changes.

Democracy evolves differently in every nation, including the ones that seem to master it and try to propagate it. Therefore, even democracies that seem to be perfect are still evolving. Democracy can only be perfect if the level of participation is perfect. This will mean that every citizen will understand every political detail or issue before deciding. The struggle by long-standing democracies like Greece to redefine themselves democratically is a warning that democracy may not always be up to the task of meeting up with its promises (Elshtain 1993). Even though democracy is seen as Government of the people, by the people, no two democracies are the same. Britain, Canada, The United States of America, France, Germany and other democracies are very similar, but each of them develops specificities, which are unique to the social context in which each democracy evolves.

Cameroonians in particular and Africans in general should define democracy in their own historical and cultural contexts. Democracy should be seen as a pragmatic way of solving daily political problems and cultural problems. Cameroon and other African states should face their challenges or problems, prioritize them, and go for democratic concepts that can help solve their problems. Not all the ideals of Western style democracy can apply to all African states at the same time. It is imprudent to import or export democratic systems. The importation of democratic ideals from elsewhere can lead to cultural misappropriation. Democracy ought to evolve at the same rate with the political and intellectual development of the African societies. However, whether democracy is the best form of government or not is still debatable amongst scholars and politicians.

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