THE IMPACT OF COLONIALISM ON THE POLITICS OF CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT: *The 1884-1885 Berlin Conference was a gathering of European nations that aimed to establish territorial boundaries and mitigate potential conflicts in the pursuit of colonialism. The European colonization of Africa had a profound impact on the political consciousness of the African population, which was essential for the continent's advancement. Colonial institutions have significantly affected the political atmosphere that has emerged in the aftermath of independence. This article employs a historical methodology and conducts a thorough review of multiple types of empirical literature and materials to examine the impact of colonialism on Cameroon's politics. This paper examines the political administrative strategies of colonial administrations in Cameroon and their impact on political development, emphasizing the significance of colonialism in understanding the current political climate in Cameroon. The German colonization of Cameroon commenced in the 1880s and concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. After World War I, Germany lost its colonial territory in Cameroon, and Cameroon was partitioned into French and British trust territories. The French colonizers in Cameroon implemented the "assimilation policy," which compelled Cameroonians to adhere to the French cultural norms and beliefs. Cameroonians who had integrated into French society were acknowledged as members of the French community, notwithstanding the restricted access to education. Governors of British colonies claimed that although Cameroonians were not political allies of the British, they were expressing political power in the nation. The British administrative approach of indirect rule permitted only Cameroonians to exercise political authority over their compatriots. The discourse concerning the influence of colonization on Cameroonian politics endures. Some argue that it led to resource depletion, labor exploitation, and cultural ruin, while others assert that it improved Cameroonian politics. The study found that the three colonial governments that imposed their policies on Cameroon have had impacts on the nation's politics and philosophy, resulting in a sacrifice of their own values and traditions. As a result, a Western-style political framework has disregarded local perspectives and political ideas.*

Keywords: *Colonialism; Direct Governance; Assimilation; Indirect Rule; Cameroon politics;*

1. Introduction

Colonialism is the "direct subjugation of one nation by another, driven by the state authority of the foreign entity aiming to incorporate political control and extraction" [Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012, p. 46]. Colonialism necessitated the connection of the African economy to the worldwide system dominated by the colonists. The colonialists exerted direct control over political administration, facilitating integration into the global market and international economy. This resulted in colonial African nations obligation to accept the international division of labor, which designated it the essential function of supplying agricultural raw materials needed by European industry [Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012]. Direct control guaranteed that these colonies became a consumer market for European manufactured products, influencing the progression of modern industrialization in Europe. European colonialists dominated the political system by interfering systematically in the internal policies of national governments. In other words, the African culture and values were undermined by the seizure of traditional institutions [John, 2014]. The colonial period profoundly affected African nations, resulting in political, linguistic, and economic crises. The colonial history of Cameroon, formerly a German colony and thereafter a trust territory of France and Britain, has influenced its governance [Ashu, 2020;

Lekane & Asuelime, 2017; Okia, 2014]. Cameroon was under German colonization from 1884 to 1916, after which it was partitioned between France and Britain from 1916 to 1961 [Lee & Schultz, 2012]. In 1884, Germany annexed Cameroon, marking the beginning of the country's socioeconomic development. The Germano-Douala agreement, signed between the Germans and Douala rulers, established a restricted coastal stretch of land where many tribes made friends with Europeans [V. J. Ngoh, 1987; Ngoh V.J, 1996]. The German government expanded into the interior through Zintgraff's explorations, and in 1905, the Germans took complete administrative control of Cameroon but faced resistance due to their policies, which recognized uninhabited areas as colonial properties [Okia, 2014]. This led to a rebellion and the establishment of boundaries between colonialists and indigenous people. The reallocation of indigenous people from their homes and resettlements to European regions caused anger among the indigenous population. In 1911, natives lodged complaints with Parliament, but the Germans continued seizures and breached the 1884 agreement [Austen, 1977; V. Ngoh, 2000]. The injustice in treatment, disrespect of boundaries, and failure to keep agreements pushed some notable Cameroonians to conspire with the British and French to ally against Germany that led to the Anglo-French forces' victory in 1916, marking the end of the German model in Cameroon and encouraging France and Britain to sign a treaty in London, dividing Cameroon [Austen, 1977]. The Germans were instrumental in the country's socioeconomic development, as they introduced the local population to the global economy, western education, and architectural designs. The political system yielded a variety of outcomes as a consequence of the divergent and occasionally contradictory colonial policies that French and British Cameroon implemented. In 1960, French Cameroon achieved independence. Subsequently, British Southern Cameroon elected to merge with independent French Cameroon following a plebiscite in 1961 [Awasom, 2002]. Even after reunification, the nation's sociopolitical conflicts persist as a significant feature. Colonialism's impact on Cameroon's politics is the primary focus of the study. An understanding of history is essential for the development of solutions that address obstacles and enhance political systems.

2. The Political State of Cameroon in the Colonial era

The colonial era was a critical period that influenced the political evolution of Cameroon in various directions. The initiation of German colonialism in Cameroon was marked by the signature of protectorate contracts with King Bell and Akwa of Douala in 1884 [John, 2014]. German Cameroon, referred to as Kamerun, was primarily governed through exploration rather than formal administration, heavily depending on compelled labor for the establishment of plantations and infrastructure. Zintgraff's explorations enabled the German government to expand into the interior, and in 1905, they established 26 districts in Cameroon, assuming complete control [Okia, 2014]. German conquests, friendship agreements, and military incursions united Cameroon's ethnic groupings to establish a single, "cohesive political entity," as asserted by Fombad [2011, P. 2, as cited in [Lekane & Asuelime, 2017]. The contemporary system was established as a result of the establishment of borders. The German political system was highly centralized, with a governor at the top, district administrators in the middle, and monarchs at the bottom due to the "master race" ideology, which justified their subjugation [Ngoh V.J, 1996; Okia, 2014]. In German colonial Cameroon, sovereignty consolidated territories, developed infrastructure, and fostered agricultural prosperity [V. Ngoh, 2000]. Although facing allegations of being severe and lacking empathy [Okia, 2014, p. 177], numerous individuals appreciated the significant contributions made towards advancing education and infrastructure development.

The Germans in Cameroon faced resistance due to their policies, which included reclassifying uninhabited areas as colonial. This led to a rebellion and the establishment of boundaries between indigenous populations and the colonizers. The Germans breached the 1884 German-Douala agreement regarding native property rights, leading to increased tension within the indigenous population [V. Ngoh, 2000]. The aspiration for a German empire came to an end by the onset of the First World War. The German surrender to the Allies [Britain and France] was the consequence of the invasion of Cameroon from Chad, Nigeria, and Gabon [Lee & Schultz, 2012]. In response to the anti-German

attack in 1914, Britain and France partitioned the German territory of Cameroon. France obtained 80% of the occupied area, while Britain acquired 20% [Aimé, 2013, p. 165]. The British and French administered the territories they took temporarily, with the British settling near the Nigerian border. The newly acquired German territories were mandated by the League of Nations, and Cameroon was designated as a Class B mandate after World War II, as it was to be administered and legislated by mandatory authorities with complete authority [Aimé, 2013]. Conquered colonies were categorized into Class A, B, and C mandates.

The governing system of French Cameroon employed direct rule and assimilation, with the objective of integrating indigenes into French culture [Nzume, 2004; Aimé, 2013]. Notwithstanding initial obstacles of resistance, the French government implemented colonial control in Cameroon by issuing decrees that divided the country into smaller regions, each with its own administrator and second-in-command emphasizing municipal organizations and uncompensated labor through abduction and physical punishment [Lekane & Asuelime, 2017]. The legal system distinguished between assimilated Africans and indigenes, establishing a "dual status" framework within the judiciary [V. Ngoh, 2000, p. 167]. The French implemented conventional governing structures following the Germans even though the French legal system was altered to accommodate Westerners, and the indigenat were permitted to execute individuals without a trial [V. Ngoh, 2000, p. 32].

However, France's security measures during World War I undermined political security, resulting in opposition to decolonization. From 1946 to 1960, the United Nations influenced France's political decisions in Cameroon, and the 1946 French Constitution promoted political parties in French colonies and discontent among the populace, with the Union des Peuples du Cameroun [UPC] emerging as the first political party in 1948, championing unification [Aimé, 2013; V. Ngoh, 2000].

The London Agreement of 1916 established British dominion over Cameroon; the British partitioned Cameroonian territory into Northern and Southern regions, which were ruled independently yet as components of British Nigeria [Dupraz, 2019]. The management of Northern Cameroon resulted in neglect and the emergence of nationalist agitation, while Southern Cameroon was accorded "quasi-regional" status with restricted self-governance, ultimately achieving full regional status inside the Federation of Nigeria [Lekane & Asuelime, 2017, p. 139]. Indirect rule was the method of administration in British Cameroon, with traditional leaders exercising authority over their respective territories [Nzume, 2004; Dupraz, 2019]. Cameroon underwent significant administrative and political changes during the British Governance period, transitioning from a part of Nigeria's Eastern region to an autonomous entity [Aimé, 2013]. After World War II, Southern Cameroon's politics were centered on reunification and in 1961, a referendum was conducted, during which the Muslim majority favored Nigeria and the Christian majority advocated for unification with French Cameroon [Lekane & Asuelime, 2017 p. 140].Colonial governance has faced criticism for its effects on state formation and institutional capability. The impact of colonial control on the enduring advancement of state capacity is perceived as transient due to the administrative legacy of colonialism on political authoritarianism [De Juan & Pierskalla, 2017]. The political inheritances of colonialism include the marginalization of ethnic groups and political instability [De Juan & Pierskalla, 2017]. Although France and Britain ignored indigenous customs and practices, they developed their own cultures [Lee & Schultz, 2012]. Consequently, the colonial history of Cameroon has led to the establishment of diverse sociopolitical traditions and customs. The state's existence was contingent upon the policies implemented by colonists to administer regions, which resulted in the existence of two official languages and political inconsistencies.

3. The Impact of Colonialism on the Politics of Cameroon

The Europeans' assumption of superiority at the expense of Africans is tied to colonialism. According to Nkrumah [1965, p. 68], colonialism is a central force that has a notorious impact, eroding personal identity, personality, and dignity. The history of Cameroon is multifaceted, taking in both traditional and colonial periods. Indigenous peoples were not granted equality by the British unless they adopted their conventions, whereas the French accommodated them if they abandoned

their culture, personality, and identity [John, 2014]. Cameroonians were considered civilized if they were attuned to the colonial language and culture and had abandoned their traditional practices. The postcolonial policies of Cameroon are still influenced by the legacies of European empires in the post-independence era [Lekane & Asuelime, 2017]. Political prospects in the postcolonial era have been impacted by the diverse state-building strategies that emerged as a consequence of colonialism, including multipartyism, the outcome of Cameroon's colonial politics [V. Ngoh, 2000]. During the colonial period, Cameroon encountered party politics consistent with the French model, even though the Brazzaville Conference enabled associations to avert disturbances. The Brazzaville Conference of 1944 was a critical juncture in the history of French colonialism, during which administrators issued recommendations for the future of Africa [Sanchez, 2023]. Despite the fact that Africans were not involved, they were informed and viewed it as an opportunity to reflect. The conference had an impact on French colonial policies, favoring local chief power and association [Sanchez, 2023]. In 1948, the "Union des Populations du Cameroun [UPC]" was founded to consolidate French and British Cameroons. Notwithstanding governmental misconceptions, the UPC strengthened its influence, and in 1955, the UPC announced the cessation of the French model and suggested an interim administration. French Cameroon declared independence in 1958 after the Loi-Cadre constitution was implemented in 1956 [V. Ngoh, 2000; V. J. Ngoh, 1987; Ngoh V.J, 1996] African republics are primarily subjective in their establishment as a result of their colonial origins. As a consequence of colonial backgrounds, contemporary Cameroon's establishment of boundaries is indeterminate, resulting in an ethnically divided nation with a divided population [Alesina et al., 2006]. The artificiality of colonial borders is widely acknowledged.

The primary impact of colonization on Cameroon politics is centralization, which appears as decentralization in postcolonial and contemporary politics [Ziltener & Kunzler, 2013]. The colonized territory of Cameroon had centralized government under Germany, Britain, and France. Under British colonization, indirect rule was more successful in fostering local

authoritarianism and restricting the colonial state's capacity to carry out policies outside of the capital, while direct control established a centralized legal-administrative framework, connecting state officials to central governance. Elevated death rates prompted colonialists to establish fewer settlements and create extractive organizations, which centralized power and were vulnerable to property expropriation [Acemoglu et al., 2001]. Cameroon, a nation classified as an autocracy, has experienced two significant periods of autocratic control since its independence in 1960 [Gandhi, 2008]. H.E. Ahmadou Ahidjo, who served as the nation's inaugural president from 1960, implemented a dual electoral system and a robust executive branch. He pursued patronage-based networks and centralization [Awah, 2019]. Since 1982, the political landscape of Cameroon, ruled by President Paul Biya, has resulted in a deterioration of statehood and political engagement [Transparency international Defence & security, 2020]. The extremely centralized governmental structure, dominated by Biya's CPDM [Cameroon People's Democratic Movement], which holds 82% of the National Assembly and 88% of the Senate, leads to negligible parliamentary scrutiny of executive and defense issues [Transparency international Defence & security, 2020]. H.E. Biya succeeded H.E. Ahmadou Ahidjo with the objective of establishing a new society [Awah, 2019]. However, since 1982 until present, the domestic politics of Cameroon have remained unchanged, with the current era extending the previous one in its colonial standards of centralization. Cameroon is a decentralized unitary state, as defined by the 1996 constitution, with a President who is responsible for the appointment, supervision, and exercise of executive powers [Kofele Kale, 2011]. Local governments are designated responsibilities in accordance with the 1996 Constitution. However, the Cameroonian model is a superficial representation of decentralization, as it combines political delegation with administrative deconcentration [Kofele-Kale, 2011]. The central government's influence limits the authority granted to regional and municipal administrations, emphasizing the need for a more efficient decentralization framework.

Colonial impacts on Cameroon's politics are reckoned in the educational system of Cameroon. The creation of educational institutions and infrastructure in colonies differed according to the

constitutional distinctions among colonial rulers. Legal frameworks in British colonies were founded on common law, permitting reduced governmental participation compared to French systems [Rafael La Porta et al., 2008]. The political system of Cameroon is regarded as underdeveloped as a result of the insufficient practical framework on sociocultural concepts that colonial education, which was primarily established to further colonial objectives, provided; the fragmentation of indigenous educational models is attributed to colonial education [Ndille, 2020]. Under the Anglophone system, students were required to complete secondary education and enter the workforce a minimum of three years later. The educational system has maintained a substantial number of colonial-era practices, and progress is relatively limited [Ziltener & Kunzler, 2013]. The recruitment of colonialists into government service was influenced by a variety of factors. Certain groups were prioritized, while others were marginalized. For instance, the administration was more likely to include Cameroonian indigenes who identified with colonial authorities [Ziltener & Kunzler, 2013]. The contemporary Anglophone Crisis is a political hazard that has resulted from Cameroon's colonial history. Lekane and Asuelime [2017, p. 142] identify the following as contributing factors to the devaluation of the English language in public life: discrimination against Anglophone Cameroonians in human resource development, the exclusion of competent Anglophones from state professional schools, and the "francophonization" of the English educational and Common-Law systems.

The education sector is frequently regarded as the most beneficial outcome of colonialism, with colonial human capital identified as the primary factor influencing long-term growth [Bolt & Bezemer, 2009]. Nevertheless, education under colonial governance was not chiefly intended to enhance local knowledge for political stability [Ndille, 2020]. For example, Cameroon indigenes who identified with colonial rulers were better represented in administration. The present-day Anglophone Problem is a political peril that has arisen from Cameroon's colonial past.

The impact of colonialism on the politics of Cameroon is reflected in Cameroon's economic growth and engagements. Colonial empires encouraged trade by monetizing colonies to cut transaction costs, utilizing a common language, and setting up currency unions [[Mitchener & Weidenmier, 2008]. In Cameroon, colonialism distorted the economy, resulting in diminished product diversity and manufacturing capability [Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012]. The premature incorporation of the economy into the global market led to economic exploitation by developed nations, as seen in the export-import orientation of colonialism that impeded economic development by causing Cameroonians to depend more on imported commodities than on domestic manufacturing. Post-independence African countries like Cameroon embraced an anti capitalist ideology [John, 2014]. The trade between colonizers and indigenes would have influenced the present political and economic landscape; however, the robust connection between elite and colonial authorities resulted in socio-economic turmoil and political instability. The economy of Cameroon is primarily oriented toward Western interests, and the labor sector is influenced by historical colonialism [Angyie et al.,2022].

This has led to a division among cultural groups, which has created impediments for individuals who are seeking new employment opportunities. At present, the majority of individuals are employed in low-skilled sectors, which has resulted in destitution and heightened dissatisfaction [Batoh, 2023].

Employment prospects are scarce, which limits the influence of individuals and their capacity to contribute to global objectives and national development. Cameroon's capacity to achieve genuine independence is restricted by the reliance on neocolonial strategies and heightened corruption [Batoh, 2023; Transparency International Defence & Security, 2020].

4. Conclusion

The diversity of colonial experiences in African nations complicates the accurate exploration of colonialism's influence. The divergence is seen in the evolution of colonized versus non-colonized regions; non-colonized regions experienced less vigorous integration into the global economy with a gradual disintegration of old frameworks.

In sub-Saharan African nations such as Cameroon, where the extent of traditional state creation facilitated substantial political changes, political ramifications of colonialism are

expressed.

Cameroon, although an independent nation, is significantly impacted by its European allies and postcolonial practices. The split between Britain and France resulted in considerable political challenges, creating substantial disparities among various population groupings. The insufficiency in government policies often obstruct advancement in social systems as postcolonial laws restrict access to educational resources and elite employment, resulting in the marginalizing of citizens from social engagement.

This article investigated the political patterns in Cameroon and the colonial interactions that impacted its politics. The Cameroon colonial process was complex, involving natural resources exploration and exploitation, capital investment, and confrontations with Kings by the use of governmental techniques that included assimilation, indirect rule, and direct rule which

have led to political instability, in socioeconomic disparities, instability, and inadequate development in contemporary Cameroon. We recommend that the leadership of Cameroon might want to reconsider the adoption of a feasible political ideology of transparency that implements a practical confederated democracy and decentralization in order to develop a comprehensive socio-political framework that addresses these challenges.

Cameroon's Leadership should cultivate a culture that surpasses ethnic distinctions while making human right a priority. Low literacy level, Inadequacy in educational infrastructure, and economic distress can impede democratic political participation.

However, leaders have to cultivate integrity, accountability, and provide global investors with enhanced information about the nation's circumstances.

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