

## **POLITICAL TURBULENCE AND POWER TOPOGRAPHY IN THE NORTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON, 1990-2000**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The spirit of liberalism that animated the political landscape in Africa in the 1990s produced varied and confusing reactions especially in states whose governments hitherto, provided little or no space for the functioning of the basic components of rights and freedom (democracy). In the Republic of Cameroon a central African country governed from independence by a tight dictatorial rule, this liberal age combined with home realities and incidentally gave both the governing and the governed sufficient reasons to engage in a chain of an interesting power contest. In effect, all of this brought forth a kind of turbulence which registered serious impacts on other political developments in Cameroon thereafter. In the North West region of this country, this turbulence emerged mostly from the circles of the unemployed and underemployed youths including a bug of people who had lost their jobs following the structural adjustment programme that was ostensibly adopted as a therapy for these crises. In any case, turbulence emerged and expressed itself in form of mob actions, gangsterism and civil strife and disobedience. Interestingly, the state authorities transformed the situation into an interesting power contest by employing most of the time; more than required brute force to counter the uprisings. The consequence of all of this was that; power and authority to lead and govern became largely contested and as such, technically shifted from its original traditional and legitimate fiefs to wander in absurdities for close to a decade. Guarded by an interdisciplinary approach, this paper attempts to tap evidences from primary and secondary sources complimented with oral accounts to bring out the ingredients, shapes and impact of this kind of encounters in this politico-geostrategic niche of Cameroon. It proffers that this phenomenon orchestrated traumatic encounters between the indigenous power barons against governmental structures and authorities. By so doing, it posits that this kind of power and authority drama ignited a general decay in power tenure and collective response from both ends. It further opines that these mixed and confused reactions to the liberal age in Cameroon like elsewhere in Africa destroyed the ligaments of mutual trust that existed between the government and the people on the street and therefore erected a lingering impediment to Cameroon development and this situation has continued to deter development planning and political conduct in Cameroon even lately.*

**KEYWORDS:** Political turbulence, Power encounters, liberal age, North West Region, Cameroon

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Before the 1990s, Cameroon could aptly be described as an island of peace in an ocean of turbulence and a tourist destination of choice. Safe for the fact that the fundamental rights of most of its citizens were tampered with, this country could possibly score an excellent bench mark in the contest of economic management and progress.<sup>1</sup> Through brute force and skilful

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<sup>11</sup> This in itself is a contested argument because most scholars rather turned to argue that Ahidjos planned liberalism had an effective political motive but saddled by a wrong economic considerations. It ensured balanced development but overloaded

leadership, Ahidjo succeeded in a large scale to keep the different compartments of the state under his control. The Cameroon state was seen and widely appreciated to be a veritable protector of its citizens backed by the fact that jobs were available and living standards were comparatively low.<sup>2</sup> A deal of scholarship argues with startling evidences that it is not only erroneous but equally misleading to give such wholesome praise to Ahidjos reign because it suffered from a lot of malpractices that infuriated a bulk people. They assert that; the ability, willingness and qualification to be part of the governing process was tactfully removed from the realms of the majority rights(democracy) and lodged in the prescient of a few hands mostly old people(gerontocracy)led by their grand master Ahidjo. Under the pretext of enforcing national unity and nation building, a good number of Cameroonians were forced by the unpredictable and most of the time vindictive Ahidjos ploy of governing or leadership style to suffocate in quietude or self-exile. To make this system visibly alive, he and his power barons employed an assembly of methods within and through which they intimidated and rendered the people both mute and confused enough to forget even about their basic rights.<sup>3</sup> Worthy and intriguing as these contentions might have been, it suffice to note that Ahidjo,s regime wild and heartless in dealing with the obstacles to their centralization as claimed by a broad range of scholarship but scored and outstanding credit in dealing with turbulence or destroying such motives right from their bud. Indeed, Ahidjo administration possessed an exceptional tact of providing jobs to most of its youths and this placed the country on a broad path of development that gained both internal positive appreciations and external praise. An important outgrowth of this system was that the state was both largely feared and respected by a majority of people thereby; giving patriotism a comfortable yard to blossom.In this kind of political environment, the government or the state and all its different agents were held in very high esteem and there was little to charge and attack the government for since in the main, jobs were available and the cost of living was minimum. Contrary to general expectations, the Cameroon economy became a victim of disturbing political and economic events all of them intricately cued up to the changing world order as well as the excesses of the governing machinery. In effect, this tilted not only the power ownership and distribution equation that had existed but equally pushed a number of people off guard.This paper attempts to bring forth the foundations or pillars of this turbulence. It brings to fore how this orchestrated a power tussle and as well as how all of this affected developments in Cameroon with emphasis on the North West region. There could be no better way of doing this than beginning with the lodges (fiefs) of power in Cameroon in general and the North West region before 1990.

### **Power Barons and Morphology prior to the 1990s**

A thorough examination of the changing configurations that have marked the Cameroon political economy from independence resonate a fine mixture of peace and turbulent episodes along with differing groups and lodges that have been negotiating alternating passions of loyalty. Each of these events had distinct qualities and underlying causes with its lasting

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the state with a little too many responsibilities. This naive planning according to these scholars prepared the sad moments that were faced by the New deal regime in the 1980s

<sup>2</sup> On a comparative scale, living standards in Cameroon were by far higher than any other country in its central African sub region. There was a steady rise in per capital income. Under operation green revolution which was part and parcel of the five years development plan, countries like Gabon, Chad, Central Africa, Equatorial Guinea and Congo hallowed Cameroon as their bread basket.

<sup>3</sup> The issue of fear, intimidation and intrigues which formed part and parcel of Ahidjos governing style was confirmed in every detail in our interview with Jonas Sahne, Hon Kwi Joseph and Ambroise Ngu who were all CNU party milltants. Though with some slight variations ,they was a concord in the fact that Ahidjo inspite of all, had succeed to raise himself and the CNU party which he incarnated to the status and moral sanctity of a religion and strove in every aspect to make Cameroonians worship it as such.

consequences in the entire economy. However, the events that triggered the political turbulence in Cameroon in the 1990s and the power encounters that came with it; has deeper and unexplored insights especially when the power barons and the conditions plaguing the Cameroon economy before 1990 are not critically examined. This is the sole mission of this section.

Prior to 1990, power tenure and the directions of command on people, space and the resources in Cameroon like elsewhere in sub-Sahara Africa was intrinsically lodged in two different but complimentary areas of interest.<sup>4</sup> The first and the most obvious were the modern fiefs which for the most acclaimed dimensions represented the threshold of governance. In these confinements; sufficient state power was held to be alive. It strove and assured in the main, the security of persons and goods. Its strength and legitimate essence was justified first by the invincibility of the state institutions with their various mechanics of checks and control organs like the Law courts, Gendarmerie, Police and army. Power in this realm was further sustained by a psychological conviction alive among most Cameroonians that; in all spheres of life the government was the most reliable employer, the infallible judge and the sole provider of social goods. In this respect, the government and other institutions that were directly depended on it were held to be pregnant with a large measure of both responsibilities and rights and as such, glorified in most circles as a guarantor of everything that had to do with the welfare of its citizens.<sup>5</sup> In reality, such grandiose statuses and lavished praise accorded to the Cameroon government and other constituted authorities, ignited some healthy spirit of patriotism among young and old folks since almost all forms of fear of a possible attack from any alien were tactfully removed from immediate possibilities.

Interesting but quite unfortunate for the people of Cameroon and Africa at large, the country witnessed an economic meltdown in the second half of the 1980s. The meltdown sounded more like a drastic and very unexpected switch from the boom Cameroon enjoyed in the early 1980s and posed like a logical deception to those who saw the country to be marching towards a paradise of opportunities under the New Deal Regime of President Paul Biya. Concretely, this economic malaise was just part and parcel of the world slum that affected most economies at the time but the masses especially those who were poorly driven by sound convictions that the state was created to remain invincible in all situations refused to see or lend credence to this naked reality. Based on this lame reasoning, they (masses) still perceived the Cameroon state to own all power especially the financial muscle to tackle all souring economic hardships including the kind that was taking most of them hostage at that time.

The second but seemingly convert store house of power in Cameroon prior to 1990 were the traditional lodges and cults constituted mostly by fons, Lamidos or chiefs. The Northwest traditional polity had a huge deal of these authorities. They were general graduated into centralised and decentralised ethnic units. A limited list of these power barons will include the

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<sup>4</sup> For a wider world view of this power complex see Barchrach, P. and Barratz, M.S "Two forces of power" in *American Political Sciences Review* vol. III, No 56 1962 pp. 947-53 and Kaptue, Leon, " Roi et(chefs) dans les Etats Africains de la veille des independences a la fin du XX siecle; Pris entre le Marteau et Enclume, Le Pouvoir Traditionnel Choisit-il de se Prostituer au Cameroun. Endoscopie de la situation 1884 a 1922" .*Colloque International* Paris: Sorborn, 8,9,10 Novembre 1995

<sup>5</sup> The elites and the aging people that were or had benefited the largesse of Ahidjo and Biyas' leadership fought hard to raise these vague beliefs to the heights of religious dogmas and were by 1990, grappling among daunting odds to make the youths and the unemployed to either swallow them hook line and sinker or worship them as such . My interview with Isidore Wainchom Nkwain at Njinikom on the 12 of January 2007 confirmed this in every detail.

polities of Nso, Kom, Bali, Bafut, Bum and Mankon.<sup>6</sup> Prior to colonialism, these traditional units were held and treated as states within their regional confines. They had their own administrative machinery and governing systems with elastic rights and responsibilities over their citizens though the concept of citizenry revolved around verbal declarations.<sup>7</sup> During and even after colonization these states were led by individuals who were generally accorded profound functions. These individuals anchored titles like fons, chiefs or kings.<sup>8</sup> These traditional functionaries were all held as authorities in their own right. In order to fit them into the mould of the modern state apparatus, Ahidjo in 1976 signed a decree which graduated them into First, Second and Third classes.<sup>9</sup> Their rights and responsibilities over the land within the ambit of their traditional jurisdiction as well as the people and resources therein, were no longer justified only by mythic figments of tradition as obtained during the pre-colonial period but more concretely, by a legion of regulatory decrees and communiqués enacted by the agents of modern government. In these varied grading and recognitions, they were upheld as administrative auxiliaries and surrogates. Ndi puts this more graphically when he argues emphatically that by the 1990s a fine mixture of French and British convenience had succeeded to altered the original essence of traditional administration and was poised to treat them as

..... an integral part of the machinery of administration [ meaning modern governance and essentially grouping them into one kind and system of administration]in which the native chiefs had clearly defined duties and an acknowledged status that ran at par with that of the British officials. These two duties were not to conflict and were by their very functional essence designed to overlap with limited variations. Additionally, state and traditional administration were to be complimentary to each other and the chiefs/fons who were upheld as the doctrinaires of the system of traditional administration were under such imposed order obligated to understand that they had no right and power of their own over their palaces but that the new offering provided that they performed the supreme duty of rendering services to the state.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike the modern state institutions which were like snapped shots of the modern system of administration with efficient checks and control components, the amount of respect accorded to the traditional pedigree of power tenure depended first and foremost on the power allowance accorded to it by the state along with the responsibilities and authority it exercised within and

<sup>6</sup> Nchoji Paul Nkwi and Waniers Jean Piere in *Elements of History of the Western Grassfields*, presents in details the graphics of these traditional bastions of power. He presentation and contentions helps in providing some anthropogenic factors that might have prompted the categorization. The case of Mankon seemed strange because unlike other traditional polities that had a number of sub chiefdoms under its authority, it was all alone and had a single language alongside a homogenous population.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Tabuwe Aleutem "The use of Legitimate Force in Traditional Political Institutions" in *Science and Technology Review* Vol. IV no 4-5, 1988 pp.87-95.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed analyses and forms of these traditional leaders see Confidence Chia Ngam "Kom Leadership in its Regional Subsetting Ca 1865-2005: A study in Power Diplomacy within a State of the Cameroon Grasslands" Ph.D thesis, Yaounde I, 2013, pp 23-5.

In 1976 Ahidjo signed a presidential Decree which ran in consonance with the chiefs' ordinance that had regulated traditional authorities in Southern West Cameroon. This decree categorised chiefs and ethnic of power units and attempted to solve the problems that seemingly arose from the Federation of Native authorities in 1949. Though political convenience that ethnic and socio-cultural realities seemed to be the driving force behind this categorization, it somehow gave a sense of order that reigned as a result of the quest for traditional hegemony in the North West Region.

<sup>10</sup> See Ndi Anthony Tabuwe's unpublished paper on the Contribution of the Catholic Women Fellowship (CWA) to the growth of the church in the Bamenda Arch- Diocese presented on the celebration of the centenary of this Association in 2005. Though he was referring for the most part to the British System of administration in Nigeria in a much earlier period, this was a kind of a snapshot of the situation that prevailed in the North West Region of Cameroon in a during the 1990s.

on its area of administration. Secondly, traditional power essence also emanated from the paradigm of mutual trust contracted with the people on their traditional fiefs.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the governing system of Cameroon under the leadership of Amadou Ahidjo (1960-1982) and to some extent, Paul Biya from 1982 had its fair share of positive dividends but the overall transcript highlighted a veritable magnitude of negligence for the basic rights of Cameroonians especially the right to participate in governance by choosing their leaders through a well-established and recognised democratic processes. In any case, Cameroonians especially those who were feeling completely neglected and forced to remain mute (and this was a whooping majority), had accumulated grievances against the state and all its corollaries which needed just a trigger of some sort. The turbulence that rocked Cameroon in the 1990s and got graphic representation in the North West Region was greatly connected to this power groupings and mutations in discourse.

### **The Foundations of the Turbulence**

An assembly of both internal and external factors combined to produce the kind of political turbulence that gripped the Cameroon economy in the 1990s. As signalled earlier, the Northwest regions whose power bases have been detailed above incidentally became the epicentre of most of the actions though the architects often made vague claims that the government of Paul Biya was the real problem. Although the global picture of these developments left a portrait of a political turbulence, its key origins were enveloped in the combined work of the changing political, social and economic climate that was in the offering at that time.<sup>12</sup>

### **Economic Foundations**

By 1990, a good deal of events within the economic interface worked together to churn frustration and ignited the kind of anger that longed for revenge among the masses and even those in the circles of government. Top in this realm was the problem of unemployment and underemployment whose combination destroyed the bastions of hope and wellbeing that sustained the hopes of most Cameroonians in the 1970s and the early 80s.<sup>13</sup> By the dawn of the 1980s, Cameroon was held to be the least indebted among her central African peers; her growth rate was not only encouraging but her impact as a regional giant was appreciably felt in all circles. The governing system was to some extent corrupt but not inefficient.<sup>14</sup> Many youths majoring from the professional and nonprofessional schools found jobs in both private and the public sectors.<sup>15</sup> They were many Para-public and convectional enterprises providing jobs to

<sup>11</sup> Michael Tabuwe Aleutum and Emmanuel Chia Ngam "The Socio Political Structure of Power in Kom Traditional Society" in *Science and Technology Review* Vol. VI no 1-2 January to June 1989 PP48-70.

<sup>12</sup> The turbulence is most often tagged as political because it had much to do with leadership miscarriages. Suggesting as I am doing that; the turbulence was soundly rooted in economic and social than political should not create any nuance here. For a more detailed analyses of the duel between people in different regimes see ;Geschierre Peter. "Hegemonic Regimes and Popular Protest in Wim Van Binsbergen, Filip, Reyntjens and Cliente Hesslig (eds) *States and Local Communities in Africa* Centre d'etude dedocumentation Africaine, 1986 pp. 332-58.

<sup>13</sup> Care of a distinct sort must be taken not to give these hope and well being lavished praise because complacency and cooperation in the state building process was obtained mostly by force rather than negotiation. However compared to the 1990s the economic situation of Cameroon was far better.

<sup>14</sup> A near complete transcript of how Ahidjo combined brute force and skilful leadership to make Cameroon workable despite all odds can be diagnosed in Joseph A. Richards (1978) ed *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon under Ahmadou Ahidjo*, Collorodo Press.

<sup>15</sup> A snap shot of the boom that the Cameroon economy enjoyed in the early 1980s is presented by Joseph Takougang nad Milton Kreiger Kreiger in (1998) *African states and societies in the 1990s, Cameroon Political Crossroads*, Colorado



Cameroonians that survived from consistent governmental support especially subventions. By the end of the 1990s, the economic situation in the North West Region like elsewhere in Cameroon took most people even the most trusted economic pundits off guard.

### Economic Slum

The Economic crises which came as a result of falling prices of Cameroon goods in the world market and the general economic slump incidentally overturned the pleasantries of the 70s and 80s and incidentally rendered most people unemployed and poor. The austerity measures that were later developed<sup>16</sup> by the state to cope with this new trend rather accentuated than helped the unemployment and poverty situation especially in Cameroon. In the Northwest alone, matters were made appalling by the fact that vibrant enterprises and institutions that served like bread baskets and sources of livelihood to the indigenes gradually wound up. In no specific order, the National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB) that was trusted by farmers for marketing their goods and pre-financing most of their agricultural activities diminished in status and essence. The Wum Development Authority (WADA) which sustained the entire economy of Wum town and that of her dependent administrative units became insolvent and wound up before the end of the decade. Cooperatives that were part and parcel of the five year development ran out of financial vim as a result of lack of incentives and subventions from the state.

There was indeed a growing distrust of most institutions and structures that had to do with agriculture or some kind of farming in the North West province. As indicated shortly, this distrust was due in part by the fact that most of their donor institutions found themselves not capable of sponsoring and mentoring farmers and the institutions linked to this activity as a result of the world economic slump as well as the worsening business climate in Cameroon at the time. To be added to this was the fact that; the Cameroon state control mechanism as a result of accruing difficulties was somehow found to be weak and ineffective.<sup>18</sup> Going by the testimonies<sup>19</sup> of those who were worked in close collaboration of NPMB at the time; further corroborated by a memorandum<sup>20</sup> from the archives of North West Cooperative association (NWCA), the NPMB was more of a school of scandals of mismanagement caused essentially by state paralysis.<sup>21</sup> Its relationship with its partners like the North West Cooperatives Association, Wum Development Association, the Santa Coffee Estate and the Upper Noun Valley Development Authority sank to the lowest ebb. The resultant effect of all of this was

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Westview publishing House. However, the crises that rocked the Cameroon economy in the 1990s were not a complete surprise to political pundits. See Colin Legum and William Zartman (1979) *Africa in the 1980s; a continent in Crises* with an Introduction by Catherin Gwin.

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<sup>18</sup> In our Interview with Ni John Fru Ndi in the Ntarikon SDF head quarters in Bamenda on August 20, 2015 on some of the key aspects of the emergence of turbulence in the North West Province in the 1990s he confirmed this in every detail. This had been earlier refuted in our interview with Mr Isidore Francis Wainchom Nkwain Neng in his Njinikom Palace on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2015 who simply declared that turbulence was orchestrated by a group of misguided youths and individuals who were out to settle scores and paralyse the state machinery.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Munang (August 2015) in Bamenda, Justice Wanki (2012) Ndop, Nyuysemo Marcel (August 2015) differed slightly in their accounts but all of them pointed to the fact that, the leadership of NPMB some sort of exploited the confusion created by poverty and state nonchalance to misappropriate funds designed to sponsor farming activities.

<sup>20</sup> See memoranda of the North West Cooperative Association to the NPMB concerning the deteriorating marketing relations of 9<sup>th</sup> June 1987.

<sup>21</sup> In writing about the civil disobedience in Cameroon, Napoleon Konghaban Lukong (2005) "Civil Disobedience in the North west Province, 1990-1996" master dissertation, University of Yaounde I, from pp.20-5 gives a more fascinating account of how these economic worries fuel tension in this ecological niche.

that all those working with these enterprises found themselves in perplexing situations wherein opportunities were seemingly offing. In these deteriorating conditions, these enterprises were forced to downsize its workers which further compounded the volatile and souring unemployment problem.

With so many people rendered jobless and a lot more suffocating from pangs of poverty, anger against the state along with the institutions and leadership that were incarnating it became a veritable subject of open scorn. This scornful regard and growing grief gave birth to a twin set of problems all of them acting as ingredients to turbulence of some form. The first was that; hard times made people to lose both confidence and respect to the Cameroon leadership and institutions thereby, destroying the elements of patriotism and making them to stand like ready clients to any philosophy that poised to provide some form of alternative to the prevailing predicaments. These people served and actively became the architects of the civil strife, strikes and gross civil disobedience that became a sort of a renowned currency in the Northwest Region of Cameroon in the 1990s.

Aside, the situation even within the Cameroon public service that had hitherto received extensive praise for being the most reliable employer; was not far different. Concordant with the general austerity measures imposed by the World Bank and the IM F on Cameroon, a good number of people who were civil servants of North West origin lost their jobs with the public service and even those who survived, got their salaries drastically slashed by the state by more than half. Though a few people could celebrate the fact that fate had saved their working matriculation numbers (meaning employment in the public sector), their grievances against the government were separated from those who were either unemployed or sacked from their jobs by a very thin membrane. In an atmosphere of fast deteriorating economic conditions poverty escalated to appalling heights because the number of mouths to feed increased on daily basis.

Another dark tint of governance that was responsible for mass discontent and which laid the basis for turbulence was the fragrant mismanagement and embezzlement of public funds. As discussed above economic crises and the devaluation of the French Franc CFA did not only paralysed individual businesses but significantly handicapped state institutions especially the ability to control those who were in positions to manage public funds. In addressing the nation in his capacity as the Union for Change candidate, Ni John Fru Ndi lamented that the nation's funds were grossly misused and diverted to private accounts either in Europe or elsewhere. He warned that such behaviour was not only detrimental to development projects but largely a ploy by New Deal CDPM led regime to push people of good faith to the streets. It was indeed vexing and provoking to see those in authority swelling their private fortunes and investments abroad while the masses continued suffocating in misery. This message attracted a lot of attention from the masses and incidentally created a rift between them and those in authority. The series of mob actions and gross disobediences that rocked the Bamenda town emanated partly from this rift and accumulated grievances. With hopes of fast return to normalcy gradually becoming a farfetched possibility, loyalty to the state and the various institutions or authorities under its command also gradually shifted. This shift of loyalty only made the people vulnerable to fall prey to any doctrine that moved in the doctrine of sabotage, mob action or gangsterism.

### **Political Foundations**

The power topography and distribution in Cameroon in the late 1980s and 1990s produced an environment that was in the main turbulent ridden. In this package, there was in the main the

inexperience of the political leadership, lack of foresightedness on the part of policy designers, the waywardness of the forces of Law and order, the partiality of the judiciary as well as the rise of political parties with people of a critical and brave mass that were ready to advertise the evils of the CPDM regime. All of this combined to create a climate which unfortunately, worked for the good of turbulence.

To begin with, the power switch (from Ahidjo to Paul Biya) at the helm of the state indicated to most people that the old order (Ahidjo dictatorial regime) had passed away and that the new order was going to be so promising. This thinking was substantiated by the fact that the new regime inaugurated a new governing philosophy known as the New Deal. With its slogan of rigour and moralisation entrenched in its basic text *Communal Liberalism*, many people thought that matters had taken a positive revolution. Loaded with extravagant illusions of good tidings from the realms of the New Deal regime in the right direction where power, responsibility and accountability in governance were going to be shared. As if to make things further clear in this direction, Biya on December 12th 1990 signed into Law a presidential decree which opened up the landscape for various forms of freedom. Prominent in this was the liberalisation of the political space to provide room for competition, freedom of speech as well as the right for people of all abstractions to form associations. This decree calcified the feelings of those who had seen the rise of Biya to power as the opening of a wide door for a full gear operation of democracy and freedom. The resultant effect was not only the formation of political parties but also the creation of radical newspapers that took off time to sensitize people about the state responsibilities. Like any new thing, extensive freedom as indicated in this decree was not only new to the masses but also entailed the adoption of a series of measures to keep the state safe from dissident doctrines or philosophies. The failure of the state to take corresponding measures to prevent the growth of dissident doctrines and the overzealousness of opposition parties to correct the wrongs of the regime even in the market place produced a good avenue for turbulence to emerge and blossom.

Worse still, after the October 11<sup>th</sup> presidential elections, the union of opposition parties which had vigorously campaigned under the banner of Union for change, claimed that their candidate Ni John Fru Ndi won but that the Supreme Court had doctored the results to suit the CPDM candidate Paul Biya whom they had brandished before and during the campaigns as the author of all the problems that Cameroon was facing at the time. Correspondingly, they exploited the lapses created by the economic malaise and the air of liberalism that reigned then to advertise the economic ills of the regime and took every step to make the Cameroon leading cartel at the time to appear for the most part, as monstrous and heartless people who anchored no string of regard to the masses that formed the thrust of their political bargain. To give these sad events a concrete but very appalling configurations, they took off time to invite Cameroonians of all walks of life to salvage their God given Land of Glory and Promise from the hands of arm-robber type regime by staging street protests and mass tax boycott including a head-on disrespect of every institution and authority that was connected to the Cameroon government. As indicated shortly, this call found ready clients amongst the unemployed youths and the retrenched workers all over the key Cameroon towns like Douala, Baffoussam, Kumba and Limbe but the situation in the North West Region was acutely dramatic and worrisome.

Together with a battery of fine scholars and established technicians who found it hard to understand why their salaries were brought to the scale of mere minions, civil disobedience as preached and practiced by the frontline opposition parties notably the SDF gained tremendous attraction and incidentally became the order of the day. Growing from these analyses, it is



fitting to assert that, the turbulence that rocked the North West Region of Cameroon in the 1990s and gradually transformed the area into the nation's political heart beat had its prime roots in economic misgivings and governmental insensitivity. Indeed, turbulence was mounted and made from an avalanche of economic issues with social and political factors being the consequent.

Aside from the above discussed situation, the Cameroon judiciary and the institutions/individuals charged with the mission of interpreting, applying and enforcing the Laws conducted themselves in a way that turbulence of a sort could not be avoided. Economic hardship elsewhere in the economy created not only financial hard times but also rendered the decentralized agents of Administrations notably the governors, the divisional officers and other appointed officials largely weak, rude, corrupt and inefficient. As indicated earlier in the economic foundations of this turbulence, salaries of workers were dramatically sliced by more than half in the late 19880s and this was accentuated by the devaluation of the French Franc CFA in 1994. Though these agents of administration were still endowed with enormous financial allowances that could still keep them at comfort, most of them resorted to unorthodox methods of survival. Indeed, services that were generally rendered free by these decentralized agents became an issue of bargain with the highest bidder always winning the show. In this lack of a sane method in governance, meritocracy was sacrificed in the most of the public offices for mediocrity ridden with bribery. This was the major reason for the decay of the power of state institutions in the 1990s. With the power to protect and provide for the citizens wandering in absurdities, most people in Bamenda used these opportunities to negotiate alternative forms of loyalties thereby; providing an avalanche opportunities which most political parties and other frustrated people exploited in wholesale basis. This deteriorating situation could not have been that bad if the judiciary sector was just or impartial. Unfortunately, the crimes of the above described individuals were comparatively milder than that of the judiciary sector.

Before 1990, the Cameroon judiciary might have been corrupt and depended on the humour of the head of state to render justice but the situation became a very awkward between 1991 and 2005. For reasons of personal aggrandisement, lack of state control and inertia, justice became a marketable commodity squarely placed within the reach of the rich. It became scaring to see that Lawyers who were naturally expected to conduct themselves in ways that warranted emulation with regards to legal and moral issues became the first people to be counted corrupt and inefficient. State Lawyers, gendarmes, police and customs officers made justice and rights at every level complicated, long and fruitless. With a kind of a rubber stamp parliament, it became difficult for a law to be pass that could keep checks on the excesses of the regime. The absence of a veritable check and control mechanism was saddled by a blind feeling that the opposition parties especially the SDF had nothing of substance to offer. Blinded by this illusion, the the New Deal regime committed political errors that helped to pamper mediocrity which the North West masses especially in the intellectual class hated with a passion. This continued to register serious shifts in the power ownership and distribution equation because not only the police but other state institution linked to justice lost the popular support from the base.

It was indeed startling for the police which was expected to serve like the prime protector of the entire citizenry to be classed by a wide scholarship and opinion holders as the top most

corrupt, inefficient and unethical agency of the Law.<sup>22</sup> These vices were visibly demonstrated when they organized a litany of checks along major roads into and from Bamenda in the name of providing security to the citizens and keeping order. As it came to be the real mission of these men and women in uniform in this check points proved to be everything else but the security and order which they claimed to offer. With increasing frustration and threats from the masses to their lives and functions, these men and women rather concentrated in brutalizing and extorting money from poor masses. By so doing, they demonstrated in every way possible that their mission was more personal than public. For purely personal reasons therefore, the police and gendarmes who were the first people to understand the Law toiled with every aspect of it and exploited the ignorant and frustrated lot by every inch. By so doing, they directly participated and fuelled turbulence simultaneously. Commenting on the decay of justice and gross violation of human rights, the Bishops Episcopal communiqué of 8 June 1990 insisted on this when they intimated that;

We notice around us day in day out violations of more flagrant of the rights of human beings, the poor, the weak, the defenceless are subjected to the arbitrariness of the unscrupulous civil servants [meaning police and gendarmes] of the agents of the Law. These are persons of ill-defined positions acting under the cloak of the party or protected by some mysterious impunity which gives rise to scandals.<sup>23</sup>

As for external motivations, there was the new wind of change that exploded and brought to lesser influence the communist bloc, the apartheid regime in South Africa as well as the renewed emphasis placed on countries of the South (Cameroon being inclusive) for an indispensable need for good governance. Emboldened in this stream of developments were the calls made by the international community for the strict respect of the basic rights of man most especially those that had to do with the practice of democracy. These were indeed very exacting demands to states like Cameroon whose governing system from independence was in the main dictatorial in essence and practice. As earlier indicated, Ahidjo had fought hard to make the world believe that his dictatorial methods were but genuine steps towards national unity and cohesion. Through the list system, he claimed to be practising democracy but within the realm of a single party and banked on the odd realities of multi-party competition in Cameroon from 1961-66 to argue that; it was a cumbersome venture for young and frail African states to engaged full scale in that kind of complicated political practice. Through this philosophy, he fought hard to make Cameroonians across a wide spectrum to believe that the intricacies were not only multi-form but counterproductive. Whenever an opportunity presented itself, Ahidjo as head of state and supreme commander of the arm force never minced words to buttress his point especially about the unsoundness of the prototype European or American democratic practice to a state like Cameroon that was profoundly multi-ethnic. The kind of democracy that vibrated within the orbit of a single political party whose philosophy was carefully tailored to worship the system in place at the time was anything else but democracy.<sup>24</sup> It was an opaque system whose functional essence gave inelastic opportunities

<sup>22</sup> A graphic image of how there was a dramatic divorce between the police/gendarmes and the population can be found in Arch –Bishops Episcopal conference of Cameroon concerning the Economic crises which the country was undergoing of 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1990.

<sup>23</sup> Bishops' pastoral conference communiqué concerning the trends of affairs especially the conduct of agents of Law and order in Cameroon dated the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1990, p.15.

<sup>24</sup> A.Ndi description of Ahidjos' tyranny and autocratic system of administration is acerbic, frightful and in every sense; scaring and marvelling. See A Ndi, (Forth Coming) *The Golden Age of Southern/West Cameroon: Prime Lessons for Cameroon*, p.4.

to just a handful and wide range of frustration to many a people thereby watering the seeds of turbulence that was to take shape in any near or distant future.

In this system, accountability to the tenure and management of public goods and resources was not self-automated but borne out of an ostensible desire to please the head of state who through intrigues and manipulation, had risen beyond the heights of human reproach. In any case, Ahidjo had a way of placing his cards for inspection/scrutiny by the international community. With this, he was able to transform the parliament and judiciary to pass for a rubber stamp institutions since its membership and structure laid squarely within the "beg and call" of his personal humour than that of the entire Cameroonians. With a tight fist on the press and all organs of expressions, debate and opinion clashes within parliament became almost a far-fetched possibility. This kind of leadership that was replete with intrigues deceit and constant manipulation all in name of democracy survived easily during the one party era (1966-1991) but found a lot of obstacle to blossom in the North West region during the New Deal era most especially after the reintroduction of multi-partism.

In perspective, Southern Cameroonians where the Northwest forms the nucleus reacted differently to this new age of liberalism because regardless of attempts of cultural harmonization by the French proto-type administration adopted by Ahidjo since 1972, they were intrinsically people of a class apart political orientation apart. Their training and moral philosophy inherited either from the British Culture (Anglo-Saxon) or sound Christian upbringing, made them ever ready to agitate or strike each time their rights were trampled upon. With regards to the soundness of this culture in the southern/West Cameroon political intercourse Ndi passionately observes that;

In comparison Southern Cameroons, which had survived British and Nigerian intrigues after disentangling itself from the Eastern Region Crises in 1953, worked out its own salvation and soon distinguished itself, as the most democratic, most peaceful, literally corruption free state with a blossoming middle sized, self-sufficient economy. As a consequence, its citizens were relatively happy, progressive and understandably optimistic everything being equal. Remarkably, the democratic handover of power which marked the apogee of its 'Golden Age', happened some fifty-four years ago, precisely in February 1959, when its political leadership demonstrated an even more magnanimous and glorious handover of power which in the Southern Cameroons instance was taken as absolutely normal attracting no undue local or international attention. This practically demonstrates how far ahead of Nigeria Southern Cameroons was in matters of democratic culture.<sup>25</sup>

The legion of strikes, agitation and all the activities that challenged the political order of the time in the North West Region of Cameroon emerged from the remnants of this culture. However, it should be stressed that these people suffocated but had no choice but to bear this grudges throughout Ahidjo regime because the International community whose prime concerns appeared to be elsewhere, remained mute. This muteness on the part of the international community stifled many people and fuelled tensions among many camps. In all, these developments in power topography gave the masses who felt far abandoned from the confines of jobs and secluded by terror, the undue assignment to pray for Ahidjo departure from power as fast as possible. It also assailed those who harboured various claims of suffocation under the

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.5.

yoke of dictatorship to yearn for an opportunity where and when their voices could be heard and the contours of their minds (grudges) graphically displayed.

The 1990s therefore provided these long awaited opportunities. This political environment that was animated by twisting and contrasting strands of governance opened wide gates for these frustrated lot to negotiate the possibilities of sharing and owning power. Since it became difficult for them to effect these changes through the Cameroon established institutions of governance, the street became the only possible forum or theatre of action. Concretely, by 1990 Cameroon like many African countries South of the Sahara still had a number of veritable home problems to handle but the problem of governance most especially the practices of democracy and the respect of the fundamental rights of man seemed to take pre-imminence. With the hope of international protection further sustained by a grim feeling that the New Deal Era was going to be an epoch of opportunities for many, agitation in all dimensions became common placed. The key actors of the chain of civil disobediences that paralysed the economic vim and the acclaimed moral righteousness of the people in the main towns of Cameroon were products of this group.

Again, turbulence of a disturbing magnitude became rampant in the North West Region because of the availability of a radical intellectual class, mass media and civil societies. The presidential decree of December 1990 which liberalized the media landscape and granted people of goodwill to form association laid the basis for turbulence in Cameroon particularly in the North West region. As a sort of a sign post or theatre of changes and pronouncements<sup>26</sup> the people of the northwest seemed to have been having a knack for political developments and moral rectitude especially in the tenure of publicly endowed power. This anxiety brought to fore a class of intellectuals and opinion leaders like Professor Ngwashi Clement, Barister Sendze Luck, Pr Siga Asaga, Albert Mukong, Dr Akuchu, Professor Tatamentang, Ni Joghna Fru Ndi, John Ngu Foncha,<sup>27</sup> Pr Paul Nchoji Nkwi, Eric Chinje, Baristers Ayangwe and Ben Muna and a host of others not neglecting a long list of those who provided ingredients to turbulent action leaving in the Diaspora. Though most of these people harboured grievances which were slightly different from the masses on the streets both the two classes had a concord with it came to the question of power sharing and representation.<sup>28</sup> To this class should also be added a number of politically sensitive and an educated youths who were mostly graduates from the lone Federal university (the University of Yaounde).

Besides the fact that these youths were unemployed and poor, the availability of Newspapers that extensively advertised the ills of the regime enabled their grievances to grow into rancour and open sores each time they were reminded of their rights as Cameroonians. At the background too was the fact that rumour especially on issues that castigated the CPDM and Paul Biya always arose and circulated with astonishing velocity. Indeed, Facts, figures and

<sup>26</sup> The North West generally referred too in political lexicon simply as Bamenda incidentally gained the title as theatre of pronouncements and political changes because a) It was in Bamenda that Southern Cameroonians met for the first time in June 1961 after the February plebiscites to determine the nature of their union with French Cameroun, (b) it was in Bamenda that president Paul Biya was crowned fons of fons, (c) it was in Bamenda that the CNU was converted to CPDM. To See how this town has shaped political developments in Cameroon History read Confidence Chia Ngam (2015) 'The Working of the Bamenda Spirit in Federal Cameroon Deal' African Journal of Humanities, Vol. 7, whole text.

<sup>27</sup> John Ngu Foncha needs to be treated separately from this list because nobody bored the troubled and incurred the pains of Ahidjo technique of deceit and manipulation as he did. The troubles of the 1990s especially the social confusion brought by both the *frenchification* of administration of the administration, made him to write a long and a telling letter within which he resigned from the CPDM.

<sup>28</sup> Literary speaking, the list of intellectuals and opinion holders that preached radical ideas and persuaded the masses to belief in the power and usefulness of the street cannot be exhaustive in one study so the list provided is just a counted few.

events about the regime were carefully edited and mixed with rumour or completely tilted to emphasize that the New Deal and all those serving its machinery intrinsically represented a curse to the youths. The unfulfilled promises of Paul Biya and other utterances in Bamenda along with the disregard given to Anglophones as people with a particular history, upbringing and status some sort of certify these rumours and tilted information.<sup>29</sup>

### **Media /Mass Communication Foundations**

As for mass Medias' responsibility to the age of turbulence, the situation attained disturbing heights. The breakdown of order due to lack of genuine and unbiased control along with the growing number of idle and hungry people as a result of skyrocketing unemployment, produced many issues to write and talk about. This found a fertile avenue to blossom because the liberal space provided for freedom of expression and formation of associations added another serious steam for information flow. There was a sudden rise of Newspapers like *The Herald*, *The Post*, *Cameroon magazine*, *Cameroon Day Dawn*, *Cameroon Outlook*, *Post Watch magazine* *The Massager* along with *Jeune Afrique Economique* that fed the public with radical information concerning the welfare of the state. People from the Northwest region belonging to the media field exploited every available opportunity that came with this liberal age and even used official programmes of the CRTV like *Cameroon Calling* to market radical ideas to those who could buy.

In substance, Northwest population was sufficiently sensitized both about political developments in Cameroon as well as the different available opportunities and methods of challenging the existing order at the time. The end product turned out to be that the people incidentally adopted a series of ways through and within which they staged protest and strike which also formed part of the turbulence. In this connection still, the international organization and media notably the, Breton woods Institutions, British Broad Casting Company (BBC) and the voice of America (VOA) often took off time to advertise the evils of dictatorial regimes in Africa placing the Republic of Cameroon on the frontlines. This advertisement caught the attention of most donor organization and made the Cameroonian communities in Diaspora really worried.<sup>30</sup> The ugly colouration given by the international media about to the main tenets of governance notably, the enveloping of individual and collective freedoms, blatant favouritism and the over dependence of the judiciary on the state could have found pale attraction from the Cameroon populace if they were no genuine home bearings. As indicated above, the economic situation in Cameroon at the time had large and endless bearings to this external colouration of Cameroon governance.

Enveloped within the realms of these media foundations was the problem of social friction especially the fact that Anglophones made claims that since the closure of the Federation experiment in 1972, they were both victims of colonization and humiliation as far as power ownership and distribution was concern in the administrations of both Adhijo and Biya. These

<sup>29</sup> Upon ascending the helm of leadership, Paul Biya made promises to the North West people that created a lot of anxiety. As if to divert attention from Law no 84/001 of 4th April 1984 which officially changed the name of the country from the United Republic to the Republic, Paul Biya took the Bamenda people by storm when he did not only announce the Ring road project but swore that he was personality going to supervise it. With the progress of time in the 1990s, it became clear that all those promises amounted to a mere political gimmick designed to divert people's attention from the real troubles of the time and this infuriated a lot of people.

<sup>30</sup> This list of those who formed the worried communities in Diaspora is really long. It included those who were studying abroad on government scholarships, those who had tactfully sought and obtained political asylum like Bouba Bello Maigari, along with many others who had received various frustrations with the way the issues of governance operated in Cameroon both within the new the Ahidjo and the new deal Regimes. To this must be added a bulk of those who harboured radical ideas against the working of the governing system along with those who had simply travelled abroad to negotiate greener pastures or opportunities that the Western World offered at the time.



claims were sustained by evidences of leadership insufficiencies that carefully brought out the contours of segregation in appointment to higher offices.<sup>31</sup> There was definitely a twisted understanding of freedom and rights by most Anglophones Cameroonians. Freedom of Association in their sense was ignorantly or deliberately interpreted to imply mean freedom to form a state. They were therefore tracing from history, picking and piling the sins or wrongdoings of the Cameroon state to give ultimate credence to the fact that time was ripe for the English speaking Cameroonians to form a distinct state or at worst return to the Federalism deal stroke in 1961.<sup>32</sup> The attempt by the then minister of secondary education, Ngango George to harmonize the Anglophone Curricular and Evaluation system and the fact that the GCE examinations were either not marked or corrected in doubtful environments by people of doubtful credentials<sup>33</sup> became a veritable problem and sent most people to the streets in most towns of the Northwest region.

However, it cannot be possible to exhaust all the foundations of the turbulence that became almost a way of life in the urban landscape of North West region of Cameroon in the 1990s in a single study because the causes were so multi-faceted. It sufficed to note that it was a joint responsibility of economic, political and social causes but that each of them was particular in its responsibility to one or many of the turbulent episodes.

### **Turbulence and Power Reconfiguration thereafter**

The decision of the masses to take their grievances to the street in order to attract public attention and international sympathy and states' decision to use every available means to destroy such moves and intentions resulted to turbulence of various forms. The turbulence was characterized by public demonstration, mob action, mass boycott and general disregard to any constituted authority except those that were formed to address the accumulated grievances of the people during that period. There was therefore a coordinating committee of groups that were steering these movements. In no specific order these groups included, the All Anglophone Movement led by Elad, the Cameroon Teachers Union led by Azong Wara, the SDF political party and National Coalition for opposition Movement led by Ni John Fru Ndi as well as Teachers Association of Cameroon and Cameroon civil Servant Unions whose leadership constantly migrated as circumstances changed. To this should be added some sporadic organizations and movements that sprung up especially in rural areas with claims of loyalties to these movements. In any case, the clashes between these two groups of people tactfully removed power ownership and all its dynamics to a new landscape wherein, negotiations and tolerance was required.

<sup>31</sup>The maltreatment of Anglophones and the problems arising from it ushered in new debates and fertilized the ideas of so many scholars, communiqués, meetings and mutinies. A selected few includes F.B Nyamjoh (1996) *The Cameroon GCE Crises: A test of Anglophone Solidarity*, Limbe Nomremec Press. N.N Sunsungi (1991) *The Crises of Unity and democracy in Cameroon, Can a country which has pronounced itself Death be saved by Democracy?* Abidjan, N.P. A W. Mukong (1990) *The Case for Southern Cameroon*, Enugu, Chaka Printing Limited. There is need to see how this changing topography was decried in J.N Foncha (1990) (1993) Letter of Resignation from the CPDM political party" along with "Open Letter addressed to the Government of Cameroon Republic of Cameroon on the Operation of the Unification" A more provoking picture of Anglophone neglect in the issue of power ownership and distribution is found in the "Buea All Anglophones Conferences Declaration of May 1994

<sup>32</sup> A graphic translation of this feeling is found in a ground breaking treatise by V.E. Ngome (1995) *What God has put asunder*.

<sup>33</sup> The reliability of this claim was confirmed in details by a certain Ntono Jean Marie in our discussion with him in Yaounde in June 2005 when he struggled in vain to make us understand that there was nothing exceptional in the GCE examination. He described a situation in the 1993, where he by then a level 300 student of French modern Letters along with his friends to mark the GCE in Amphi theatre 1003 of the university of Yaounde. Going just with this sorted example, the Anglophones had tangible reasons to cast doubts either in the conduct of the exams, the people who conducted it or both.

The first action that championed turbulence was the distribution of tracts bearing the evils of the regime and announcing the eminent launching of the SDF political party that was billed for the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1990. During the launching of the SDF a crowd of exceptional huge size constituted by mostly youths and old people marched and chanted songs against the regime. Irrespective of the mass militarisation of the town along with the anti-campaign carried out by radio Bamenda further sustained by prefectural order banning public manifestations, the SDF party was finally launched at the City Chemist Round about.<sup>34</sup> This public demonstration inaugurated the rest of turbulence not only in Bamenda but throughout all the divisional headquarters and sometimes villages of the region. Some of the key elements of turbulence that gave excessive stress to the Cameroon economy were the pronouncement and preaching of the SDF chairman in connivance with other opposition parties that all French made or oriented goods should be avoided. He equally ignited profound trouble but worn extensive admirers especially among the rural lots when he asked them not to be paying poll and other taxes that funded the state. Together with operation Ghost town within which businesses were closed and commuting limited, the Bamenda urban sphere became not only a theatre of turbulence but also quite ungovernable.

### **The Crux of Turbulence and Governmental Response**

The climax of turbulence came when the results of the 1992 October 11<sup>th</sup> presidential elections were released. With almost no coordination except the crude type provided by vandals whose allegiance to any of the above mentioned groups was doubtful, people took to the streets chanting song of disillusionment and their determination to turn the tides in their favour. Turbulence did not just end in Bamenda town. It went wild and viral to other towns like Belo Fundong, Baitbo, Wum Ndu, Kumbo Nkambe and even villages. The culture of protecting state property earlier preached and upheld by the above enumerated groups because it was owned by all and sundry not a particular regime was utterly abandoned. In this guise violence against people who were identified with the regime became a common currency.<sup>35</sup> Public and private houses were burnt to ashes while all public and private services were temporarily closed down. The Ndu genocide, the Kumbo water crises and the scandals that came with it speaks volumes for the disorder and loss of lives that animated this period.<sup>36</sup>

The state though significantly crippled both by the economic malaise and this turbulence had no choice but to order a house arrest for the SDF chairman and to impose a state of emergency throughout the region. The comportment of the forces of Law and order called upon to quell this turbulence was in every way; a dramatic continuation turbulence.<sup>37</sup> This stemmed mostly from the fact that the men and women in uniform were young and inexperienced in peace keeping and again that in the exercise their duty brute force than gumption was recommended. Rallies, gathering and agitations of all sorts were banned quite alright but the meaning of a state of emergence was cosmetic to a mostly traditional people that were already too infatuated with the issue of power. This lack of understanding or the willingness to do so made them to continue to form groups and to agitate. This ignorance some sort of assailed the soldiers who

<sup>34</sup> During the Celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the SDF on May 26<sup>th</sup> 2015 Ni John Fru intimated that this sport from then hence should be known and esteemed as the liberty square. He paid glowing tributes to the five people that lost their lives in the in the cost of the events as well as those who lost parts of their bodies and lives after. In tears he insisted that their lives and the plight and that of the people still living is and shall go a long way to water the tree of liberty.

<sup>35</sup> See full developments in R.Gobatta (1993) *The Past Tense of Shit*, Limbe ,Noremec Press,

<sup>36</sup> For a full picture of what constituted the Ndu crises which had strong connections with the Kumbo water management crises, read Michael Ndi (1995) *Naked Truth about the Ndu Genocide* , Onitsha Reina Arts.

<sup>37</sup> R Gobatta (1996) *I spit on their Graves: Testimony relevant to the Democratisation struggle in Cameroon*, Bellingham cola Tree press.

ransacked homes, arrested and torture people, loathed property, raped girls, children and women. These kind of macabre comportment coming from the ranks of the governing inaugurated a reign of terror within which people were arrested and subjected to drink water of doubted quality as well as to dance and sing songs with no clear meanings.<sup>38</sup> Whatever the case, the age of turbulence ignited fear, destroyed peace and took the lives of many people but most importantly, negotiated new horizons for power sharing and its dynamics in the North west region in particular and Cameroon at large.

### **The New Horizons of Power from the 1990s**

The lessons learnt from the open show of force between the forces of law representing the state and the masses was that the issue of power and authority to lead people regardless of their political class or scholarly credentials gained new horizons. Force of a vehement magnitude was required to quell the disorder that was almost attaining genocide standards but this came as result of lack of foresight on the part of the leadership. The list of lives lost in the process along with the huge sums of money spent and the stigma this engineered can never be exhaustive or clearly determined but this are all issues that could have been avoided by any leadership that is conscious of its history as well as the changing dynamics of power in place and time. Turbulence exposed the true context of Northwest development as well as the heights at which the people could attain when pushed to the elastic limits of their patience. The creation of the GCE Board, more administrative units, the tripartite conferences and the arsenal of peace talks together with the reform of the electoral code were indeed good responses but a little too late. Adequate preparation was required on the part of the state before liberalising the political, social and socio-cultural landscape and the measures later adopted could have destroyed turbulence from its bud.

On the masses of the North/West locale their gain and losses in this exercise was multi-dimensional. It gave the youths sufficient allowance to challenge the state for refusing to open up the space for them to (a) flower and blossom in the wealth of nation through jobs and appointments (b) questions the merits of gerontocracy and (c) the ever abiding zeal not only to challenge the state but also to understand that there was need to negotiate their survival and loyalties elsewhere. An unfortunately growth from this decade of change is that notoriety was most often confused for popularity and charisma. In this context, opportunists who had clearly nothing to offer gained space and eventually worn offices in the ensuing elections especially within the ranks of the main opposition party; the SDF. To add to this is also the fact that the masses became introduced to an inelastic concept of rights which was not corroborated with responsibilities both to their communities or the state. Closely connected to this was the fact power that was lodged principally within the confines of traditional lords like the fons, chiefs or other traditionally constituted authorities became a matter of negotiation and not automatic as obtained before this period. Although with the passage of time the state empowered some fons like Doh Gwanyi III of Balikumbat to stand beyond common reproach, royalty and its essence in time and place became a matter of negotiation in the north west region as from the 1990.

Another Interesting development rooted in this 1990s age of turbulence was the regard given to women in the grassfields. In post-colonial politics women played roles that were mostly advisory and representative as far party militancy was concerned. In the traditional fiefdoms the women were forced by changing times notably the need for popular support to abandon

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<sup>38</sup> I was a victim of such treatment.

their traditional and child bearing elegance to press for other wider social and political openings. This was particularly true of the *Takemberg* womens group which almost exclusively formed the pressure arm of the SDF and constituted a sort the Republican guard of the SDF chairman when he was put on house arrest. In this new twist the question of how power was shared, how it was maintained and how it could be redistributed was removed from the strict patriarchal reserve of the men and place at equi-reach with women. It was easy in this context for any man or woman with no acclaimed family history, educational height or social status to climb to the rostrum of influence and power on account of her bravery, oratory and social exposure. The question of who was and could be elite was required to be given another detailed redefinition.

## CONCLUSION

A study on a period that left such a classic reconfiguration of power distribution on a country's history can answer a few questions and open room for research to many. This is what this paper has done. It has attempted to bring to fore the causes, the character and the overall impact of turbulence in the Northwest region in particular and Cameroon at large. It has investigated and reported the issues from its own position of the balcony arguing that the present power sharing pattern in most parts of Cameroon took its roots from this period. It records that the turbulence came close to a

Genocide situation, bringing about decay in old fashioned modern and tradition power tenure. Intrinsically, this period negotiated a transition required of growing state though at some cost

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and stigma but it created a space for the hitherto voiceless classes of people in the Northwest region notably; the women, the youths and a majority of men and women from the middle class to make their influence felt. This paper offers an argument which is valid not for Cameroon leadership and the people therein but also for governments and peoples of the wider globe that prompt reaction and conscientious approach is required to pre-empt problems in this case turbulence in this new dispensation of liberalism and change

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