

The Search for a Cameroonian Model of Democracy or the Search for the Domination of the State Party: 1966-2006

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ABSTRACT

1966 and 2006 are two milestones in the political history of Cameroon. They represent, respectively, the establishing of the one-party system in the country and the vote, by the parliament, of the bill creating an independent body for the organization of elections in the country. The road followed by Cameroon, as compared to the one chosen by most African countries, notably Benin and Niger as far as building the political framework is concerned, seems to be different. This paper, which analyses Cameroonian major constitutional and electoral laws voted as from 1990 and appraises facts from newspapers as compared to Benin and Niger, aims at showing that, since 1966, the rulers have always endeavoured to have a Cameroonian exception in the field of democracy. The eventual aim has been openly to have a Cameroonian model of democracy. In reality, the hidden aim has been to perpetuate the domination of the party state in the political landscape of the country.

Keywords: *Cameroon, Benin, Niger, Cameroonian model of democracy, state party, one party system, multiparty system, election.*

Tahun 1966 dan 2006 merupakan dua tonggak penting dalam sejarah politik Kamerun. Keduanya mewakili berlakunya sistem satu partai dan pemungutan suara berkaitan dengan pembentukan badan independen penyelenggara pemilu. Kamerun, jika dibandingkan dengan kebanyakan negara-negara Afrika terutama Niger dan Benin, memiliki kerangka kebijakan politik yang berbeda. Tulisan ini berusaha menganalisis hukum dan aturan-aturan tentang konstitusi dan pemilu Kamerun sejak tahun 1990, dan membandingkan fakta-fakta surat kabar dengan Benin dan Niger dengan tujuan menunjukkan bahwa sejak tahun 1966, para penguasa selalu berusaha untuk membuat pengecualian dalam demokrasi Kamerun. Tujuan akhirnya, yang dikemukakan secara terbuka, adalah berupaya mewujudkan model demokrasi Kamerun. Pada kenyataannya, terdapat tujuan tersembunyi untuk melanggengkan dominasi partai penguasa dalam perpolitikan nasional.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Kamerun, Benin, Niger, model demokrasi Kamerun, partai penguasa, sistem satu partai, sistem multipartai, pemilihan umum.*

Since the 1960s, when most African countries got their independence from the colonial masters, there has been, in Africa, a search for democratic ways. Here and there, many paths were opened, although in general, new African leaders embarked on a path which has been called African democracy? Cameroon, being an African country, also embarked on a path which seemed to be peculiar? That peculiarity of Cameroon appeared during the 1990s when Africa was swept by what Samuel Huntington called “democracy’s third wave”. In order to better appraise what seems to be the Cameroonian exception, the study of this case should be carried out in comparison with the cases of Benin and Niger.

This study is not the first as far as democracy in Cameroon is concerned nor as far as comparative study on democracy and democratization in Africa is concerned. Victor Julius Ngoh (2001) is a pacesetter. He has studied the case of Cameroon and has arrived at the conclusion that Africans are responsible for the failure or the success of the democratisation process in their countries. As he studied Cameroon from 1960 to 2000, this paper will go further up to 2006 with the starting point in 1966 when the one-party system was established in the country. In 2006, the parliament voted a law providing the creation of an independent electoral body known as Elections Cameroon (ELECAM). Eboussi Boulaga (1997) has studied the process of democratisation in Cameroon in the 1990s. He has analysed the various structures put in place so as to bring out their shortcomings. Zacharie Ngniman (1993) has presented the main events which Cameroon went through as from 1989 related to the democratisation process. This journalistic account helps in getting facts which can be analysed so as to get the real implications of the decisions taken at one moment or the other in framing the Cameroonian path to democracy.

All these studies have a weak point which resides in the absence of comparison that enables one to better understand the case of Cameroon in the light of what has happened elsewhere. This shortcoming is avoided by Mario Avezedo who has put side by side Gabon and Cameroon in a bit to show how ethnicity influenced democracy in both countries. In comparative studies, Mamoudou Gazibo (2000, 2002, & 2005) has contributed a lot as he has studied the trajectories followed by Benin and Niger in the democratisation process. Moreover, he has done a lot in calling on researchers in the field of political science which helps other disciplines like history in paying attention to some shortcomings in the comparative methodology. He says for instance that, in a transnational comparison, the researcher is generally more familiar with one case than the other (Gazibo 2002, 441) Moreover, he can have more data for one case than the other. As a consequence, he has the temptation to bridge the deficit of familiarity or data by letting himself guided by the case for which he has a better mastery of the data. There is

a danger of concluding on the less mastered case by the observations drawn from the case the author is most familiar with.

The author of this paper is more familiar with the case of Cameroon for which he has enough data. In order not to be caught in the trap of the shortcoming presented by Gazibo, the comparison will be limited to specific aspects which Cameroon on the one hand and Benin and Niger on the other shared notably the paths taken in putting in place new institutions. The comparison will emphasize the period after 1990 during which these countries engaged in the democratisation process. This paper aims at showing that, through out, the democracy Cameroon has been searching for since independence has been a search for the domination of the state party. So, in order to better present the point, a discussion will be opened on the notion of democracy. After that, the study will present the first phase of the search for Cameroonian model of democracy which, in comparison with what happened in Benin and Niger, was the institution of the one-party democracy which, in Cameroon, was the “ruling democracy”. The second phase of the search presents the “advanced democracy” which is a democracy in which the ruling party’s will is to prevail by all means.

What is Democracy?

Democracy is one of the most controversial concepts in this contemporary world, since it is used here and there with meanings that seem to differ from place to place and from context to context. It started somewhere with a precise meaning. But as the product has been adopted in various parts of the world, it has become a concept the meaning of which has been broadened so as to fit some goals of its users. The consequence of this fact is that, today, you cannot really say what democracy is all about. There is a situation which is tantamount to confusion.

Democracy started in the 5th century BC in Athens. It was then conceived as the “government of the people by the people and for the people”. By that time, there was what was called direct democracy in which all citizens of a certain age participated directly to the management of the city by voting laws. The population was not as numerous as it is the case today. That is why, nowadays, except some few cases that are found only in Switzerland, there is no more direct democracy. It is indirect democracy that prevails, with the citizens ruling through their representatives. It is in this context that, in various countries, you have the parliament and the councils. This type of democracy, in order to function well, must fulfil a certain number of conditions. In the words of Peter Wanyande (2000, 111) the conditions

to be fulfilled are the following: the existence and use of institutions through which the people can take part in the management of the affairs of the state such as parliament, the executive, the judiciary, political parties. Moreover, there should be an electoral process and the institutions should serve as checks for the possible abuse of power. All in all “democracy...rests on voluntary popular participation in the political process, accountability of the rulers to the ruled and the sharing of power”. Those are the characteristics of democracy. That is how it works in the West. With that conception of democracy, should one say that it is universal?

In principle, the political system called democracy is universal, but its characteristics are not universal since the interpretation of the concept is not universal. It is in this framework that you can talk of African democracy or Cameroonian model of democracy. This author does not mean that democracy is stranger to Africa in general and Cameroon in particular. On the contrary, democracy existed in traditional Africa as one former Premier of West Cameroon, Augustine Ngom Jua asserted in 1967 (Ngoh 2001, 9). He had the following words: “the concept of total democracy has its roots in the Cameroonian traditional culture where government has been for centuries, the concern of all the people, by all the people and for all the people.” In this light, when Carlos Lopes talks of “the africanisation of democracy”, he does not mean that there is no democracy in Africa. He wants rather that Africans should appropriate again the debate on democracy since “there is nothing specifically African in the politics of Africa” (Lopes 1996, 142). The argument is also supported by Robert-Charles Dimi when he talks of the conversion to democracy, that is, to abandon the monolithic policy that Africa has adopted for decades to no avail as far as the principles of democracy are concerned. These authors made this point as a call to Africans who had given a different conception to democracy. That is why democracy has come to be prefaced. Nasser talked of party-less democracy (Wanyande 1996, 110). It is in this line of prefacing democracy that a path was searched for in Cameroon, with some stages that, in reference to the characteristics of democracy as presented above, make a peculiarity.

The First Phase of the Search for the Cameroonian Model of Democracy or the Building of the “Ruling Democracy”

The first phase of the search for a Cameroonian model of democracy started at independence with Ahmadou Ahidjo as the guide. He had a hidden agenda which was to establish the one party system in Cameroon. That system was the foundation of his “ruling democracy” that Paul Biya strengthened as from 1983.

The Political System in Cameroon before Independence and Reunification

It is an overstatement to talk of a Cameroonian political system before independence, since Cameroon was under colonial rule. What we had was the political system put in place by the colonial masters. Cameroon had the French and the British as colonial masters. Their political systems differ in some aspects, but in general, after the Second World War, they were characterised by the existence of multiparty politics.

Multiparty Politics in Cameroon under French Rule

In this section of Cameroon, Cameroonians started taking an active part in the running of their affairs as from 1946 with the institution of the Assemblée représentative du Cameroun (ARCAM) which was the result of the implementation of the French 1946 constitution creating the French Union. It is only two years later, that is in 1948, that a real political party was created, the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC). Before that date, the Jeunesse Camerounaise Française (Jeucafra), which was later transformed into Union Camerounaise Française (Unicafra), existed, but as an administrative party which eventually changed into the Rassemblement Camerounais (RACAM) (Joseph 1986, 102-105).

The UPC was an offshoot of the RACAM since the goals of the latter party were beyond what the French colonial administration expected from Cameroonians. So, all measures were taken in order that the party should not achieve these goals. It died out and it is on the ashes of the RACAM that the UPC sprang up. Globally, from 1938, when the Jeucafra was founded, to 1948, when the UPC came into being, no more than one party effectively existed in Cameroon. 1951 is the year of the beginning of multiparty politics in French Cameroon. That year, Dr Louis Paul Aujoulat founded the Bloc Démocratique Camerounais (BDC). As the Assemblée territoriale du Cameroun (ATCAM) or the Cameroon Territorial Assembly started functioning in 1952, many other political parties came into existence. The following political parties were therefore created: the Mouvement d'Action Nationale du Cameroun (MANC), the Union Socialiste Camerounaise of Charles Okala, the Parti des Démocrates Camerounais. In 1958, the Union Camerounaise was founded.

They all participated in the political life of Cameroon before 1960, vying for seats either in the French assemblies or in the local assembly. In 1957, autonomy was granted to Cameroon under French rule. That is why a Cabinet was put in place with all the members drawn from the

legislative assembly that was elected in 1957. The members of that assembly are those who voted, in 1958, a motion calling for the lifting of the trusteeship and the attainment of independence on January 1, 1960 (Bouopda Kamé 2006, 108). The process that was started in Cameroon under French rule was the same in French colonial Africa. It means that, in Benin and Niger, after World War II, multiparty politics was introduced with the existence of many political parties. That was the case till 1960, the year of independence in most French African colonies. A look at Cameroon under British shows a similar picture as far multiparty politics is concerned.

Multiparty Politics in Cameroon under British Rule

Multiparty politics started in the Southern part of Cameroon under British rule in 1953. Before that, some events unfolded. It is necessary to present them in order to better understand what was to follow.

This part of British Cameroon is generally called Southern Cameroons. According to the Mandate Agreement and later to the Trusteeship Agreement, Cameroon was to be administered as an integral part of Nigeria. So, the Southern Cameroons was administered from Lagos according to laws that governed the ruling of Nigeria. But Southern Cameroons was not represented in the Legislative Council in Lagos, as the Clifford constitution of 1922 did not provide for it. A political association known as the Cameroons Welfare Union, headed by G.J. Mbene, demanded for the representation of Southern Cameroons in the Legislative Council. As a consequence of that demand, in 1942, Chief John Manga Williams was appointed as the representative of Southern Cameroons in the Legislative Council (Ngho 1990, 22-23; Ebune 1992, 126).¹ From 1942 to 1947 he was the sole representative of Southern Cameroons in Nigeria. As from 1947, when the Richards' constitution went operational, Southern Cameroons had two representatives not in Lagos but in the Eastern House of representative as provided by the constitution.

The number changed into 13 with the Macpherson Constitution that was promulgated into law in 1951. The new constitution allocated 13 seats to Southern Cameroons in the Eastern House of Assembly. Out of the 13 representatives, four sat in the Federal House of Representatives one of them being in the Federal Council of Ministers. In the Eastern House of Assembly, out the nine remaining, one delegate of Southern Cameroons was in the Regional Council of Ministers. It should be reminded that, during the Ibadan constitutional conference for the drafting of the

¹A typing error has made Ngho to talk of 1924 instead of 1942. See Ngho, 1990: 23.

Macpherson constitution, the two-man delegation, headed by Dr Endeley, pressed in vain for a separate region of Southern Cameroons. It is in the framework of the Macpherson constitution that the 13 representatives of Southern Cameroons were elected. In the Eastern House of Assembly in Nigeria, a crisis broke out in 1953 and gave way to the creation of local political parties.

In a nutshell, the crisis stemmed from the leadership clash that shook the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) (Ngoh 1990, 95-103; Ebune 1992, 138-141). The president of the party, Nnamdi Azikiwe, was challenged by his deputy, Iyo-Ita. The latter, who was the party's leader in the Eastern House of Assembly, opposed Azikiwe's desire to change the constitution of the party and to reshuffle the NCNC cabinet in order to meet the new demands of the Macpherson constitution. As a consequence, there was a disagreement between the members of the party on the question of ministerial posts in the Eastern and Central houses. As Azikiwe wanted to secure the neutrality of the 13 representatives of Southern Cameroons, he made a statement supporting the desire of Southern Cameroonians for a separate region.

Later, the declaration happened to be a deceitful one as Solomon Tandeng Muna who held a ministerial post in the Eastern region was dismissed. The 13 members, who, in 1952, had declared their support for the NCNC on the grounds that it identified itself with the cause of Southern Cameroons, were divided as four of them continued supporting the president of the party. During the May 6, 1953 sitting of the Regional Legislature, the nine other representatives walked out, thus paralysing the Assembly. The result was the dissolution of the House and the convening of fresh elections which the nine representatives decided to boycott. After the dissolution of the House, the nine representatives went back to Southern Cameroons which they toured and explained to their electorate what happened. They appealed for a conference which took place in Mamfe on May 22-25, 1953. This conference wrote a petition requesting the creation of a separate autonomous legislature for Southern Cameroons. It is at this conference that political associations started merging to form political parties. So, the crisis in the Eastern House of Assembly was an incentive to the creation of political parties in Southern Cameroons. The maiden political party was the Kamerun National Congress (KNC).

The KNC was a merger of the Cameroons National Federation (CNF) chaired by Dr Endeley and the Kamerun United National Congress (KUNC) headed by Dibonge. The latter political association was an offshoot of the former since its founders were members on the CNF. They defected on the grounds that, the leader, Endeley, was not convinced by the reunification he advocated. Moreover, there was a

personality clash between Endeley and the Secretary General, N.N. Mbile. The latter, with other members who were staunch supporters of reunification like John Ngu Foncha, broke away and joined Dibonge to form the KUNC in 1951 (Ebune 1992, 131). The split was only for a time as the two political associations merged to form the KNC.

In the Mamfe conference, it was decided that the CNF and the KUNC would merge into a political party called the KNC which was officially launched in June 1953 with Endeley, leader of the former CNF, as the president and Dibonge, president of the former KUNC, as patron. The Secretary General of the KUNC, Mbile, did not adhere to the political party since he had serious differences with Endeley. The differences were such that Mbile split from the benevolent Bloc formed by some representatives of Southern Cameroons in the Eastern House of Assembly when the 1953 crisis was unfolding. Logically, he could not be a member of the KNC. As he also needed a political party for his own ambitions, he shortly after the formation of the KNC gathered his followers and teamed up with P.M. Kale to form the Kamerun People's Party (KPP), the second political party of Southern Kamerun (Ngoh 1990, 105). The creation of this political party introduced multiparty politics in Southern Cameroons. Differences led to split and the creation of new political parties. By 1961, when the plebiscite for reunification was held, Southern Cameroon had many political parties amongst which the most important were, besides the first two: the One Kamerun (OK), the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) and the Cameroons Peoples' National Convention (CPNC). These political parties existed and competed for seats and positions as Southern Cameroons was granted a quasi-regional status in 1954 and a regional status in 1959. In the process, alternation was witnessed. That was the case until reunification came with a new deal.

The Liquidation of the Multiparty Politics as a Means of Achieving 'Ruling Democracy'

The liquidation of the multiparty politics was designed by Ahmadou Ahidjo who masterminded the whole process. It is here that his hidden agenda appears clearly. According to the political bureau of the Cameroon National Union (CNU), Ahmadou Ahidjo, in his political career has never hesitated to destroy what he had patiently put in place when the general interest was at stake (Bureau politique de l'UNC 1968, 14). It is in this spirit that, in 1956, he dissolved the regional association he was headed, the Association Amicale de la Bénoué, to form the Evolution politique du Nord Cameroun which was designed to have a bigger extension. Through the new association, he grouped parliamentarians of Northern Cameroon. That was only a step towards the creation of a political party for Northern Cameroon. In 1957,

Ahmadou Ahidjo was elected in the Legislative Assembly. He was a member of the first French Cameroon Cabinet of May 1957 occupying the post of Minister of Interior. He was one of the key actors of the cabinet crisis that led to the collapse of the Mbida Cabinet as he became the new Premier. Being Prime Minister without any political party, Ahidjo understood that he had no backing and urgently needed one. True to his principles, he went a step forward. He had observed that, in Northern Cameroon, each region had a major regional association. He then thought that if these associations were grouped under one umbrella, a political party, Northern Cameroon would be stronger and he, the Premier, would have a strong backing that would enable him envisage a bright political future. He embarked on the task of convincing leaders of regional associations. The task was not an easy one as resistance was raised in some quarters. He finally succeeded in convincing them. As a result, in April 1958, they all assembled in Garoua and the result was the creation of the political party named Union Camerounaise (UC) (Bayart 1978, 52). Ahidjo then had at his disposal a new instrument to achieve his goals.

In the assumption of his duty of Prime Minister, he learnt, from the various parliamentary sessions, that his office was precarious in the parliamentary system that was in practice in Cameroon since the advent of the autonomy regime. In October 1959, the Parliament voted the law granting full powers to the Premier. So, when French Cameroon acceded to independence in 1960, the Premier enjoyed full powers as there were no more parliaments, ALCAM having been dissolved before independence. Ahidjo used the full powers he enjoyed to mastermind the constitutional referendum of February 21, 1960 which changed the political system of Cameroon from the parliamentary to the semi-presidential one. The new constitution provided in its article 13 that the first President would be elected by an Electoral College comprising parliamentarians and notables (Gaillard 1994, 111; Bouopda Kamé 2006, 140). The Electoral College was finally restricted to parliamentarians. The parliamentary elections which took place in April 1960 were gerrymandered and rigged in the advantage of the Union Camerounaise that won the majority of seats. As the parliament was to elect the first President, Ahmadou Ahidjo being the only candidate, he won. In his capacity as President of the Republic he could then look forward to implementing his hidden agenda.

The next stage was to unify all the political parties of the country into one. In September 1960, during the third ordinary congress of the Union Camerounaise, Ahmadou Ahidjo appealed for the building of a great national party. The first move in that direction went towards the Mouvement d'Action Nationale du Cameroun that had only one parliamentarian in the National Assembly, Charles Assalé, whom Ahidjo

appointed Prime Minister. By appointing him, Ahmadou Ahidjo was calling on that party and the regional association, the Union tribal bantou, which supported Assalé, to join the ranks of the Union Camerounaise. The new Premier, who controlled the Union Tribale Bantou, thought in vain that the merger of his party and his association could be obtained after negotiations. That was not the President's plan who wanted a merger without any negotiation. In 1961, the MANC joined the ranks of the Union Camerounaise. As in Assalé's bastion, the extension of the Union Camerounaise was very timid because the Premier was resisting dissolving his association, Ahidjo mounted pressure on him. Fearing to lose his prime ministerial post, Assalé convened a meeting of his association on September 8, 1962 in order to dissolve it (Kpwang Kpwang 1997, 300-303).

During the meeting, he called on his fellow members to join the Union Camerounaise. So, by will or by force, Cameroonians were to heed to the Maroua 1960 call for the building of the great national party which would be the single party. True to this logic, the UPC members were forced to join the Union Camerounaise as in 1962 their congress was brutally dispersed by the police under the pretext that the party "had publicly bailed out the rebellion" (Mbu Ettangondop 2004, 115; Bouopda 2006, 160-161). The suppression of the congress then compelled the members of the UPC to join the ranks of the Union Camerounaise. Some political parties such as the Parti des Démocrates of André Marie Mbida tried to resist the liquidation of multiparty politics but not for too long. Using some manoeuvres, they were compelled to toe the line since, in the 1965 federal parliamentary elections, they were unable to constitute a list of candidates. Their leaders understood that the parties represented nothing and decided to join the Union Camerounaise by themselves. In East Cameroon, everything was ready for the agenda to be completed.

One of the tricks used by Ahidjo to implement his hidden agenda was to form, with the KNDP of John Ngu Foncha, a "national united group" and a coordinating committee in the Federal House of Assembly. That was done after the reiteration, in November 1961, of the call for the building of a great national party. The appeal was welcomed favourably in West Cameroon. This was made possible by the internal problems that this federated state was experiencing. In the opinion of the KNDP, the opposition political party, the CNPC, was to dissolve and merge in the KNDP before the latter party could negotiate the deal of building a great national party with Ahidjo and his UC. In so doing, the leader of the KNDP, Foncha, was to be the lone interlocutor of Ahidjo in negotiation for the great national party. The party experienced serious dissensions when John Ngu Foncha resigned his office of Premier to be the vice-president of the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

As a matter of fact, the legitimate ambitions of his lieutenants for his succession and his desire not to be cut from his political basis generated some clashes which eventually led Solomon Tandeng Muna and Egbe Tabi to form the Cameroon United Congress (CUC). West Cameroon then had three political parties. The actions of the CPNC and the CUC weakened the position of the KNDP and gave way to Ahidjo to stand as the referee of the game. In that capacity, he mastered the situation. As West Cameroon politicians were dragging feet on the path of building the great national party, Ahidjo became impatient. On June 11, 1965, he convened the Premiers of the two federated states and the leaders of the three West Cameroon political parties in Yaoundé and explained to them the necessity of the single party for the good functioning of the Federation (Mbu Ettangondop 2004, 131). He succeeded in convincing them and they put up a committee in charge of elaborating the structures of the single party. Progressively, political parties of West Cameroon were dissolved and on September 1, 1966, the Cameroon National Union, the single party, was created. Ahidjo's dream had come true.

Cameroon was not the only African country that engaged in the one-party political system. It was the trend in Africa after independence. Virtually all African states established the one party system with the following arguments presented by Peter Wanyande (2000, 10-109). The multiparty system was foreign to Africa as it was of Western origin. Secondly, Africa, being underdeveloped, needed to concentrate on her economic development that needed the energy of all the citizens in one country. Multiparty politics was not conducive for such development. It would rather divide the energies of the populations with no positive effect. That is why, in Niger, the one party system was established at independence with the Parti Progressiste Nigérien (PPN) as the national wing of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) dominating until 1974 when Seyni Kountché overthrew Hamani Diori (Grémah 1999; Raynaut and Abba 1990, 16).

The existence of the single party was embedded in the constitution that Kountché suspended and ruled without political party till his death in 1987. Ali Saïbou took over and put in place the party state, the Mouvement National pour la Société de Développement (MNSD). It was the single party as provided by the constitution he put in place within the two years after taking power. When Benin acceded to independence Hubert Maga established the single party system that lasted only for three years. In 1963, a putsch ousted him and, since then, the country was raged by instability that culminated in 1972 with the advent of Mathieu Kérékou who, again, institutionalised the one party system with the Parti de la Révolution Populaire du Bénin (PRPB) (Magnusson 1996, 33). As in Niger, this political system was embedded in the constitution

put in place by Maga and Kérékou respectively. Here lies the difference with the system in Cameroon.

The establishment of the single party politics in Cameroon in 1966 was not preceded nor followed by any constitutional amendment. The 1961 federal constitutional still provided in his article 3 what follows:

The political parties and groups play a part in the expression of the suffrage. They shall be free to form and to carry on their activities within the limits established by law and regulations. They must respect the principles of democracy and national sovereignty (Enonchong 1967, 255).

This choice seemed not to contradict the will of Ahmadou Ahidjo who was a militant of democracy, but his own democracy, that is the “ruling democracy” he wanted for Cameroon. The argument for this brand of democracy is not different from the ideas that were advanced here and there in Africa in order to explain the choice of the single party system. African or Cameroonian democracy should not be a mere imitation of what is enforced in the West. In the words of Ahmadou Ahidjo, “freely, and in sovereign fashion; we have chosen democracy; but the democratic systems of the West and Eastern Europe are no products that can directly be exported to African countries” (Cameroon National Union 1976, 43). The “ruling democracy” needs unity which enables stability and the rule of an individual through the party that is accepted by all in a Presidential regime as Ahidjo himself asserted.

Our Presidential regime represents a double advantage for the State. First of all, it allows the Head of State to stand as a symbol of unity for an emerging nation. In second place, it allows the executive to play its full role as the driving force for national development in conformity with the national constitution which provides for both the separation and the collaboration of powers in a spirit of complementarity, as required of the whole civil service by its adhesion to one single party. It is in consideration of the latter point that we have described our political system as a ‘ruling democracy’, in contrast to the regimes where the executive is constantly paralysed by rifts of popular opinion [sic opinions] power struggles and conflicts of individual interests (Cameroon National Union 1976, 44-45).

In the “ruling democracy”, there is no competition. There is a single party that dominates. The party is the state party. With a state party, the party dominates all other institutions in the country. The institutions are used to promote the party that serves the interest of those who are in control. They control both the party and the state. It means therefore that the state party is out to promote the interests of the rulers which are opposed to national interests. As Peter Wanyande (2000, 113) has

observed it, in such a system, the gap between the rulers and the ruled has led those who control the state power to be repressive and less responsive to the wishes of the society which are not taken in consideration. The rulers instead use the various institutions, which are normally designed to promote national interest, as tools for the promotion of their 'parochial interests'. From 1966 to 1990, that is what Cameroonians got from the "ruling democracy". It has been the domination of the state party on the citizens who have nearly been enslaved for the interest of the party and its leaders.

The Second Phase of the Search for the Cameroonian Model of Democracy or the Building of the 'Advanced Democracy'

This phase of the search for the Cameroonian model of democracy is characterised by the resistance to the multiparty politics and the implementation of what has been termed 'advanced democracy', as result of mounting pressure. The "advanced democracy" is summed up as a democracy of the domination of the former state party.

The Advent of Multiparty Democracy in Africa

In the 1980s, Africa was stricken by a severe economic crisis which resulted in the bankruptcy in nearly all the countries of the continent. They had to resort to the Bretton Woods institutions. The general remedy prepared for bankrupt African countries is the implementation of the structural adjustment plan. The acceptance of this structural adjustment plan is the condition to be fulfilled before hoping to get any bilateral financial assistance. This adjustment plan is made of harsh economic measures which can yield disgruntlement. Facing this hard situation, African leaders were called upon to make progress in democracy before aspiring for financial support. That is what François Mitterrand utterly said in his opening speech during the France Africa summit that took place in La Baule in June 1990. He said that France would continue to help African countries but the help would be half-hearted for countries with authoritarian regimes and would be wholehearted for countries that would, with courage, embark on democratisation (Hugues 2007).

The Advent of Multiparty Democracy in Benin and Niger

Benin was the first African country to be swept by the 'democracy's third wave'. It is in this country that the maiden sovereign national conference was organised as from February 19, 1990. Robert Dossou (2000) has given a good account of the preparation, the sessions and the result of the Beninese national conference that ended on February 28, 1990.

From this account, one learns many things. The first is that, facing a difficult situation, the Beninese leaders decided to concert and dialogue before finding adequate solutions, hence, the national conference that framed the trajectory for democratisation. This forum set up new institutions which were transitory: the President was stripped of some of his former powers that went to the transitional Premier and the former National Assembly was replaced by the Haut Conseil de la République, the members of which were elected by the national conference. The transition period was to run from March 1, 1990 to March 1, 1991. During this period, the transitional institutions were to implement the decisions taken by the national conference, notably the drafting of the constitution by the committee appointed by the conference, the organisation of the constitutional referendum and the holding of various elections. On April 1, 1991, the new date of the end the transitional period as provided by the new constitution of December 1990, everything had been done. As can be seen, the new setting in Benin was the result of a confabulation and not the decision of an individual.

The new institutions have worked to their best, experiencing alternation, which is one fundamental principle of democracy. There have been some improvements, notably the creation, in 1995, of an independent body for the organisation of elections. That novelty came about as a result of the dialogue and consensus spirit which is the corner stone of the new political setting in Benin. The Beninese experience has been recorded as a success story. It is why it has been imitated in some African counties like Chad, Gabon Congo and Niger. The President of this latter country acknowledged the success and praised the Beninese for that undertaking in one of the opening speeches of the conference that took place in February 2000 in Cotonou to draw up the balance sheet of national conferences and democratic transitions. That is why the citizens of Niger claimed the organisation of such a conference in their country in 1991.

In Niger, the sovereign national conference opened on July 29, 1991 and lasted for ninety eight days. It should be recalled that, when the citizens of that country started their claim for democratisation, the ruling state party resisted. The first step in the resistance was the appointment of Mahamadou Halilou as the mediator whose duty was to improve relations between the State on the one hand and the trade unions and students on the other (Salifou 2000). The second step of the resistance resided in the move of the Head of State to alone decide on the advent of multiparty politics in Niger. As a matter of fact, facing mounting pressure, Ali Saïbou, on November 15, 1990, announced, during a meeting of what was then the steering committee of the single party that he opted for multiparty politics. On December 4, 1990, he added that nascent political parties could apply for temporary authorization before the revision of the constitution enabling their legalization. Those were

procrastinating measures that did not bring satisfaction to the demands of the protesters who intensified their actions that finally compelled the rulers in Niger to comply with the demand for the convening of a national conference. As in Benin, the national conference of Niger drew the balance sheet of the past and drew perspectives for the future. Transitional institutions were set up for 15 months including the Head of State whose powers were stripped in favour of the transitional Prime Minister appointed by the conference, Cheffou Amadou. There was also a transitional Parliament called the Haut Conseil de la République. The national conference adopted a charter for political parties and appointed a committee for the drafting of the new constitution.

The experience of Niger, *mutatis mutandis*, is also considered to be success story. This sounds like an overstatement as one can prove the contrary by asking the question as to why the process was interrupted by military coups. Of course Niger witnessed two coups with one bloody. This can be understood in the light of explanations put forward by Mamoudou Gazibo (2000). Benin received what has been called premium for democracy that helped the country in solving most of its financial difficulties, thus pre-empting actions like those witnessed by Niger. That was not the case for the latter country. Here, the national conference had nearly rejected the agreement with the Bretton Woods institutions without proposing any credible alternative. The financial difficulties of the country could but worsened and paralysed the actions of the Government.

As the constitution of Niger opted for the semi-presidential regime, the path was opened for instability, since political leaders were selfish and fought more for their interests which they could not identify with the national interests of Niger. The institutions were paralysed because the holders of each wanted the other to collapse hoping that the new situation will be advantageous. The paralysis of the institutions had a boomerang effect as the opportunity was given to the army to intervene and wipe out the humiliation it suffered during and after the national conference. The Nigeriens did not know that, in a country where the army had been part and parcel of the institutions, they were not to receive any harsh treatment. Instead they had to be cajoled and, by so doing, they could go back to their barracks and stay there without any temptation of returning to power. The Nigeriens learnt a good lesson from that sad experience. They applied it in 2000 when they decided to grant amnesty to the authors of the 1996 and 1999 coups. The return to civilian rule through election in 2000 resulted mainly from the spirit of dialogue and consensus established during the national conference. That can be considered as an asset for the experience of Niger. It is only the beginning of the Niger's experience that can be likened to that of Cameroon, as this country resisted the advent of the multiparty system.

The Advent of Multiparty Democracy in Cameroon

In 1982, Ahmadou Ahidjo resigned as Head of State and, as provided by the constitution, Paul Biya succeeded to the helm of Cameroon. The new President, on taking the oath of office declared that there would be continuity. It meant that he would continue with the “ruling democracy”. His predecessor remained at the helm of the single party. As it was a state party whose chairman used to be the Head of State and since there was confusion between the party and the State, problems arose. Cameroon was in a situation of political duality that generated the problem of pre-eminence between the party and the State. As long as one individual was the Head of State and the chairman of the party, the problem could not arise. As that was no more the case, any of the holders of the two positions could but interpret in his favour. The situation degenerated and an open crisis arose with the 1983 coup nipped in the bud and the 1984 aborted coup. Consequently, Ahmadou Ahidjo resigned from the chairmanship of the party. Paul Biya replaced him, then cumulating the two positions. We had come back to situation as it existed before 1982. In his new position, he transformed the CNU into the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) that became the state party. Apparently, the new party and its leaders had a foresight as to the advent of multiparty politics and took some anticipated measures in order to resist it. The first measure came in 1986 during the renewal of the basic organs of the ruling party that witnessed the plurality of candidates’ lists (Sindjoun 1997, 97).

In 1987, for the town council elections, the experience was renewed. It was likewise in 1988 for parliamentary elections. It is worth to notice that the very beginning of the experience was in November 1983. The electoral law governing the presidential election was amended, giving room for plurality of candidates. The context called for such a move. After the 1983 aborted coup, Biya was in search of legitimacy. In the CNU, only the party could invest a candidate for elections. Being the chairman of the party, he could not allow that challengers be invested. For the parliamentary and town council elections, the competition was within a party. This opening up was a smoke screen aimed at showing that there was democracy in the country. It was an anticipated resistance to the advent of the multiparty system in Cameroon. The argument was used in 1990 when the first attempts of creating new political parties were recorded.

In the first quarter of 1990, Yondo Mandengué Black, Albert Mukong, Anicet Ekanet and others were arrested in Douala putatively for having held illegal meetings and for having distributed tracts hostile to the Head of State and calling for violence (Ngniman 1993, 46; Sindjoun

1999, 86). This reason given for the arrest was a fake explanation since the actual cause was that the arrested persons wanted to form a political party. The move was illegal as there was a *de facto* single party system in Cameroon. These Cameroonians were tried before the military court so as to give credit to the official version of their arrest. They were sentenced to light imprisonment terms. That was a show of force that was designed to dissuade anybody who could embark on any move of creating a political party to challenge the state party and bring about multiparty system in Cameroon. As if the show was not sufficient, marches were organized in the main cities of the country to protest against multiparty system and to support the single party system. A mass for that sake was also celebrated in the Yaoundé cathedral bringing together Catholics, Protestants and even Moslems. The show of force was again staged on May 26, 1990, during the launching of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in Bamenda. It resulted in the killing of six Cameroonians. In the meantime, external pressure was growing and the speech of François Mitterrand at La Baule seems to be the last stroke that broke the camel's back.

From Resistance to the 'Advanced Democracy'

The single state party finally yielded to pressures coming from within and from without and accepted the multiparty democracy. But it tailored that democracy to suit the will of the rulers which can be expressed in the following terms: as multiparty politics has been forced into existence, the new system should be that of the domination of the ruling party. This domination would be carried out through adapted laws and bodies.

After the La Baule summit, the first ordinary congress of the CPDM opened in Yaoundé on June 28, 1990. During the congress, the chairman of the party asked his fellow comrades to get prepared for 'possible competition'.² The words used portrayed some hesitation which was another sign of resistance. The word possible does not give way to any assurance. What is possible can happen as it cannot happen. It means that, in the mind of the chairman of the CPDM, who doubled as Head of State, there was still hope that the advent of multiparty system in Cameroon could be pre-empted. Eventually, that was not the case and in December 1990, the single state party voted several laws, notably the law governing political parties. It is on the basis of this law that the first political parties were legalized in February 1991. Most of the political parties newly born claimed to be opposition parties. They immediately organized into the Coalition of opposition parties and claimed the convening of a sovereign national conference so as to assess the general

² Author's translation. The words he used in French were "éventuelle concurrence".

state of the nation and define major political, economic, social and cultural guidelines for the future. In reality, knowing what had been the outcome of the national conference in Benin, they nursed the idea of grasping some power. The ruling CPDM also knew what had happened in that country and was not willing to share power or to have a Head of State stripped of some of his powers. Moreover, in the “advanced democracy”, the CPDM regime had started putting in place, the state party was to single-handedly design everything. There was no way for dialogue and consensus.

The opposition mounted pressure on the government by organizing a country wide civil disobedience campaign and ghost towns operations which were marked by acts of violence and vandalism (Mbu Taku 1993, 44-81; Ngniman 1993, 88-95). In reaction, the Government took tough measures like the creation of operational commands in the provinces that had heeded to the opposition call. The country recorded many casualties as a result of the functioning of these operational commands. In the meantime, the economy was sinking and the state authority was weakened. In order to avoid the worse and hold firm its stand, the ruling CPDM government imagined a trick to trap the opposition. Instead of convening a national conference, Paul Biya convened a tripartite conference grouping the government, political parties and neutral personalities. Eboussi Boulaga (1997, 94-95) observed that most of those called independent personalities were members of the ruling CPDM who coalesced with the representatives of the Government. So, the forum that took place from October 30 to November 15, 1991 was dominated by the former state party. Its two-item agenda was to put in place mixed committees in charge of drafting the electoral law project and a project governing public media access to political parties. From the composition of the forum which was presided over by the Premier Sadou Hayatou, nothing revolutionary could be expected. The trick succeeded as, at the end of the tripartite conference, the Yaoundé Declaration was signed by the participants amongst whom the representatives of 40 out the 47 legalized political parties (Ngniman 1993, 194-195).

The Government took the engagement of lifting the ban on meetings and public manifestations and of dissolving the operational commands amongst other. The political parties, especially the opposition, signed to lift the call for civil disobedience and to respect the laws and regulations in force for their activities. The signatories of the Yaoundé Declaration also agreed on putting in place of a tripartite technical committee in order to prepare proposals relating to constitutional reform. The tension was eased in the country and that is what the Government wanted. It could go ahead with its agenda, one important item of which was the holding of parliamentary elections. A law was needed to govern the

elections. It was the duty of the parliament to vote such a law. It was incumbent on the CPDM parliament to vote that law and the subsequent others, notably the law governing presidential election.

Legislating in Favour of the Former State Party

The last session of the single state party parliament, that held in 1991, was of great importance as to the patterns of the Cameroonian future political landscape. It had to lay the foundation of the “advanced democracy” put in place by the single party Government.

The first draft bill proposed was the one governing the election of parliamentarians. During the discussions, the idea of enfranchising Cameroonians of nineteen years old was put forward as being the general opinion and call from the nation. The idea was rejected and the twenty years proposed by the draft bill was considered. In explaining their choice, the parliamentarians argued that the recent experience had shown that youths were not so responsible persons since they were at the forefront of civil disobedience and violence. The truth is that they feared the sanction vote of the youths. This category had been severely touched by the economic crisis and unemployment and was very disgruntled. Enfranchising too much of them was a risk of giving votes to the opposition that could dominate the political landscape. For the CPDM to dominate, it was good to enfranchise only a few of this category. The law that was finally voted by the parliament gave way to gerrymandering and rigging. Article 3 of that law promulgated on December 16, 1991, provided that the constituency was the division. But some constituencies could be specially carved out given their particular situation.

In the 1992 snapped parliamentary elections, there was no special constituency. The ruling CPDM won no seat in the North West province, the stronghold of the SDF. In the 1997 parliamentary elections, Bali Kumbat was carved out of the Ngo-Ketunja Division as special constituency. There, the CPDM candidate was the Fon of Bali Kumbat who used his traditional influence to win the lone seat in competition, giving the CPDM one parliamentarian in the whole North-West province. Thence, the CPDM claimed to be the only national political party as it has a parliamentarian in all the provinces contrary to other political parties that were regional. For the upcoming twin elections, the Head of State, who is the chairman of the CPDM, once more resorted to gerrymandering. This time around, he touched the bastions of all opposition political parties.

In the North West province, the stronghold of the SDF, Mezam, Donga-Mantung, Momo and Menchum divisions were carved out into at least two constituencies each. The Noun division, stronghold of the Cameroon

Democratic Union (CDU) that won the five seats since 1997, the Magba special constituency was carved out with one seat. From all indications Magba seemed to be a stronghold of the CPDM in the Noun division. The official explanation given to this carving out of special constituencies is that there was a will of bringing the rulers nearer to the ruled. As to give force to this argument, it was said that even the bastions of the CPDM had been carved out. The true story is that the regime wanted to favour the ruling party. The law governing parliamentary elections provided in articles 5 and 6 that elections are carried out according to the list ballot. The list that obtains the absolute majority wins all the seats of the constituency. In case the winning list has a relative majority, it will be allocated have of the seats and the rest of seats will be allocated proportionally to the other lists. The special constituencies have been carved out in consideration of the results the CPDM has obtained in past elections. It was expected that the trend would be the same and then the ruling CPDM would have seats in the divisions carved out. The argument of bringing the administration nearer to the ruled can therefore be easily be rejected. The carving out of constituency in CPDM bastions was a means of healing wounds provoked by the recent renewal of basic organs of the ruling party. It is with the same additional intention that new town councils had been created

For the town council elections, new councils were created on April 22, 2007, two days after the convening of the electorate. That was a glaring foul play. This was normally to be done before the convening of the electorate. It was not the first time that the regime played foul in favour of the ruling party. In 1997, the town council elections were won in Bamenda, Limbe, Kumba Bafoussam and Garoua by the opposition. The Head of State appointed CPDM officials at the helm of these councils, therefore transforming the defeat of his party into a victory (Ngoh 2001, 34).

In the 1992 snapped parliamentary elections, the CPDM failed to win the absolute majority of the competed 180 seats so as to rule without any ally. An alliance was concluded with the Mouvement Démocratique pour la Défense de la République (MDR). The alliance was later extended to the UPC and the National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP). In the alliance, the three political parties contributed to legislating in favour of the former state party. In the process, they also had their interests to defend. An illustration is given with the September 1992 extraordinary session of the parliament convened in order to vote the law governing presidential election. The draft bill submitted provided for a one round single candidate ballot. Moreover, the president, who had a five years term, was re-eligible and the candidates should have resided for the past three years preceding the election in Cameroon (Ngniman 1993, 259).

The final bill voted by the parliament changed the residency clause. That was as the result of negotiations with the NUDP that was out for a two round election. Since its chairman, Bello Bouba Maigari planned to be his party's candidate and had resided in Cameroon only for the past thirteen months, the draft disqualified him. So, the deal with CPDM stated that the residency clause be reduced from three years to one year and that the one round ballot should be kept (Sindjoun 1997, 100). The same bill provided that a candidate could not be invested by more than one party. This clause was aimed at preventing a unique opposition candidate and therefore worked in favour of the ruling CPDM. In the snapped presidential election that took place on October 1992, Biya won with 39.97% as against 35.96% for Ni John Fru Ndi. The latter blamed his defeat on electoral rigging that was once more blamed in 1997 when the CPDM won the parliamentary elections with 116 out the 180 seats. The opposition started claiming for the creation of an independent electoral body to manage the elections in Cameroon for the sake of transparency. It is on this move that the SDF and the CDU boycotted the 1997 presidential election arguing the refusal of the government to put in place such a body that was in existence in countries like Benin. The government refusal was based on the grounds that it did not want imported models. But finally it yielded to mounting pressures. In putting in place the body, it again made sure that it would not work against the ruling party.

In 2000, the parliament voted the bill creating a body in charge of supervising elections in Cameroon. That was the National Elections Observatory better known by its French acronym, ONEL. ONEL was imported from Senegal where it was put in place in 1997. How is it that those who opposed imported models should suddenly import one? That is a million dollars question the answer of which can only be found in the will of the rulers to legislate in favour of the domination of the ruling party. The government could import only a model harmless to the ruling party. That can only be understood in the light of the context of the creation on the Senegalese ONEL as presented by Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salem (2000).

In Senegal, ONEL was accepted by Abdou Diouf and his political party only as a means of pre-empting the creation of the independent body that was claimed by the opposition. The independent body asked for was to take care of the whole electoral process from the registration on electoral rolls to the proclamation of the results. It seemed to be disadvantageous to the ruling party that refused such a model. As the opposition insisted, the government finally yielded to the demands by appointing a committee made up of independent personalities and experts that was in charge of presiding over discussions grouping all the

political parties of Senegal. It is on the basis of the work done by this committee that Abdou Diouf created ONEL, the role of which was merely to supervise and control election. ONEL had no power. Surprisingly, thanks to the commitment of its members to democracy and neutrality, ONEL produced spectacular results. It tremendously contributed to the 2000 alternation in Senegal.

The Cameroonian ONEL also had no power. It was out only to supervise and control elections. ONEL in Cameroon was not created on the basis of discussions between political parties. It was a single-handed creation of the government with the blessings of the CPDM dominated parliament. The Cameroonian ONEL members could not be credited of impartiality. Its maiden president, Enoch Kwayeb, was a CPDM member. What could one expect as neutrality from such a president? As ONEL had no credit and the opposition still claimed a real independent body, the government, still under pressure, opted for the creation of Elections Cameroon (ELECAM). The draft bill for ELECAM gave the impression that it was a real independent body as it has the task of organising, managing and supervising the whole electoral process in Cameroon. But as elections were around the corner in Cameroon, the government provided in article 42 of the draft that before the putting in place of the body, ONEL and the administration would continue to organise elections. The clause was understood as a procrastinating measure illustrating the will of the government not to accept an independent body for the management of elections. Since the CPDM enjoyed the majority in the Parliament, nothing could counter the voting of the bill. Facing the protestation of the opposition that staged a walk out, the government changed the clause by giving 18 months for the putting in place of ELECAM. As elections had been convened for July 22, 2007, the administration would again work in favour of the ruling party. That is the 'advanced democracy' on the move.

Conclusion

All in all, Cameroon, since independence, has been searching for its own model of democracy. That democracy was to be its own brand and not an imported model. The first stage was the institution of the "ruling democracy". This brand was characterized by the establishment of the single party system designed to assure the domination of a handful of individuals through the sole political party that identified itself with the State. The one party system was the general model for Africa. But in comparison with Benin and Niger, Cameroon had a particular model. The Cameroon exception lay in the fact that the system was a *de facto* one party system as the constitution still provided for multiparty politics. In the 1990s, Cameroon was forced into the multiparty system. As the

rulers did not want the new system, they instituted the “advanced democracy” that aimed at insuring the domination of the ruling party which was the former state party. All the legislations have been worked out in that spirit. In comparison with Benin and Niger, the striking difference lies in the absence of dialogue in Cameroon. As in these countries changes were carried out through dialogue, in Cameroon the government shied away from dialogue, preferring to dictate. That accounts a lot for the absence of alternation at the helm of the state. The “advanced democracy” that succeeded the “ruling democracy” seems not to differ from the former since it is still the domination of a party. The “advanced democracy” seems to be equivalent to the multiparty system which is far from true democracy when assessed with the criteria given for democracy by Peter Wanyande. The prospect is that ELECAM should guarantee freedom, transparency and fairness of elections. Consequently, there can be hope for alternation and for subsequent real dialogue needed by democracy.

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