

11

Philosophy, Democracy and Development: History and the Case of Cameroon

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Introduction

'Development' is the most important among the key terms of the above title as it is the aim that both 'Philosophy' and 'Democracy' are brought in to achieve. Talking about development, it is necessary first to consider the preconditions of development in general, irrespective of the entity whose development is in question. In general, we can consider development as purposive (teleological) growth. Mere evolution in time and space cannot properly be described as development. Left on its own, anything whatsoever will evolve in some way or other in time and space. The first precondition of development as distinguished from mere evolution is a clear and viable aim or purpose. Thus development is a *teleological* concept. As humans we optimally lead our lives according to pre-established goals and purposes; that is why the second precondition of development requires a blueprint – a well thought out series of measures and procedures – for achieving the end in question. The first generation of modern African thinkers, many of whom also happened to have been political leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor, Sékou Touré, and others, seem to have made noteworthy efforts in this regard. The third precondition requires an enabling environment for achieving the aim or purpose in question, for to choose an end or aim is to choose every means necessary for the achievement of that aim. To choose an aim and to balk at the only means necessary for achieving it is either not to have chosen the end with conviction or simply to exercise bad faith.

With this in mind, the question can now be posed: What is the purpose of development in general? To suggest a general answer to a general question, I would say that development is to be understood as a set of collective and individual decisions that ultimately lead to increased human, economic, political and cultural welfare for all persons in society according to the dictates of the most advanced

knowledge and technology available. In brief, let us say that the goal of development is greater human, material, technological and cultural welfare. Some countries have indeed experienced these evolutionary trends over the centuries as is the case with the world's most advanced technological nations.

It is my contention that, in the present state of human evolution, a liberal and democratic system is an important precondition for development geared towards human wellbeing. And this being the case, the main reasons for the developmental failures of African countries must be looked for in their democratic failures. Efforts at democratisation in Africa, which started in earnest in the early 1990's, following what was termed the 'wind of change blowing from Eastern Europe', where totalitarian governing structures seemed to collapse overnight, have largely failed, with only a few notable exceptions. Democratisation is, in my view, the horse, as it were, that must be placed before the cart of African development, prosperity and well being.

The evident failure of democracy in present-day Africa and the triumph of dictatorship, under various guises, in most parts of Africa, need little demonstration. With very few arguably possible exceptions, such as South Africa, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya (?), Nigeria (?), attempts at democratisation in contemporary Africa (mostly externally instigated by key Western nations such as Britain and the United States) have not only failed but also brought some of the countries to a situation of civil war or to the brink of total disintegration and an increase in human suffering and misery, by comparison with the past. In a country like Cameroon, with which I have direct first hand familiarity, and which can be said to have had one of the best chances of effecting a peaceful postcolonial transition from dictatorship to pluralistic democracy, on account of a fairly resilient domestic economy and elements of both Anglophone liberal thinking and Francophone centralist practice, this failure has been very obvious, in spite of what superficial observation or governmental rhetoric might mislead one to believe. Cameroon has managed to avoid civil war and to stay relatively peaceful in a region characterised by strife and turbulence; it has also managed to avoid famine and the more glaring manifestations of poverty. But this situation is due more to sheer chance than to deliberate political policy or action, as my analysis below will attempt to demonstrate.

My initial hunches for explaining the failure of democratisation in Africa revolve around the following non-exhaustive factors:

- Absence of genuine democratic structures.
- Failure to modernise traditional structures, habits and patterns of thought.
- Failure to properly domesticate and indigenise borrowed structures and modes of thought.
- Absence of the genuine political will to democratise.
- Availability of an inexhaustible stock of immunising tactics and subterfuges to incumbent dictators.
- Connivance of very influential external governments, agencies and persons.

African Systems and the Structures of Democracy

If we understand democratic structures in the modern setting as including, *inter alia*, such things as a system in which there is separation of powers between those who make laws, those who execute them, and those charged with punishing infringements of the law; as a system in which all citizens without any exception are equally subject to the same laws; as a system which guarantees freedom of thought and expression; a system where the will of the majority holds sway on contentious issues but where the rights of minorities are protected by law; a system where fundamental human rights are respected and protected; a system, most importantly, where power is subject to strict controls and regular periodic renewal or change of mandate, then it needs no arguing that most post-independence African countries have failed in practising democracy. Some of such structures existed in the precolonial traditional governing systems of Africa, in spite of the fact that most were monarchies in which change at the top could come only at the passing of the incumbent.

Most modern African governing systems would seem to have borrowed from the traditional past the principle of non-change at the helm of power without also modernising the traditional strict control of power wielded by the pre-colonial kings. For that reason, heads of African states have been mostly *de facto* monarchs wielding power without any checks and balances, power without any responsibility. If we needed to exemplify, we could consider heads of state such as Sese Seko Mobutu of Zaire, Jean-Bedel Bokasa of Central African Republic, Houphouet Boigny of Ivory Coast, Gyasimbe Eyadema of Togo, Omar Bongo of Gabon and Paul Biya of Cameroon. On the other hand, most African countries have also borrowed from the industrialised Western countries the idea of multi-parties (usually based within the Western context on different ideologies) as one of the structures of democracy, without any attempt to indigenise it in line with local conditions. The result in many cases has been the multiplication of political parties along ethnic and sectarian lines, leading to a cacophony of divisions and civil strife.

Democracy in Africa need not necessarily follow Western models or paradigms, some of whose elements are in fact only dubiously democratic. If we consider, for instance, the effects of the use of money, paid propaganda and the skilful manipulation of public opinion on 'democratic' choices, then some Western democracies are only superficially democratic. Democracy in any actual context needs to adapt itself to the culture, world-view, values, customs and practices of the society in question, as long these do not contradict the fundamentals of democracy. Democracy is also, in principle, quite possible within a non-party¹ or a one-party system.² It is a well-known fact that public decision-making in traditional Africa was usually effected by the method of consensus, which in no way implied unanimity or total agreement, but rather an exhaustive discussion of differences, the recognition of the irreconcilable ones, and the fashioning of a way forward which permitted the suspension of disagreements. Such a procedural method if appropriately modernised could be quite compatible with democratic values. Julius Nyerere sufficiently demonstrated this with his idea of *UJAMAA*. But democracy, anywhere at any

time, must necessarily subscribe to democratic values translated into and sustained by democratic structures.

Political and Moral Egalitarianism

Political egalitarianism is one of the enabling conditions of democracy. One of the fundamental assumptions of an egalitarian system is the moral equality of all human beings as human, without individuating differentiations; the equality of all citizens of society as citizens. All humans, *qua* human, are equal because they have a common defining characteristic – their humanity. The equality of human beings does not imply that they have the same descriptive or individuating characteristics; those are rather what distinguish one human being from another. But all humans are equal in the sense that on the basis of their humanness they are accorded the basic human rights of freedom and moral equality. We describe such equality as **moral equality** to distinguish it from other putative types of equality. It is such equality which in the political domain justifies the rule of law and the policy of ‘one person one vote’. By simple extension, it is this sense of equality which imposes respect for minority groups within any community.

We may describe a meritocratic system as one in which every individual is endowed with moral equality and is freely able to be justly held responsible or compensated for personal activities regarding the wellbeing of society in general. Although some human societies can be described as ‘individualistic’ and others as ‘communalistic’, every society must to some extent or other combine communalistic and individualistic elements. Few individuals seek to survive outside a community, while any community endures only by virtue of the collective and individual efforts and contributions of its members. From this perspective, it is perfectly possible to combine the best values of a communalistic outlook with those of an individualistic orientation.

Meritocracy is one of the indispensable road companions of democracy and development. In a meritocracy, subjective data, such as birth place, ethnicity, parentage, province of origin, gender, religious, political or ideological affiliation, etc. do not count in selection and reward procedures. However, a meritocratic system can indeed accommodate social gestures that attempt at righting or minimising past wrongs and discrimination inflicted on identifiable groups, through some form or other of affirmative action. The rationale employed in this instance is certainly based on the concept of fairness.

I would therefore say that a democracy is any system underpinned by the interconnected values and ideas of liberty or freedom and equality, that permits periodic change of leadership without bloodshed or violence. The indispensable structures and indices of a liberal democratic system include: the rule of law, separation of the main types of civil powers, freedom of thought and association, freedom of expression, respect of human rights, broadly consensual rules for belonging to, living and operating within the collectivity (usually spelled out in a constitution), clear consensual rules for accessing and vacating positions of power (usually elaborated in an electoral code), and fair practices in the social, political and economic spheres.

History, Democracy and African Dictatorships

It needs to be recognised that pure dictatorships, that is, power without any internal controls, checks and balances, were introduced in Africa by Western colonialism. Colonialism was a system based on the imposition and acceptance of superiority – that of the coloniser over the colonised. Before the colonial intervention, many African governing systems were traditional monarchies, many of which seem, by design or accident, to have struck a viable balance between autocracy and democracy, thanks to the ritualised control of power. Within such systems, extensive powers were accorded the monarch but only on trust and in reciprocity. There was strict control of power through ritual taboos, some institutions and personalities of high moral integrity, such as *kwifon*, *ngwerong*, *takumbeng nngang*, priests/priestesses, sages, medicine persons, diviners, etc., to cite examples from the traditional kingdoms of the Western grassland areas of Cameroon. In such kingdoms, ritual safeguarding and protection were ensured for the land (kingdom) as distinct from the king, for the ordinary person, the departed ancestors, and the as-yet-unborn. Such controls acted as an effective block against dictatorial or arbitrary abuse or misuse of power and authority.

Within such settings, the privileges of power and authority were counter-balanced by its heavy responsibilities, restrictions and dangers. In traditional Africa, a monarch could sometimes be subjected to a public act of atonement for a mistake, transgression or taboo wittingly or otherwise broken or violated, as was witnessed quite recently (1989) with Ngaa' Bifon III, the Fon of the Kingdom of Nso', who reigned from 1983-1993. As an institution, the African king was often symbolically considered immortal, but as a person not only mortal but fragile, wherefore, the title *kimforkir* (fragility) accorded to some of the Fons of the Nso' kingdom. In some extreme cases, when the traditional monarch's continued rule was considered particularly dangerous or ruinous for the collectivity, he could be escorted into exile (usually by the women) as happened quite recently (2004) in the Fondom (Kingdom) of Babanki-Tungo (alias Big Babanki) in the Western grasslands area of Cameroon. In extreme cases, the monarch may be punished with death, as in fact eventually happened with the Fon of Babanki-Tungo (January 2006) when he sneaked back from exile into the Fondom and was promptly beaten to death and gruesomely burned on the borders of the village.

With only a few notable exceptions, most post-independence ruling regimes in Africa are pure dictatorships, co-extensive with the colonial regimes they replaced. Furthermore, the economic and political problems encountered by many of the post-colonial nations of Africa lead many to reflect negatively on the decolonisation process. Consider, for example, the serious problems experienced in the countries now known as the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and the Sudan.

Under Western pressures, many African dictatorships are today successfully masquerading behind democratic rhetoric, slogans and symbolism. Such phantom democracies are presently flourishing, particularly in Francophone Africa (Togo, Gabon, Burkina-Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea), for reasons that must

have some connection with the administrative structure, manner and style of French colonialism and subsisting neo-colonialism. But genuine democratic systems, erected on firm democratic foundations and structures, are an indispensable pre-condition for peaceful and enduring development anywhere.

It, however, needs to be pointed out that multi-partyism and democratic elections, often brandished as proofs of democracy, by themselves, are not necessarily signs of a genuine democratic system. In Cameroon, for example, the ruling regime constantly brandishes the peaceful nature of the numerous 'democratic' elections it has conducted since the early 1990s, and the fact that there are more than two hundred registered political parties, as a sign that Cameroon's democracy is highly advanced. Elections by themselves, even when patently democratic, are not necessarily signs of democracy itself. They may only help to replace one autocratic tyrant with another, or, more usually, confirm the incumbent autocrat in his office. The problem is not just with lack of democratic elections but rather with the highly centralised and authoritarian governing systems, which give no real chance for a peaceful and genuine alternation of power. We have seen recently in Togo, where a long reigning dictator, on the approach of his natural death, arranged with the army to use every means, including ostensibly 'democratic' means to install his son as his successor. What difference could be expected in a country like Gabon, whose minister of the armed forces is the son while the minister of finance is the daughter of the incumbent 'democratically elected' president, were the latter to follow his former Togolese counterpart to the great beyond? Izu Marcel Onyeocha³ has advanced very plausible reasons as to why he considers the structure of multi-party democracy without qualifications as fundamentally unsuitable for a country like Nigeria.

As a consequence of the lack of genuine democracy, Africa is today a crises-ridden continent, politically, economically, sociologically and culturally. And yet, it can be said that Africa abounds in natural resources of whatever dimension. With these endowments one would expect under normal circumstances that the continent would have been well on the way towards serious economic growth and general development. So, what is the genesis and what are the causes of the present problematic of Africa, and what sustainable solutions are available or may be prescribed?

Cameroon: Africa in Miniature

For the purposes of this chapter, allow me to focus attention on three crisis areas, namely, politics, ecology and conflict, each and all of which are highly subversive of development. I will, further, use Cameroon as my focal case and paradigm, mainly because I happen to have first-hand experience of the social scientific situation in the Cameroon, and also because Cameroon is actually in many ways paradigmatic of the rest of Africa. Cameroon is, veritably, in many ways, Africa in Miniature, as some Cameroonians are wont to call it. In Cameroon, all the macroscopic problems of Africa as well as its potentialities and possibilities seem to be present. This country is the meeting, if not melting, pot of the colonial legacies of leading ex-colonial nations of the world such as Germany, Britain and France.

Lying in Equatorial Africa, between Latitudes 2° and 13° north of the Equator, Cameroon occupies a surface area of 475,000km², with an estimated population of approximately 16.5 million inhabitants. Cameroon's neighbours are many and varied. To the west is Nigeria, 'the giant' of Africa, with whom she shares the whole length of her western border; to the north, Niger and Chad, with whom, together with Nigeria, she shares the Lake Chad basin; to the east, the Central African Republic; to the south, Congo Brazzaville, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. The south-western end of Cameroon opens out onto the Bight of Biafra in the Gulf of Guinea within the Atlantic Ocean, with a coastline of over 350km. The Cameroon Mountain (Mount Fako), on the south west extremity is the highest peak in West and Central Africa (4070 meters), an active volcano which last erupted in 2003.

Cameroon also has about 34 crater lakes, some of which like Nyos (21 August 1986) and Manoun (15 August 1984) emitted lethal gases which killed hundreds of humans and animals. Quite surprisingly, the cause of these occasional massive lethal gas releases has not been firmly and convincingly established and, even more surprisingly, the Cameroon authorities have sometimes shown only lukewarm interest in the issue, leaving ordinary citizens to engage in the wildest of speculations. Research teams from several Western countries which rushed in and collected data following the 1986 Nyos disaster met for an international conference in 1989 in Cameroon's capital city, Yaounde, but dispersed in disarray over serious disagreements. It is only quite recently (January 1996) that an American scientist came up with, at last, a plausible-sounding scientific explanation of these lake gas disasters.⁴ Only since then has some system of monitoring the lakes to ensure safety been introduced.

Cameroon's geographical, biological, historical, linguistic and cultural diversity leaves out little that is of real significance elsewhere on the African continent. The major ecosystems and climatic zones, the flora and fauna of the continent are all to be found in Cameroon; so are the different Central African peoples, from the Twa of the south-east extremity of Cameroon through the coastal Bantu speaking communities, through the Sudanese of the savannah middle-belt to the Arabic speakers of the Sahel-encroaching extreme north. Cameroon's population is also composed of almost equal proportions of ethnic religions (39%), Christians (40%) and Islamic (21%). This is a near-perfect case of that triple heritage that theorists such as Nkwame Nkrumah and Ali Mazrui have written about – where African, Euro-Christian and Islamic values meet and mix.

In terms of economic resources, Cameroon is self-sufficient in domestic food production and produces for export most of what are also produced elsewhere in Africa: cocoa, coffee, tea, banana, groundnut, palm-produce, cotton, timber, rubber, petroleum, etc. With a plethora of indigenous languages and corresponding ethnic cultures, and with French and English as official national languages, Africa's rich linguistic and cultural diversity finds an obvious instantiation in Cameroon. Now, why should an African country with such a profile as Cameroon's be the failure that it has been in all domains of development except perhaps the game of football?

Cameroon in History

Douala is Cameroon's biggest coastal city. According to historians, one of the kings of the Douala area of Cameroon (King Bell) signed a commercial treaty with the English in 1856. Subsequently, all the kings of the Douala area wrote a joint letter to Queen Victoria, inviting England to establish a 'protectorate' over their area. But as her Britannic Majesty was tardy in answering, the Douala kings, in disappointment, turned to the Germans who quickly set up a 'protectorate' in 1884. The English later arrived (a few weeks too late!) with a mandate from Queen Victoria to do what the Germans had just done but, to their disappointment, they saw the German flag already flying triumphantly in the Douala breeze.

At the 'carving up of Africa' Berlin Conference of 1884, Germany's colonial lordship over Cameroon was confirmed by the other colonial powers. The Germans set up their capital at Buea, on the slopes of Mount Cameroon (Fako), with its relatively mild climate, free from mosquitoes, and, from there, consolidated their grip over the rest of what came to be known as Kamerun. The peace-loving peoples of the coastal areas were easily bought over with exotic gifts and promises but the politically well organised kingdoms of the hinterland had to be subdued by military force. By the eve of the First World War (1914), the Germans were in total colonial control of the territory. But when the Germans were defeated in the war, they lost Cameroon along with all of their other African colonies. The League of Nations took control and placed the western part of Cameroon under British mandate and the eastern part under French mandate, an arrangement which the United Nations maintained in 1945, when Germany again lost the Second World War and the United Nations Organisation (UNO) replaced the League of Nations.

The British administered their own areas of Cameroon, which came to be known as 'British Cameroons', composed of 'Northern Cameroons' and 'Southern Cameroons', from Lagos, as a part of Nigeria, their largest African colony. 'Northern Cameroons' was administratively attached to the Northern Region and 'Southern Cameroons' to the Eastern Region of Nigeria. In the area under French mandate ('French Cameroons'), agitation for independence started in 1948 when the UPC (Union des Populations du Cameroun) was formed. The programme of the UPC was centred on the slogan 'Immediate Independence and Unification'. The French colonials were not amused. They brutally suppressed the UPC and it went underground. Some of its militants escaped to 'Southern Cameroons'. The UPC rebellion continued in 'French Cameroons' especially in the Bassa and Bamiléké regions through 'independence' which the French 'granted' on January 1st 1960. The country became known as La République du Cameroun. The rebellion was not, however, definitively crushed until around 1971.

Meanwhile, in Cameroon under British mandate, parliamentary democracy had been established and was flourishing, with several parties in lively and healthy competition. The first ever elections organised in the territory were won by the KNC (Kamerun National Convention) which formed a government under the leadership of Dr. E.M.L. Endeley. In 1959, the ruling party lost heavily in another election to

the opposition party, KNDP (Kamerun National Democratic Party), and John Ngu Foncha headed a new government.

Nigeria gained her own independence on 1 October 1960 as a Federal Republic. At that point, the United Nations proposed a plebiscite in Cameroon under British mandate with two options: (a) Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Federal Republic of Nigeria? or (b) Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent La République du Cameroun? The plebiscite took place on 11 February 1961, and 'Southern Cameroonians' voted overwhelmingly (70.49%) to achieve independence by joining La République du Cameroun while 'Northern Cameroonians' opted for remaining as a part of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

After the plebiscite, a constitutional conference was held in the border town of Foumban between 'Southern Cameroons' and 'La République du Cameroun' during which a Federal system was agreed upon with a provision (Article 49) that any attempt to abolish the federal structure would be null and void. And so the 'Federal Republic of Cameroon' was born, composed of two federated states: West Cameroon (with its capital at Buea) and East Cameroon (with its capital at Yaoundé).

Things went on fairly smoothly in the 'Federal Republic of Cameroon', a multi-cultural and officially bilingual (French and English) country with three parliaments, two legal systems (Common Law and Napoleonic Law), two educational systems, two administrative systems and two peoples with different colonial experiences, orientations and outlooks, trying to understand and learn from each other in a bold experiment in modern nation building.

But in 1966, Ahmadou Ahidjo, the leader of 'East Cameroon' (former La République du Cameroun), who was now the President of the Federal Republic while John Ngu Foncha, the leader of 'West Cameroon' (former Southern Cameroons) was the Vice President, deceived the leaders of all the other political parties into sinking their differences to merge into a single party for the purported end of accelerated development and unity. The result was the CNU (Cameroon National Union). Now under a one-party state, Ahidjo moved fast and decisively to assume dictatorial powers and to set up a highly efficient network of state repression and espionage. Then in 1972, he organised what he called a 'referendum' proposing a unitary state. Not surprisingly, his proposal 'won' by 99.99 per cent of the votes supposed to have been cast, thanks to the ubiquitous 'Préfets' and their even more ubiquitous security arm, the 'gendarmes'. Then, by decree, Ahidjo changed the name of the country from 'Federal Republic of Cameroon' to 'United Republic of Cameroon'⁵.

Ten years later, in 1982, Ahidjo suddenly resigned, for reasons that remain mysterious up to the present, and handed over power to one of his most loyal collaborators, Paul Biya. In 1984, Paul Biya, without any further ado, issued a decree reverting the name of the country to 'La République du Cameroun', the name of French East Cameroon before Reunification! This was variously interpreted either as an act of unilateral secession from the union by 'East Cameroon' or as an act of

annexation and assimilation of 'West Cameroon' into 'East Cameroon'. The effects of these dictatorial actions have ever since been shaping politics in Cameroon.

Ahidjo had resolutely kept Cameroon out of both La Francophonie and the Commonwealth. Biya did not hesitate to take Cameroon into La Francophonie and, to mitigate the political implications and consequences of this action, has recently (November 1995) also taken Cameroon into the Commonwealth. But, since the main preoccupation of La Francophonie, as so clearly stated by the late President François Mitterand and reaffirmed by his successor, Jacques Chirac, is to fight 'Anglo-Saxon cultural imperialism', while that of the Commonwealth is, without doubt, to spread it, it is clear that Cameroon is in a rather untenable position as a member of both.

My own suggestion, relative to Cameroon's chequered history is that the country should *first* symbolically revert its name simply to KAMERUN or to some new historical name to remind us of why two territories with very different colonial histories ever thought of merging to form one country, and then second, tidy up and lay afresh the constitutional foundations of a potential nation that would be culturally, economically and politically committed to its peoples in particular and to Africa in general, without being entangled in the tiresome wooing game of the ex-colonial powers. The question is this: in what way do the divisive notions of Anglophonie or Francophonie assist in the struggle for African development?

Crisis Profile

In spite of its remarkable human and natural resources and potentialities, Cameroon is today one of Africa's cases of failure: economically, politically and ecologically. These failures are fundamentally founded and grounded on dictatorship and the absence of democracy. Cameroon's economy, which, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, was being rated with triple A's by international experts as one of the most promising on the entire African continent, has been ruined by shady mismanagement, large-scale executive fraud, ever falling prices of primary products in the world market, and a fall in domestic production levels. Since 1987, when the negative results started becoming rather palpable, the leadership of Paul Biya progressively increased its promises and assurances to turn around the economy in direct proportion to the progressively worsening situation, backed by annual declarations of sighting the light at the end of the economic tunnel.

Ecologically, the encroachment of the Sahara Desert on Cameroon's northernmost region has continued unabated with only occasional token attempts at fighting it. Cameroon's appreciable reserves of tropical forests have also been depleted at an alarming rate by both piecemeal local activities and large scale commercial logging. Today, while the trend in other parts of the world is to protect and preserve forests for environmental and global ecological reasons, there are about 112 government licensed logging companies in Cameroon, frantically destroying the forests with careless abandon. As recently as July 1995, the Cameroon Government, within the propagandistic context of convincing the World Bank, the IMF and Cameroonians

in general that it is capable and soon about to revive the dying economy, has been boasting that wood is now Cameroon's second foreign exchange earner after petroleum and is even poised to take the lead in the near future.⁶ An indirect effect of deforestation is that it is increasingly affecting overall rainfall and water for both domestic and industrial usage. Some experts are predicting that, by the year 2050, there will be no more forests left in Cameroon. But from what I have myself personally witnessed, I do not think that Cameroon's forests could survive the next two decades at the present rate of exploitation.

Cameroon also faces pollution through improper or non-disposal of urban domestic and industrial waste. Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital city, for instance, until quite recently, ranked amongst the least efficiently maintained cities in the world. Oil exploitation in Cameroon has always been shrouded in secrecy, but its effects on the ecology of the south-western areas where it is carried out can be no different from that on the Ogoni lands just across the border, to which international attention was recently drawn by the efforts of the Nigerian writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa, murdered in 1995 by the Abacha regime. On both sides, it is a clear case of foreign interests in alliance with a corrupt dictatorship trampling, with arrogance, on the rights, safety, security and survival of helpless local peoples. An oil pipe line, nearly 1000 kilometres long has now also been laid from Chad through the whole length of Cameroon to the coastal town of Kribi. The environmental concerns and consequences of this project have constantly been swept under the carpet by the Cameroon government and the American companies responsible for it.

Politically, the process of democratisation in Cameroon, which seemed to be on course from 1990, following the launching of an opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), got arrested in 1992, when the regime in power evidently lost the presidential elections but decided, with the support of the French government, which seemed afraid that its interests would not be protected under a new democratic regime led by an Anglophone, to stay put in power. At the time, the French interior Minister clearly stated that France was not ready to accept an Anglophone President in Cameroon. French policy in Africa is no secret to anybody. In stark terms, the French, by contrast with their other comrades in colonialism and empire-building, have never decolonised their own territories where the others, at least, did so by substitution with remote control mechanisms or arrangements. In all French colonies, 'independence' was simply a euphemism for a blatant political fraud. This is the causal background for French support and maintenance of dictatorships in preference to democratically elected leaders in Africa.

Since 1992, Cameroon has remained in a state of political uncertainty and uneasiness in spite of 'democratic' elections, continuing government rhetoric and periodic declarations about reviving the economy and advancing the democratic process. The dictatorship in Cameroon has been unwilling to yield to genuine democratic pressures and has successfully taken refuge behind a myriad of subterfuges dressed up in democratic rhetoric. Furthermore, Cameroon is in constant danger of internal conflict as the Anglophone minority component of the country (formerly 'Southern Cameroons'), fed up with marginalisation, exploitation, failure of the democrati-

sation process, and continuing assimilation, is keeping the reassertion of its autonomy ever in view. A petition to this effect was taken to the United Nations by a delegation of the 'Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC)' in March 1995 and currently there is a case pending in the international court for the rights of minorities. If a peaceful outcome is to be expected, the United Nations and the other Western powers ought to act preventively and intervene in Cameroon before things get out of hand. Cameroon also has a standing dispute, which occasionally breaks out in armed conflict, with Nigeria, over the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsular and, in spite of a 2003 ruling at the International Court of Justice affirming Cameroon's sovereignty over the disputed area as well as a United Nations arranged joint commission between the two countries for peaceful implementation of the international court ruling, Nigerian troops are still occupying the disputed area.

Cameroon and its Disjunctions: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Structures

My general thesis is that the present plight of Africa is a direct consequence of both colonialism with its alienating transformation of the African psyche and personality and the evident failure of the post-colonial regimes of Africa to govern democratically. Africa's present predicament is largely to be blamed on the culpable and invincible limitations and irresponsibility of the leadership of the various African countries. They have not, of course, all failed to the same degree. An exception might be cited here and there, but this does not change the stark reality any more than, say, finding a few grains of rice in a bag of corn changes the fact that it is still a bag of corn. No one would deny, for instance, that Nelson Mandela's decision to serve only one term as president of post-Apartheid South Africa was an African political anomaly. In this regard, he and Julius Nyerere are two notable exceptions of African political leaders who, instead of amassing personal wealth and clinging on to power, have done just the opposite. The truth is that most of the postcolonial governments of Africa have brought their countries and people not only economic chaos and generalised misery, but the prospect or actuality of real catastrophic disintegration. And in most cases, the damage done by the corrupt dictators will only be fully realised and assessed after the dictatorships have yielded place to more democratic systems. How then does one explain the political behaviour of Mandela and Nyerere? One answer is that both men, through long study, have understood that modern government is and ought to be radically different from what was the norm in monarchical and feudal society for centuries. They also recognised that freedom from European colonial domination would be meaningless if the new post-colonial governments offered little political change in terms of democratic governance.

Colonialism and neo-colonialism should, therefore, bear their fair share of responsibility for the present state of affairs. It was the various colonial administrations which introduced the purely dictatorial systems of government, that is to say, dictatorships without any internal controls or checks and balances, into Africa, and

neo-colonialism actively supports the present state of affairs. If some of the really influential Western powers had not changed – through pressure – their position about giving covert support to the apartheid regime in South Africa, Apartheid would probably still hold sway and Nelson Mandela would probably still be imprisoned. But direct settler colonialism in South Africa was defeated because the popular struggle forced the West to desist from direct political and economic support of Apartheid. Even Britain's conservative government under Thatcher had to yield at some point.

Recently, the same weak arguments were heard in relation to the Abacha dictatorship in Nigeria before it finally collapsed on its own. Had comprehensive economic sanctions, especially on oil, been imposed on the Abacha regime following the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other Ogoni people,⁷ as canvassed by many people the world over, the Abacha regime, I believe, would have collapsed within a fortnight, giving Nigerians another chance for a veritable democratic breakthrough. But beneficiaries of Nigerian petroleum argued that imposing an oil boycott on Nigeria would only hurt the poor masses of Nigeria. It was evidently not the interest of the Nigerian masses that was at stake here. The same is true for the other African dictatorships under which the ordinary masses are now chafing with much stoicism. The obvious solution is that the masses resume the same kind of struggles that they waged against the colonial regimes. The struggle has certainly been more complex, given the wiles of the neocolonial governments who seek to confuse the masses by duplicitous appeal to ethnic loyalties and vain economic promises.

Because of a rather widespread fallacy that the precolonial kingships of Africa were all dictatorships and the very cynical argument of some people to the effect that Europeans have no moral right to impose democracy on Africans, just as they had no moral right to impose colonialism, let me discuss this issue at some length. This argument has been expressed by some of the African dictators as well as by some people in the West who are their witting or unwitting allies.

Many of the pre-colonial kingdoms of Africa had political structures which might have seemed authoritarian from the outside but which, internally, were in fact secured by very strict controls of power through institutions and personalities of moral authority whose main preoccupation was protection and safeguarding of the kingdom from the transgressions of those in legal authority such as kings, queens and other kinds of monarchs.

To take an example, when the German colonisers first arrived in *Nso'*, in the western Grassfields of Cameroon, in 1902, they found a relatively flourishing and rapidly expanding Kingdom, composed of originally smaller kingdoms most of which had voluntarily merged (under threat from the Fulani aggression called '*bara nyam*' in *Lamso*', the language of the *Nso*, a ripple of the expansionist religious wars of Uthman Dan Fodio), and a few that had been militarily subdued and loosely annexed. The King (*Fon*) of *Nso'* who, by original consensus, was always selected by a committee headed by the leader of one of the lineage strands of the Kingdom from among the

male offspring of a female of another distinct strand (the *Nso'Mmntar* or commoner class) and a male of yet another strand (the *wonnto'* or royal class) had quite extensive powers which were, however, considered as held in trust and subject to several established controls.

These controls, notable among which were those exercised by the regulatory secret society, *nwerong*, and the leaders of the commoner segments of the Kingdom, (*mmntar Nso'*), were an effective safeguard against dictatorial or arbitrary abuse of power by the King who was, moreover, often reminded of his weakness as a person as opposed to his strength as the King. Whenever he is away from the palace, it is usual for visitors to salute and pay homage to the empty royal stool (*kava*) exactly as if its occupant were sitting on it. One of the favourite titles of the King (*Fon*) of Nso' is *kimforkir* (fragility). He is 'His Royal Fragility' and if he happens to die outside the palace, as happened on two occasions in the last century, both, incidentally, during the period of German colonisation, he would forever after be referred to as *kimforkir* of wherever he had died; for example, *kimforkir ke Cisiong* (Sëem 11, 1880-1907), and *kimforkir ke Vikauntsen* (Mapiri, 1907-1910). Of course, as King, the *Fon* cannot die.⁸ At his burial, he is seated on the royal throne (*kava*), ritually uncapped, and his personal name, which cannot be called from the moment of installation while he remains King, is called out, with the addition that that is the person who has died (*kpu*) but that the *Fon* has not disappeared (*lai*), that the *Fon* continues shining like the sun. Obviously, in this cultural instance, the kingship is permanent while the king himself is transient.

It is very significant to note that, whenever the King (*Fon*) of Nso' dies, many eligible candidates for succession flee from the Kingdom for fear of being seized and forcibly installed as King. The successor must, however, be installed the same day, since the royal stool (*kava*) is not supposed to remain for more than a single day without an occupant. And the successor is usually always forcibly seized by *ngwerong* and installed against, at least, token frantic protestations. The responsibilities and restrictions of kingship in Nso' arguably only balance its advantages and privileges.

At the arrival of the Germans in Nso' at the turn of the century, the political set-up and general situation were such as to create a certain amount of stability and self-confidence. And one of the German officers, named Zimmermann, who provided arms to Captain Pavel, did not fail to note it in writing that although the Nso' had never seen Europeans before, they were nonetheless 'confident in their bearing unlike the timid forest people'.⁹ This, however, must have been considered an undesirable disposition, at least, by Lt. Houben and his group, who arrived five months after Pavel, with conscripts from other grassfield kingdoms, notably, Bali and Babungo. Failing to bully the leadership of the Nso' Kingdom into timidity and submission, Houben and his group set the palace (*Nto' Nso'*) on fire, after picking it clean of what they considered valuable, before proceeding to Banyo.

Pavel himself had explicitly stated in writing that he and his retinue had been well received in Nso' and that the *Fon* (King) had agreed he would comply with their demands punctually.¹⁰ But, that notwithstanding, the Germans returned to Nso' in

1905 under Captain Hauptmann Glauning, Commander of the so-called *Schutztruppe* in the Bamenda *Bezirk* (district) and again attempted to intimidate the Fon of Nso' into submission, by conducting a demonstration march through all the states bordering Nso' proper – a veritable *argumentum ad baculum*. The Fon, Sëëm II, was, however, unimpressed and is reported to have even boasted that he had nothing to fear because his subjects were as numerous as finger millet.¹¹

Meanwhile, the Germans discovered that the Bamum Kingdom, ancestral brothers of the Nso', had a serious grudge against the latter on account of their late King, Sangou (father of the then incumbent, Njoya), who twenty years earlier, had been killed during a battle in Nso'. His skull was still retained in Nso' and, according to traditional custom, a new King could not properly be enthroned in Bamum without it. So, Glauning went into a strong alliance with the Bamum Kingdom which saw here a golden opportunity not only to recover Sangou's skull, but also to avenge itself against the Nso'. Using two well-equipped companies, Glauning's army and its Bamum allies invaded Nso' in April 1906 from two directions. The war lasted about forty days during which the Nso', experiencing canon and machine gun fire for the first time, suffered heavy casualties and learned timidity and how not to carry a confident bearing before Europeans. On June 6 1906, Sëëm II admitted to Glauning: '*Atav ne shaa mo*' (You have really proved stronger than I), and surrendered.¹²

Writing about the expansion of the Nso' Kingdom in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Mzeka N. Paul has noted tellingly that one of the factors which encouraged this expansion in both human and territorial terms was:

...the tendency to use the strategy of consensus rather than coercion in administrative pursuits. Pre-German survivors in Nso' insist that coercive use of authority in certain areas of Nso' culture was imitated from the German colonial administration, which used physical force as an instrument of administration.¹³

After independence, African governments inherited the dictatorial systems and structures of colonialism and tried to justify them by appealing to the need for national unity, integration, development, well-being, peace and prosperity. These are the lofty ideals which President Alhaji Ahmadou Ahidjo used in 1966 to impose a one-party system in Cameroon and, further, in 1972, to impose a highly centralised unitary system of government. But what, in fact, happened was that colonialism transformed itself into neo-colonialism by forging alliances of partnership with unscrupulous and opportunistic individual Africans, or a handful of such individuals, so that economic exploitation could continue on a scale, in many cases, worse than under overt colonialism.

Contemporary African heads of state and their minions are mostly unscrupulous kleptocrats who have constantly emptied the public treasury of their impoverished countries to bank and invest abroad. Democracy in Africa, or anywhere else, need not follow the Western model. But I consider the main, indispensable and irreducible minimum of a democratic system, anywhere, to be the ability to remove

a bad government or, in any case, one perceived as such by the governed, without any bloodshed or violence. It is on this political principle that the post-Enlightenment modern West is founded. Consider, for example, the summarising views thereon expressed by the Western political philosopher, Karl Popper.¹⁴ It is a view that strongly recommends itself, particularly in the present context and situation of Africa.

Explanations

The problematic of African development is an issue that has been of great interest to social scientists over the years. In strict economic developmental terms there have been those who have advocated a whole adoption of the neo-liberal economic model, according to which free markets and minimal government constitute the necessary model for economic growth and development. One recalls the economic treatises of W.W. Rostow (*The Stages of Economic Growth*, Cambridge University Press, 1960) and W.A. Lewis (*The Theory of Economic Growth*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1955) both founded on the free market economic model. But then, there were the opposing treatises developed by theorists of anti-capitalist persuasions such as Marx, Lenin, Mao, and in the African case, Nkrumah and Nyerere. I mention this conflict between the two development paradigms of capitalism and socialism because I want to explain the developmental problematic in the case of Africa as partially derived from the post World War II Cold War conflict between the West and the Communist world. African governments were afforded licence and weaponry to run authoritarian and anti-democratic states as long as they proved themselves to be firm allies of the West or the Communist bloc.

Furthermore, it is a fact that the achieving of independence by Africa's nations could be seen as a purely formal exercise given that economic ties to the erstwhile colonising powers remained intact. The argument that colonialism was followed by neo-colonialism made by political theorists such as Kwame Nkrumah and more lately Samir Amin is a valid one. The problem was compounded by the fact that neither the West nor the socialist nations provided sufficient capital to Africa's nations so that they experience meaningful economic growth leading to development. While other nations such as Korea and Taiwan were subjected to authoritarian governments but with economic growth and development, Africa experienced only neocolonial authoritarianism with minimal economic growth.

Now that the Cold War is over, the peoples of Africa are now feeling more free to express the view that they deserve the maximum political freedoms and rights. They also believe that they are naturally entitled to the fruits of their labour and the resources of their respective nations. This was the basis for the anti-colonial struggle: freedom, democracy and economic growth and development.

In this new climate, African development needs a strong and viable civil society to force governments to make the right choices with regard to education, health, general welfare, political freedoms all with the goal of development in mind. I will not seek to analyze the situation by appeal to an unfounded African essentialism as

some thinkers have done.¹⁵ Humans are merely expressions of their history and their lived sociologies. There are no human essences that explain behaviour. It is better to explain the African situation by appeal to authors such as Nkrumah and Frantz Fanon whose *Wretched of the Earth* written on the eve of decolonisation is always relevant to the contemporary situation.

Conclusion

It is quite clear, I believe, that there can be no development in Africa, nor peace and tranquility until the present dictatorships have, at least, yielded place to more genuinely democratic and accountable systems. The linkage between Africa's present political problems and colonialism ought to make the former colonisers feel more responsible for Africa's plight than would otherwise be fairly expected from motives of pure altruism. Any policy towards Africa today, no matter its overt or covert aim, (aid, trade, humanitarian help, mutual co-operation) would do well to realise that, although democratisation has so far, with only few notable exceptions, failed, the process of democratisation itself is clearly irreversible in a world rapidly becoming a global village. Political support for Africa's peoples today against its authoritarian governments would not only be morally right, but tactically preferable from the point of view of pure self interest.

My contention and suggestion is that any genuine attempt to assist Africa out of its present plight should give priority to the political dimension of the problem, that is to say, the instauration of genuine democratic systems based on firm and solid democratic structures. And Africa's peoples have come to realise this. In many African countries today the citizens would gladly and patiently bear extreme poverty, hardship and other privations for as long as necessary if only they were sure that that was what was really necessary to bring about a truly democratic and responsible government. In 1991, Cameroonians willingly and gladly subjected themselves to many harsh privations and hardships by boycotting French goods and services and remaining indoors in an operation termed 'Villes Mortes', in the hope of convincing the French Government to allow genuine democracy to take root in Cameroon. The French did not budge and the operation only helped in further damaging the already seriously damaged economy. Even today, many are the Cameroonians who celebrate whenever they hear news such as that the IMF or World Bank is unhappy with or considering suspending or blacklisting Cameroon. The hope here is that the collapse of the so-called structural adjustment programmes would lead to the collapse of dictatorship and a chance for a genuine democratic beginning. So, how could anyone helping to bring about such popular democratic change possibly be said to be imposing democracy on Africans? Is it conceivable to be culpable for imposing, say, health on a patient? The argument that Europeans (or whoever) have no moral right to urge African governments to practise democracy is a lame argument.

With regard to conflicts in general, it is also highly recommendable for Western governments and their arms manufacturers to seriously consider ceasing the supply of arms to African regimes, dissident groups, organisations and individuals. Such

arms are generally used to crush popular dissent and to maintain neocolonial relationships between oppressive governments and their patron states. An embargo on arms sales to African governments would help in no small way towards peaceful resolution of conflicts and the advancement of democracy in Africa. The reason is that it is the unrestricted flow of arms to the undemocratic regimes in Africa that provide Africa's authoritarian governments with the means and confidence to continue their undemocratic practices. The recommendations made here should be seen in the context of the democratic struggle against neocolonial oppression with the full knowledge that the postcolonial world is a world run according to the dictates of *real politik*. Africa's peoples have always been aware of this fact long before they mounted their anti-colonial struggles. There are forces that are actively militating against Africa's development. Such forces are anti-democratic. Thus, African development will occur only within the context of genuine popular democracy.

Notes

1. See Kwasi Wiredu, 'Democracy and Consensus in African Traditional Politics: A Plea for a Non-Party Polity' in Kwasi Wiredu, *Conceptual Decolonisation in African Philosophy* (Essays Selected and Introduced by Olusegun Oladipo), Ibadan, Nigeria: Hope Publications, 1995:53-63.
2. See Julius K. Nyerere, 'Democracy and the Party System' in *Readings in African Political Thought*, edited by Gideon-Cyrus M. Mutiso & S. W. Rohio, London, Nairobi, Ibadan, Lusaka: Heinemann, 1975:478-481.
3. See his 'Nigeria and Western Democracy: The Possibility of an African Alternative', in George F. McLean et al. (eds.), *Democracy, Culture and Values*, Volume II, Washington D.C: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004:167-194.
4. See Youxue Zhang, 'Dynamics of CO² -driven lake eruptions' in *Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science*, No. 6560, 4, Vol. 379, January, 1996.
5. For a good historical snapshot of the period 1922-1972, see Anthony Ndi, *The Golden Age of Southern (West) Cameroon 1946-1972: Impact of Christianity*, Bamenda, 2005.
6. See 'Exposé Liminaire de S.E. Bava Djingoer, Ministre de L'Environnement et des Forêts à l'occasion de la Conférence de Presse du 03 juillet 1995 à Yaoundé.'
7. These other Ogoni people, judicially murdered together with Ken Saro-Wiwa on 10 November 1995, are by name: Saturday Dobe, Barinem Kiob, Paul Levura, Nordue Eawo, Felix Nuate, Daniel Gbokoo, John Kpuinen, and Baribor Bera. To this list should be added Clement Tusima, who had earlier (August 1995) died in detention.
8. See B. Chem-Langhëë, et al., 'Nto' Nso' and its Occupants: Privileged Access and Internal Organisation in the Old and New Palaces', in *PAIDEUMA* 31, 1985:175.
9. See Mzeka, N. Paul, *Four Fons of Nso': Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Kingship in the Western Grassfields*, Bamenda, The Spider Publishing Enterprise, 1990:77; quoting E.M. Chilver, *Nso' and the Germans* (unpublished field research notes), p.1.
10. Ibid, p. 78.
11. Ibid., p. 77. Said Sëëm 11, while releasing a fistful of finger millet through his fingers: Mfan kaay? Amo Nso' dzeen ben! (What need I fear? Nso' people are as numerous as these!).
12. Ibid., p. 79.

13. Ibid., p. 15.
14. See especially his *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vols. I and 2, London and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1945.
15. See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley, the University of California Press, 2001.

