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Multicultural Administration and Public Policy Making in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Nigeria and Cameroon

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Abstract

Following independence, diversity portrayed the morphological nomenclature of the African nations. African post-colonial state is characterized by ethnolinguistic variation and cultural pluralism. Governing such a political environment requires a model of governance pigeonholed to absorb the divergence ethnic groups that exist within the socio-political topography of the state. The identitarian configuration of African societies and recognition of ethnic disparities thus requires appropriate policy responses to accommodate ethnic and cultural minority groups to partake in the economic and political affairs of the state. This rationalizes the necessity for the adoption of multiculturalism in public policy and administration in Africa. Therefore, multicultural administration is one of the numerous governance strategies adopted in many African nations to manage ethnic fractionalization and foster peaceful co-existence among the different groups. Such policies have been embraced to ensure equal political representation, equality in employment distribution as well as to safeguard all-inclusive governance. In Nigeria, the principle of federal character as enshrined in the constitution aims to address such regional, cultural and ethnic differences. In Cameroon, the politics of balanced regional development was employed to appease ethnic and cultural diversity. Therefore, this chapter aims to compare multicultural administration and public policymaking in Nigeria and Cameroon.

Towards Parity of Participation: Multiculturalism and Inclusive Governance in Cameroon

Cameroon is often referred to as 'Africa in miniature' (Amin, 2014) due to its geological and cultural diversity. Demographically, Cameroon has a population of 26 million and is globally

ranked as the 52nd most populated country. Constitutionally, Cameroon is a unitary, decentralized, secular, democratic and pluralist State that guarantees public and individual liberties and respect for fundamental rights of citizens regardless of his/her origin, religious, philosophical, or political opinions or beliefs. Historically, Cameroon is a former colony of Germany, France and Great Britain and it is this 'triple colonial heritage' that makes it a unique nation fused with many political, economic and social complexities (Nyamnjoh and Awasom, 2008, p.1). The official languages are French and English, although over 240 indigenous languages and local dialects exist (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003). After more than fifty years of independence, Cameroon is still struggling to deal with its complex heritage with regards to its use of and attitudes towards national unity and public policy making.

Cameroon has - until recently - been a relatively politically stable nation in Africa since independence in 1960. For the past fifty years, Cameroon has had only two Heads of State, beginning with Ahmadou Ahidjo who ruled from 1960 to 1982. In 1966 under the rule of Ahidjo all political parties unified to form a single party – the Cameroon National Union (CNU) - and power became centralised and concentrated in the hands of one man, the President of the Republic of Cameroon. Paul Biya succeeded Ahidjo as President in 1982 leading the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). In 1990, multiple parties became legal after widespread protest. 1992 saw the first election held, which was won by the CPDM (who had formed a coalition with the Movement for the Defence of the Republic). Biya is still in power today, in his seventh term of office. When Biya began his presidency in 1982, his promise to Cameroonians was that he would dismantle the dictatorship established by Ahidjo and provide Cameroonians with a country based on trust and morality. Since independence, the leaders of Cameroon have strived towards constructing a nationalist discourse of 'unity' and creating a united Cameroonian identity, which many critics argue remains an elusive aspiration (Eposi Ngeve and Tabe Egbe Orock, 2012). Others suggest that the democratic process in Cameroon has stalled due to poor political governance and leadership (Nyamnjoh, 1996), whilst others argue that individual freedom continues to elude most Cameroonians under a Biya led government (Mbaku and Takougang, 2004).

The central argument of many critics is that the Anglo-French partition created separate allegiances and still today the two linguistic and cultural groups of Francophones and Anglophones remain distinct and uncompromising, with the people of each community firmly attached to their own respective cultures, identities and public policies (Fanso, 1999). It has been suggested that the political situation in Cameroon reflects a split in loyalty which in turn impacts on a united Cameroonian national identity (Jua and Konings, 2004). This situation is not unique to Cameroon however, as Phiri (2006) asserts that many African nations suffer from the lack of a clear notion of national identity.

However, as this section outlines, there is widespread evidence to suggest that in fact paradoxical outcomes of Cameroon's ideological public policy efforts are evident and that a sense of national unity and balanced regional development among its people is far from being realised.

Two traditions: the historical legacy of ethnic and cultural diversity in Cameroon

The complexity of Cameroon's colonial past presents a range of contemporary challenges for parity of participation. Put another way, the ability for all Cameroonian people to participate as equal peers in public life — across economic, cultural, and political domains remains an elusive ideology. The two official languages, English and French, arrived in Cameroon in 1916 when Britain and France divided Cameroon into two unequal parts at the end of World War I. Following the end of the First World War, the Ex-German colony of 'Kamurun' was split into English and French Cameroons, setting administrative boundaries, which ignored cultural or ethnic identities. This pivotal moment in Cameroon's history also led to the implantation of the two languages; a situation which is still contentious today. Despite having access to over 240 indigenous languages Cameroon followed the pattern of many of its post-independence African neighbours and chose its 'official' languages from its colonial past. These new administrative boundaries divided indigenous cultural areas and cut across well-established lines of communication. They entailed cutting across a dominant or active sense of community, based on traditions and common ancestry, with strong kinship ties, based on shared socio-political institutions and economic resources, common customs and practices and sometimes acceptance of a common political control, in most, cases (Ngege, 2000; 2003).

Following reunification in 1961, English and French became the two 'official' languages of Cameroon along with a public policy of language bilingualism. The adoption of French and English as the two official languages gave rise to the distinguishing linguistic markers: Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians (Dyers and Abongdia, 2010). It is important at this stage to note that Cameroon is also divided into ten administrative units known as 'provinces' or 'regions'. Eight of them are French-speaking (Far-North, North, Adamawa, Centre, South, East, West, and Littoral) while two are English-speaking (South-West and North-West). French is considered to be the dominant language due to its majority use across eight regions, whilst English remains dominant in the two regions (North-West and South-West) which had been under British rule (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997; Nyamnjoh and Rowlands, 1998).

Unresolved tensions

Many scholars suggest that the true situation of public policy in Cameroon today does not reflect the multicultural nature of the country (Mbaku, 2005; Mbaku and Takougang, 2004; Kum, 2018). A major issue concerning Cameroonian governance and politics is the ongoing socio-political dispute commonly referred to as the 'Anglophone problem' (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997; 2003; 2019). The essence of this 'problem' is traced back to the end of the French and British colonial legacy and the formation of Cameroon as an independent state. The well-documented divide between the populations of Cameroon relates to the identity and perception of Anglophone Cameroonians, who constitute 20 percent of the population. In short, Anglophone Cameroonians feel marginalised and exploited by the Francophone-dominated state and by the Francophone population as a whole (Konings (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2004; Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019; Tamfu, 2018). In their candid discussion of bilingualism in Cameroon, Dyers and Abongdia (2010) state that Anglophones are widely understood to be the inferior cultural group and are therefore much more likely to have to learn French (rather than Francophones learning English) in order to access services and state benefits; resulting in a one-sided bilingualism. The critiques concerning the unequal practice of bilingualism largely stem from the fact that the Francophone population vastly outnumbers the Anglophone population, a dominance which affects language preference and functional spheres of power including government and broader civil services such as education and justice systems (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003; Konings, 2011; Nyamnjoh and Rowlands, 1998; Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019; Kum, 2018). Many have criticised the Francophone-dominated government, and their attempts to deconstruct Anglophone identity by encouraging divisions within the Anglophone elite as one strategy to further create an Anglophone-Francophone divide (Ngege, 2003; Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003). Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003) suggest that Anglophone Cameroon has had little autonomy since the country's reunification. Kofele-Kale (1986) attributes the beginning of this divide to Biya's predecessor, President Ahidjo who was widely accused of undermining Anglophone interests and shifting administrative and commercial centres to Francophone regions away from large influential Anglophone towns such as Buea and Limbe in the South-West region.

In recent years, the unrest has escalated to new heights resulting in violent demonstrations and strikes over the perceived economic and political marginalisation of Cameroon's Anglophone minority. The recent action follows a series of grievances which morphed into political demands, leading to strikes and riots. The Cameroonian government maintains it has a fair governance structure, yet the English speaking Cameroonians still feel oppressed and feel the need to take action (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019). Since 2015, the Anglophone resistance has increased and attempts to claim autonomy from the French dominated regions

has grown. This ongoing tension has caused a series of protests, school and court closures and teacher strikes, in response to government-led interventions to control Anglophone resistance which have included internet cuts, curfews and violent clashes (Kouega (Kouega, 2018; Tamfu, 2018; Abdur, 2017; Kindzeka, 2017; Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019). Since 2015, government forces and Anglophone separatists have engaged in increasingly brutal violence and reprisals to lay down their weapons and return to community life.

In addition, government authorities have detained opposition activists who pursue outright separation from Cameroon with a new state called 'Ambazonia' (Mwakideu, 2017), a move which Abah (2018) suggests causes major challenges for the state regarding national unity. A number of scholars have attributed the emergence of 'regionalism' and lack of progress concerning the ongoing Anglophone/Francophone dispute to the domestic (cultural) hegemonic tendencies of the Francophone-dominated state (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019; Angwafo, 2014; Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2016). Representing the majority of government ministry positions, Francophone Cameroonians are the largest in number and therefore hold a hegemonic position in terms of defining the social, cultural and political agenda in Cameroon.

The need for trust and transparency

If multicultural public policy is to be a reality rather than an ideology, then Cameroon must consider how it could undertake institutional reforms to remedy the deeper problems of which the Anglophone issue is the symptom. In particular, decentralisation laws should be rigorously applied, and improved, to reduce the powers of Francophone officials nominated in the capital and administrative hub of Yaoundé. In 2020, Biya publicly defended new decentralization laws that, he claims, represent a genuine peaceful revolution that respond to the desire of our fellow citizens to participate more fully in the management of local affairs. The president hopes these measures – reinforcing bilingual language rights and devolving greater autonomy to provincial level – will defuse the deep discontent in Anglophone Cameroon and open the path to peaceful resolution of a crisis that has cost more than 2,000 lives, left 432,000 people displaced or refugees and profoundly shaken the cohesion of the state. However, it is argued that efforts should be ongoing in order to regain public trust and evidence governance transparency, for example through the creation of regional councils, who have the ability to better distribute financial resources and powers. Finally, it is important to take legal measures specific to Anglophone regions to ensure parity of participation, especially in the areas of education and justice.

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