

Cultural Diversity and Cultural Identity; Impediments to National Integration in Cameroon, 1961 to 2016

Aurelia Kihla Bamwai (PhD)^{1*}

¹The University of Yaounde 1, Department of History

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36347/sjahss.2026.v14i03.003>

| Received: 02.02.2026 | Accepted: 13.03.2026 | Published: 19.03.2026

*Corresponding author: Aurelia Kihla Bamwai

The University of Yaounde 1, Department of History

Abstract

Review Article

Cameroon is a prototype of African societies with predominant social features like cultural diversity and cultural identity. This diversity is reflected in ethnicity, language, cultural background and ideas. Before 1884, the yet to be defined territory was composed of a conglomerate of people with varied cultures, languages and ideas. European interest on African territories intensified during the second half of the 19th century and this culminated in the carving of small political entities called states, with artificial boundaries that did not recognize African cultural boundaries. It was then that African cultural societies were confined to live together irrespective of ethnic differences and cultures. Prior to the annexation of Cameroon in 1884, the Germans brought together about 250 ethnic groups to live in one political entity, making the country one of the most diversified in Africa, ethnically, linguistically and culturally which made living together difficult. This paper seeks to examine why the realisation of national integration in Cameroon since independence remains a fantasy despite government's efforts. Using information from oral and written sources of history and adopting a suitable methodology, this paper uncovers that cultural diversity and identity played a significant role in obstructing national integration therein. As a remedy to the problem raise, the paper suggests that values like love, patriotism, removal of colonial barriers, the will to act positively for the good of all, application of the concept of equality and economic empowerment of Cameroonians by the state government could go a long way to erase the barriers and foster national unity and integration.

Keywords: Cultural Diversity, Identity, National Integration, Impediments, Cameroon.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

During the 19th Century, European Nations embarked on a race to acquire African lands and territories by carving out spheres of influences that would enable them to meet up with their socio-political and economic needs following the Industrial Revolution. In the process, the African continent was divided into small states. Many of these states were offshoots of colonial manipulation which led to the monopolisation of economic and political power by favoured groups at the exclusion of others thereby leading to mistrust between the state and the masses [1]. This set the base for disunity that hindered national integration in most African nations.

Cameroon is a political entity that was carved by the Germans from 1884 when they colonized it. People with diverse origins, traditions, culture and way of life were united and made to live in a single political entity as one nation. With a surface area of 472442square Kilometers, Cameroon became one of the most heterogeneous nations of the African continent, distinguished into four cultural groups namely; Sawa, Grassfields, Fang-Beti, and Sudano-Sahalian [2]. The cultural groups were again sub-divided into ethnic groups with diverse cultures, traditions and way of life. Some of these ethnic groups were of the minority while some were of the majority. The desire to uphold their culture and identity stood between the dreams of living together under a single political entity.

¹ T. Etefa, *The Origins of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa; Politics and Violence in Darfur, Oromia and the Tana Delta*, USA, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 1.

² V.K.Ngwoh, "The Realities of National Integration in Cameroon", https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336725058_, accessed on the 30th of June 2021.

Cultural diversity in the country was made more complex when in 1916 Britain and France ousted the Germans from the territory following post-war (First World War) settlements and decided to partition it amongst them. Britain took one-fifth while France got the remaining four-fifth of the territory. The fate of the former German colony now rested in the hands of Britain and France who introduced new foreign languages, ideologies and systems of administration. In 1961, part of the British Trust territory of Cameroon voted through a United Nation's organized plebiscite to re-unify with the former French acquired territory of Cameroon which got independence in 1960. The two unified territories with two opposing systems gave rise to two distinct Anglophone and Francophone communities with the people arrogantly attached to their acquired cultures and not ready to let go [3]. These new foreign cultures together with the homogeneity of ethnic groups aggravated setbacks to the dream of national integration at independence.

This work seeks answers to why the Cameroon government has not been able to achieve national unity and integration despite the efforts towards that vision. It examines the role played by cultural diversity and identity in obstructing that dream and possible ways of overcoming the obstacles. The study is delimited from 1961 to 2016. It begins in 1961 when the British Southern Cameroons through a United Nation's conducted plebiscite voted to join the Republic of Cameroon that got independence from France in 1960. This decision ushered in two foreign cultures into the nation to complicate the already existing cultural diversity that was a hindrance to the unity of ethnic groups. It ends in 2016 when the Anglophone crises that stemmed from the cultural differences within the state evolved into a full blown war thereby obstructing national integration. The study provides a possible remedy to overcoming those setbacks by arguing that values like love, patriotism, removal of colonial barriers, the will to act positively for the good of all, the application of the concept of equality and the economic empowerment of Cameroonians by the state government could go a long way to minimise the obstacles thereby paving the way for national integration.

³ D.W. Ngwa, "National Unity and National Integration in Cameroon, 1961-2000, Dreams and Realities" PhD Thesis in History, University of Yaounde I, 2006, p. 77.

⁴ A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learners's Dictionary of Current English*, 8th Edition, Oxford University Press 2010, p427.

⁵ C.Lin, "Understanding Cultural Diversity and Diverse Identities", <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335608907>, access on the 30th of June 2021, p. 1.

Review of Concepts

Cultural Diversity

Diversity is a term that is used to describe different people or things existing within a group or place yet different from each other [4]. It is equally viewed as a debatable open-ended term which generally refers to a reality of co-existence of diverse knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws customs, religions, languages abilities and disabilities, gender, ethnicities, races, nationalities, and sexual orientations of human beings [5]. Cultural diversity on its part depicts the existence of a variety of ethnic groups within a society. Diversity becomes more visible depending on the way people choose to live with these realities. This paper reviews cultural diversity from the Cameroon perspective and focus is on the variety of ethnicities coexisting within the Cameroon nation and how they have foiled national integration.

The first map of Cameroon was drawn in 1912 by the Germans. This map was a merger of the different ethnic groups that existed within the geographical territory that was soon to be named Kamerun [6]. About 250 ethnic groups were merged to realize this goal. In his study on the peoples of Cameroon, Fanso opines that; "...the multiplicity of groups and languages has made Cameroon known within and outside Africa as the country with a "babble of tongues", or as a country where the confusion of tongues is well confounded" [7]. These ethnic groups were people of different culture, language and ideas. Since they were socio-cultural entities, they considered themselves culturally, linguistically or socially distinct from each other and most often viewed their relations in actual or potentially unfriendly terms [8]. Living together became weird due to their socio-political, economic and cultural differences. While some of these ethnic groups possessed minority status, others were of the majority thus leaving the minorities feeling threatened by the dominance of the majority. This stimulated the desire in the minorities, to fight and uphold their identities.

Cameroon became an African country that combines all the geographical features, linguistic and cultural characteristics. By virtue of its geographical, historical and sociological aspects and being a land of friendship and crossroad of civilisations, Ngwoh, describes it as "a harmony of difference" [9]. This is evident from the fact that geographical features like

⁶ Kamerun" was the German appellation of the territory. Britain called it Cameroon, France Cameroun and Germany Kamerun

⁷ V.G.Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges*, Vol.1, Macmillan Publishers, 1989, p.24.

⁸ V.K.Ngwoh, "The Realities of National Integration" P.2.

⁹ V.G.Fanso, *Cameroon History*, p. 24.

climate, vegetation and minerals that are found in Africa are all found in Cameroon though some are in small quantities. It is also a country where all the African peoples meet. Historical studies have proven that Cameroon has the Bantu peoples who claim origin as far south as the Cape, the Sudanese, the Fulani and the Shuwa Arabs in the North who claim relations with the peoples of the West, Central and North Africa and the Pigmies who are considered to be the aborigines of the land [10]. These different groups of people found in the territory have been sub divided into Ethnic groups with different traditions, cultures, languages and life style which they inherited from their ancestors and some whom historical migrations over the years had brought into entanglements with other groups where they adopted new traditions, languages and life styles. The multiplicity of ethnic groups in Cameroon therefore became the offshoot of these historical occurrences.

Some of the major ethnic groups found in Cameroon include; The Kotoko, Fulbe, Shuwa Arabs and the Batta found in the Northern part of the country. In the Western grassfields are constituted groups like the Nso, Kom, Bafut, Wimbun, Bali Chamba, Aghem, Bum, Widikum, Mankon, Ngie and Tadjon. The Bamileke and Bamum are located in the Central grassfields while the Twa, Beti-Pahouin, and Bassa- Bakoko are found in the Centre and South regions. The Duala, Bakweri, Mboko, Isubu, Mungo, Bakolle, Batanga, Limba, Balong, Bakundu, Bakossi and Bassossi are located in the Coastal and Forest regions. The Ejagham, Boki, Korup and Anyang are found at the forest and border regions with Nigeria and the Banen, Bafia, Yambassa and Vute are located in the central part of the territory. A majority of the ethnic groups found within the territory presents a minority characteristic but possess linguistic and cultural differences which are leading features of diversity. However, this heterogeneous nature of the state constituted a serious hindrance to national integration at independence, even though the Cameroon government has so far remained jealous of her cultural heritage and resolves to preserve it through her socio-economic and political actions.

Cultural Identity

Identity is a complex term that is used to describe the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others.¹¹ This could range from

national, cultural, personal or group (social identity), depending on the context that it is used. In the national perspective, identity is viewed as a psychological bond among citizens that is sustained by a shared history and a common culture [12]. On the social domain, it is seen as related elements which are part of the collective self and defines the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other categories [13]. Cultural identity on its part is the feeling that you belong to a group of people who are like you. This emanates from shared similarities like birthplace, traditions, practices and beliefs, art, music, food and language [14]. Cultural identity becomes an important part of one's self image and can help one feel connected to those around him/her because heritage is an intrinsic part of who we are. Our paper focuses on cultural identity and is limited to the Cameroon territory with diverse ethnicities differentiated by their languages. The role played by language in social identification is so distinctive because it contributes greatly in defining the identity of a human community [15]. The heterogeneous nature of these ethnic groups and their desires to safeguard their identity and independence became a stumbling block to national integration in Cameroon because ethnic languages bonded them the more.

During the pre-colonial period, the geo-political territory that was eventually carved out and named Cameroon was inhabited by people of different races and ethnic groups. The uniting force and strength of each of these groups to others was their cultural identity which they sought to uphold. The heterogeneous character of groups within this territory became a breathing ground for conflicts as each group wanted to assert their independence from the other. The constant migrations by these groups from one area to the other to satisfy their socio-economic and political needs brought them into clashes with other groups and war became inevitable [16]. However, colonial adventures confined these groups into a single political entity called Cameroon. This new political atmosphere shifted the notion of state as earlier held by these ethnic groups from their immediate cultural environment to a wider state that embodied other groups. It became an absurd dream that living its realities was going to be a difficult pill for these ethnic groups to swallow. In that regard, post-independence Cameroon's efforts towards national unity and integration always met with impediments.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, p. 743.

¹² P.J.Canover and B.E.Hicks, "The Psychology of Overlapping Identities: Ethnic, Citizen, Nation and Beyond", pp.11-49, in R. Taras, *National Identities and Ethnic Minorities in Eastern Europe; Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies, Warsaw, 1995*, Britain, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998, p.12

¹³ Ibid, p.14.

¹⁴ <https://www.familysearch.org>blog>, "Learn about Your Cultural Identity. Family Search", accessed on the 12th of July, 2021.

¹⁵ Valeria Piergigli, "The right to Cultural Identity", <https://www.persee.fr.>, Accessed on the 12th of July 2021.

¹⁶ V. J. Ngoh, *History of Cameroon since 1800*, Limbe, Press Print, 2002, pp. 2-6. J. Nfi, "Pre-Colonial Cameroon; A Course Companion, p.9.

National Integration

Integration is the act of mixing people who have previously been separated, usually because of race, colour, religion or other issues [17]. National integration on its part becomes a core value of nation building. It is the practice of national construction that allows initially loosely linked communities during a long period to become a common society with a nation state corresponding to it [18]. It dwells on encouraging active involvement of citizens of a state in state affairs whereby national interest is considered first before individual, religious and tribal interest. The Cameroon government defines national integration as unity in diversity that transcends all particularities especially in tribal, historical, political, linguistic, geographical or religious [19]. This entails giving priority to national interest.

The desire by most African leaders at independence to protect their European established boundaries was backed by policy designs to ensure national cohesion within their states. This was supported by the fact that European colonial boundaries did not consider ethnic boundaries and as such many ethnic groups were brought together and compelled to co-exist and cooperate within a single political entity. Political leaders however, used unifying slogans like national integration, national unity, national authenticity and family hood, which were all aimed at placing national interest above ethnic and regional interest [20].

At independence, Cameroon's presidents; Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-1982) and Paul Biya (1982-present), adopted National Unity and National Integration as political slogans that were aimed at unifying the diverse ethnicities which constituted the state. The problem of ethnic diversity in Cameroon became more complex with the colonial partition of the territory in 1916 between Britain and France as it ushered in two national languages and cultures. This compounded the already existing difficulty to national integration and unity because the inhabitants of the territory started identifying themselves with either the French or the English culture. Being the first president of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo was so unwavering in achieving national Unity. He is noted to have declared during the Ebolowa Congress of the Union Camerounais of 4th to 8th July 1962 that "National Unity means that in the work yard of national construction, there is neither Ewondo nor Duala, Bamileke nor Boulou, Foulbe nor Bassa; we are one and all simply Cameroonians" [21]. With regards to this declaration, he was resolute to merge

tribes together and erase tribal differences so as to foster national integration.

When Biya succeeded Ahidjo, he had a conviction that effective national unity could only be achieved through national integration. According to Biya, "National Integration was the ultimate step towards National Unity and the cardinal historic task of the highest priority ... for all Cameroonians" [22]. He sought to achieve the highest degree of solidarity among Cameroonians through the application of the believe that Cameroon could become a perfect nation if all the ethnic groups in the country were integrated into a "New Ethnic Group" where Cameroonians would manifest more national than ethnic loyalties [23]. He believed in inculcating in every Cameroonian a deep-seated national awareness which could not be shaken by an inherent attachment to tribal and religious values and interest. In that regard, principles of Communal Liberalism and National Charter of Liberties were adopted to address socio-economic inequalities by availing all Cameroonians of the fruits of the Nation's development and guarantee all forms of individual and collective freedoms [24].

To achieve his goals, Biya encouraged internal migration of Cameroonians designed to freely blend the people of different ethnic and religious groups within the national territory. Equally, he sought to build transport and communication infrastructures to link the provinces to the cities. In the cultural domain, he decided to promote bilingualism among Cameroonians of all ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in schools and training centers and nationalise cultural elements of various ethnic groups like feeding habits, economic practices as well as inter-ethnic creativities like theatre art, music and literature. He called for a major decentralization of decision making in order that the people of any particular locality be made aware of their responsibilities and develop their sense of participation [25]. The Cameroon constitution equally adopted English and French languages as the official languages of the state. These were all initiatives focused at eliminating ethnic inclinations. On the contrary, ethnic loyalties and feelings proved stronger than Ahidjo and Biya's dreams of unity and so far, remained strong impediments to national integration.

¹⁷ A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learners's Dictionary*, p. 781.

¹⁸ V.K.Ngwah, "The Realities of National Integration in Cameroon".p.1.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ D.W. Ngwa, "National Unity and National Integration", P.95.

²¹ Ibid, p. 96.

²² Ibid p.91.

²³ Ibid, p.98.

²⁴ V.G.Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges, Vol.2; The Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods*, London, Macmillan Publishers, 1989, p. 179.

²⁵ Ibid.

Impact of Cultural Diversity and Cultural Identity on National Integration in Cameroon

The concept of national integration was beautifully carved by administrators as an internal policy guideline to ensure cohesion amongst the diverse and heterogeneous Cameroon peoples. It was aimed at bringing Cameroonians to the limelight that national interest should be prioritised against individual and ethnic interest. On the contrary, the quest for identity among the diverse ethnic groups placed ethnic inclinations stronger than national interest thereby rendering the dream of national integration impossible. Due to the hindrances caused by ethnic diversity and identity, the vision of national integration became a good dream for the minds and ears of readers and listeners but their practical application became a shadow of the concepts because it suited words than action. However, we shall examine and evaluate the different challenging issues associated with cultural diversity and identity which hindered national integration in Cameroon.

Language

The role played by language in social identification is so distinctive because it contributes greatly in defining the identity of a human community [26]. The heterogeneous nature of ethnic groups in Cameroon with multiple languages and their desire to maintain their identity greatly worked against national integration. Language is a strong element of social cohesion and is indisputably the most common factor that identifies a people. People who speak a common language get more glued to each other and feel much at ease in the company of one another. People of the same ethnic groups that speak the same language prefer to protect the interest of one another than that of other ethnic groups speaking different languages. This has so far remain a strong uniting element among groups which has played against the vision of national integration in Cameroon.

Language is an example of cultural difference which can be seen as superficial or substantial. Psychology and linguistics demonstrate that languages, especially the mother tongue shape ways of interpreting, understanding and communicating with the world. Once people establish a linkage between heritage, languages and themselves at a young age, protecting instead of

depriving this attachment, it becomes crucial for people's mental health [27]. The survival of every culture in the world is however embedded in its language as it connects with power and resources [28]. Prior to the creation of the European Union (EU), the challenge of language diversity raised the question of equal opportunities for all members of the societies affected especially when considering disparities between the dominant and non-dominant ethnic groups in most EU member states. To overcome this challenge, the EU focused on the protection of minority rights by evading discrimination across member and non-member states [29]. Language therefore became a strong bond that kept many ethnic groups together and a solid obstacle to national integration.

A case of an ethnic group with such characteristics was the Nso fondom found in the North West Region of Cameroon. During the pre-colonial period the Nso wars of expansion conquered many sub fondoms and incorporated them into the Nso fondom. These conquered groups were never asked to pay tributes nor punished in any way, but rather were asked to surrender their sovereignty and identity by identifying themselves with the Nso people and speaking Lamnso [30, 31]. Added to that, the Nso fondom witnessed a large influx of refugees fleeing harassment from warrior fondoms and seeking refuge. Nso demonstrated hospitality towards them and their acceptance was based on their willingness to speak Lamnso as well as respect on the Nso traditions and culture.³² Through speaking of the Nso language, these foreigners became identified as Nso people and developed the feeling of belonging to the group which gave them the zeal to fight and defend the interest of the fondom.

No matter the size, the linguistic cohesion of a people is the basis for a distinct set of shared historical traditional and cultural values. The identity of a people fades away if language is taken from them. Most Ethnic groups in Cameroon lost their identities when they got assimilated by large and influential groups. The Sao people of Northern Cameroon became history as they got integrated into other groups and eventually disappeared [33]. Their existence is only traced by History. The cultural differences in the country got complicated in 1916 when Britain and France ousted the Germans from

²⁶ Valeria Piergigli, "The right to Cultural Identity".

²⁷ C. Lin, "Understanding Cultural Diversity", p. 2.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ T. Agarín and M. Brosig, *Minority Integration of Central Eastern Europe Between Ethnic Diversity and Equality*, New York, Rodopi Amsterdam, 2009, p. 9.

³⁰ Lamnso was the language spoken by the Nso people. When the people settled at Kovvifem, a number of clans joined them. Such were TaankumTsen, Ndzeendzev, Yuwar, Lun and Faanjang. These clans merged to form a great culture and tradition. From this fusion emerged a

language called Lamnso, which was a mixture of different languages spoken by the various clans over the century.

³¹ A.K. Bamwai, "Influence of Community Spirit in the Process of Development of the NsoFondom, 1800-1994: A Historical Study", Master's Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde I, 2012, p. 39.

³² Ibid.

³³ Fanson, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools*, vol. 1, p. 19.

the territory, partitioned it amongst them, and introduced new foreign languages. The already diverse Cameroon nation became divided into Anglophone and Francophone Communities holding firmly to their acquired cultures. While the Anglophones boasted of their English Language and the Anglo-Saxon culture, the Francophone boasted of the French language. These foreign languages only complicated the problem of national integration as the dividing line became clear with language barriers.

Cultural Ties

Cultural ties is a phenomenon that influenced people of the same descent and who shared common cultures and traditions to migrate and live closer to each other during the pre-colonial period [34]. This bond kept the flames of brotherhood burning in these groups such that the feeling of belonging and the defense of one another's interest was often prioritised. Their ancestral descent was a strong uniting bond and manifested in their feeling of responsibility towards each other. Many groups in Cameroon with such characteristics were separated from each other by dynastic feuds which ended up separating children of the royal families to move with Kinship items and settled in different locations. The movement ushered in the founding of new kingdoms as those children left with some followers. Ethnic groups that were offshoot of such feuds include the Bamum, Nso and Nditam fondoms founded by Nchare Yen, Ngonso and Mfoombam respectively, following the succession dispute at Rifem(Mbankim) in around 1394 [35]. Another case was the migration of the Duala people from Pitti into the Wouri area because of succession dispute between the children of Mbedi. Cultural ties between the Duala and the Bakweri influenced short distance movement between the two groups [36].

These ethnic groups with similar cultures, traditions and common ancestries demonstrated a strong attachment to each other as their traditional practices and cultures remained similar in many aspects even though time and involvements with other groups brought in new innovations that altered some. The Anglo-French partition of the territory separated some of these groups. The Nso were separated from the Bamum while the Duala were separated from the Bakweri. What kept their ancestral bond alive was their traditional practices and culture that looked alike. Upon re-unification in 1961, these groups re-connected. They mingled and felt comfortable with each other than with other groups. For instance, during the Nguoun festivals in Bamum, the invitation of the Nso and Nditam fondoms were always

prioritized. It is same with the Ngonso festival in Nso which prioritized the invitation of these brotherly fondoms that reminded them of their identities [37].

The desire to uphold these identities kept them closer and willing to protect the interest of each other than the interest of other groups without these ties. For instance, the unity of the Anglophones in a bilingual Cameroon nation became hampered by these cultural values whereby a Bakweri man will prefer to unite and collaborate with a Duala man than a fellow Grassfielder whom they argued had nothing in common with them. The Buea Declaration of 1993 could not achieve the desired success to project the Anglophone identity and enable them to reap benefits within the national territory because of such ethnic differences and lack of cultural ties [38]. Cultural identity in this case became a strong bond that frustrated national interest and definitely national integration became hindered.

Communal Ties

When Paul Biya came to power, his desire for national integration led him to seek ways of enforcing solidarity among Cameroonians. This led him to attempt integrating all the ethnic groups into a New Ethnic Group to enable Cameroonians manifest more national than ethnic loyalties. His introduction of principles like Communal Liberalism and the National Charter of Liberties aimed at availing all Cameroonians of the fruits of the Nation's development and assuring all forms of individual and collective freedoms [39], encouraged Cameroonians to freely move and settle in any part of the Country. It also opened up Cameroonians to freely interact with people of other ethnic groups. The intentions of the president in these moves were positive and targeted the good of the entire nation but were frustrated by communal ties where people of the same communities desired and carried out activities that projected the image of their ethnic groups.

Cameroonians responded to his charter of liberties by moving freely and settling in different parts of the Nation other than their regions of origin. The controversy was based on the fact that as many moved out of their birth regions to cities and other areas, tribal inclinations and nostalgic feelings prompted them to create ethnic social groups. These groups became avenues where ethnic matters were discussed. They became avenues of unity and identification. Refusal to belong to these groups left one with the feeling of isolation. Rulers of the various ethnic groups contacted their people through these groups. Issues concerning

³⁴ Ngoh, *History of Cameroon*, p. 6.

³⁵ P.N. Mzeka, *Four Fons of Nso, Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Kinship in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon*, Bamenda, Spider Publishing Enterprise, 1990, pp.6-7.

³⁶ E.B.Enow, *The Advanced Level History Pathfinder*, Buea, Nabesek Comprehensive College, 2000, pp. 8-9.

³⁷ A.K. Bamwai, "Influence of Community Spirit", p.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ V.G.Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools, Vol.2*; p. 179.

developments and traditional matters were discussed in these groups and contributions made thereof. Traditional songs and other activities carried out in these groups contributed and still contribute in fostering ethnic than national loyalties. These groups donated huge sums of money and put up edifying structures in cities to host them. Such are the Nso Community hall at Simbock in Yaounde, the Bangwa hall, the Wimbum hall and many others. The frequent meetings of these ethnic clusters killed the nostalgic feelings in them as they ate traditional meals, sang songs and drank palm wine which all reflected traditional settings. These groups encouraged more of tribalism than national unity and integration and went a long way to frustrate Biya's vision.

Cultural Celebrations

Ethnic diversity in Cameroon is a reflection of African states with varied groups and cultures. Cultural identification by these groups is their way of life and is mostly manifested through cultural Celebrations. Such celebrations in Cameroon traditional societies include marriage, death, naming ceremonies of children, festivals and ritual ceremonies. These celebrations vary from group to group and are manifested through songs, dance, rituals, sacrifices, incantations and dressing. They are a harmonious factor that aims at depicting the identity of a people and equally serve like a means through which the unity of the people is enhanced. Ikechukwu, writing on the Mbaïse people of Nigeria says, "Cultural festivals are celebrations marking memorable events in the lives of the traditional Mbaïse people such as, the new yam festival... death festivals, new born child festivals and marriage festivals" [40]. The essence for these celebrations are not only to bring the people together but to inculcate the spirit of oneness as a people belonging to a particular culture which in return works for their common good.

Ethnic groups in Cameroon adhered strongly to these celebrations. A popular example is the Bamileke who constantly travelled back to their villages during funerals, the Ewondo and Beti who upheld marriage celebrations and Grassfield fondoms like Bali and Nso that placed much value on their cultural festivals like Lela and Ngonso respectively. Most centralised ethnic groups in Cameroon devoted much interest in their traditional celebrations. Many found themselves journeying to their respective villages during death celebrations to condole and celebrate with the bereaved members of the communities. Activities were usually halted in villages when someone died so that the villagers could come out massively and bury the dead. During festivals sons and daughters residing in townships and other areas out of their respective fondoms were usually

called back home to participate actively. Marriage and naming celebrations were joyful events that pulled together community members to rejoice with the celebrants. These events that encouraged the coming together of people of the same ancestral origin ended up enforcing unity amongst the people. They rekindled the spirit of identification and belonging to their ancestral ethnic groups and ancestral roots. This drifted them away from integrating with other ethnic groups which were primordial steps towards national integration.

Heterogeneous Character of Ethnic Groups

People around the world are divided by several artificial categories and partitions such as identity politics where cultural groups feel their members are to some extent being attacked, bullied, persecuted and discriminated against.⁴¹ When such situations arise, living together and social cohesion becomes challenging. As earlier mentioned, Cameroon is a diverse nation with about 250 ethnic groups which were merged and compelled to live together as one nation. These ethnic groups are heterogeneous in character as they differ in language, culture, race, traditions and ideas. Such differences hindered co-existence and cooperation in a political entity. Most of these ethnic groups are small in size but their linguistic and cultural difference kept them with a burning desire to protect their identity and independence.

The advent of Biya's Communal liberalism aroused in these varied groups the feeling of having to partake in the fruits of the Nation's economic development like roads, schools, water, electricity, employment of their youths and a fair share in political appointments. It became a difficult task for the Cameroon government to satisfy the needs of 250 ethnic groups. The inability of the government to give all and satisfy all only left many with the feelings of abandonment and neglect. In that regard, community projects like pipe borne water, road maintenance, schools and many others became the priorities of ethnic groups. The more they carried out these projects, the more they revived the spirit of oneness and ethnic identity. The more they invited their elite residing out of their tribal areas home for these projects, the more they brought them closer to traditional practices and attachments to their ethnic groups. This ended up strengthening communal ties and bonded them more to their ethnic groups. With such attitude and mindset, national interest became secondary amongst people of different ethnic groups thereby frustrating national integration.

The heterogeneous nature of Cameroon ethnic groups ushered in ethnicity influence in state politics which became obstacles to democratic transition and

⁴⁰ A.B. Ikechukwu, "Traditional Communalism Among the Mbaïse of Igbo Land", Bachelor's Dissertation in Philosophy, STAMS, Bambui, 1991, pp.7-10.

⁴¹ C.Lin, "Understanding Cultural Diversity", p. 1.

definitely national integration. Influential ethnic groups desired administrative positions and influence in state politics. These demands swayed the government to design new policies like regional balance in administrative positions and even during national competitive examinations. When such happened, the place of merit became sidelined as most often regional balance politics kept away intelligent Cameroonians from being recruited to serve the nation.

The diverse nature of the state also placed party politics on tribal lines thereby obstructing democratic transition to power. Most political parties in Cameroon were and are still formed on tribal and regional lines which rendered democratic principles difficult as regional interpretations and boycott followed suit from regions and groups that had no connections with such parties. Often times, words like Bamileke party, Anglophone Party, Bassa Party and others were heard from opponents of other ethnic and regional groups. Such regionalism and tribalism in political parties went a long way to hinder the dreams of opposition parties ascending to power in Cameroon and henceforth, hindered real democratic processes because people made wrong choices because of ethnic inclinations.

Ethnic diversity within the country also bred ethnicity conflicts because minority groups felt threatened by large and influential groups and in their attempt to assert their independence they ran into conflicts with major groups. Reflecting on this issue, Taras asserts that; "The spread of Ethno-nationalist mobilization in recent years reflects on the one hand an aspiration on the part of self-determination. Since most countries in the world are ethnically heterogeneous, the potential for conflict along ethnic lines is enormous" [42]. This assertion by Taras throws more light on the fact that a country like Cameroon with as many as 250 ethnic groups could not go void of inter-ethnic scuffles. Conflicts were often heard between minor and major groups like the conflict for supremacy between Nso and Nkor whereby the Nkor people felt dominated by the Nso people during the colonial and Post-colonial days and also the Bali and Bawock conflicts which attained its peak in the Post-colonial period and resulted to open war in around 2006 [43]. Similar skirmishes were noticed in other areas like the Bamileke clans and their neighbours. However, this heterogeneous nature of the state constituted an obstacle to national unity and integration at independence, even though to this day, the Cameroon

government continues to mount efforts to preserve it through her socio-economic and political activities.

Marriage Preference

Cultural diversity and identity had a strong influence on marriages within the national territory. People practicing the same culture, language and traditions felt more comfortable marrying from amongst them. They felt more secured with spouses of their tribal origin. Until the 1970s, marriages in Cameroon were common within ethnic circles as ethnicity ties were very strong [44]. This grip relaxed after the 1970s where inter-ethnic marriages started being noticed. Biya's communal liberalism and National Charter of liberties relaxed this phenomenon as it encouraged the mobility and settlement of people across the national territory [45]. In that regard, people of different ethnic groups got the opportunity to mingle and interact with other groups. This somehow relaxed cultural grip on many and they started having an open mind to friendship and marital union with people from other ethnic groups. Inter-ethnic marriages started surfacing in the territory but the ratio was too low as compared to ethnic marriages. People however preferred to marry from their respective groups with the hope that a common culture, language and traditional practices would lessen complications in the union.

Marriage is often seen as a strong instrument for unity among families and ethnic groups. During the pre-colonial period, diplomacy between traditional societies was strengthened by marriages wherein a fondom, chiefdom or kingdom could reinforce her relationship with others by giving out their daughters into marriage with influential personalities of that fondom. The government of President Paul Biya had hoped that social cohesion between ethnic groups would encourage marriages and eventually erase tribal barriers thereby fostering national integration [46]. Unfortunately for him, marriages among people of the same ethnic groups became more preferable than inter-ethnic marriages that witnessed a very low proportion. Hence, the hope of using marriage as a tool to encourage national integration was slow and did not yield the desired fruits.

Colonial Heritage

As earlier viewed, the territory Cameroon was a German creation. It was annexed by Germany in July 1884 and the first map of the country drawn by the Germans in 1912 [47]. The original small kingdoms and

⁴² R. Taras, *National Identities and Ethnic Minorities in Eastern Europe; Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies, Warsaw, 1995*, Britain, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998 p.1.

⁴³ A.K.Bamwai, "Colonial Legacies and Impact on the Development of Anglophone Cameroon:1961-2006, A Historical Analyses", PhD Thesis in History, University of Yaounde I, 2017, p. 84.

⁴⁴ V.K.Ngwah, "The Realities of National Integration in Cameroon", p. 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ D.W. Ngwa, "National Unity and National Integration", P.98.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 76.

fondoms that saw themselves as states were brought together to co-exist in a single political entity called Kamerun. This German colonial boundary was artificial and did not consider ethnic traditional boundaries. They enlarged the scope of world as was previously conceived by traditional societies which limited it to their individual ethnic groups. This new perception of world compelled the traditional societies to submit to a new authority more superior than their traditional authorities and were brought together to co-exist and collaborate as one nation which they did not find it easy to adapt to the new political atmosphere.

Most conflict zones in Africa trace the roots of violence to colonial history. In that regard, people became forced to organize themselves according to their respective ethnic groups in fighting for justice, equality and freedom [48]. Inter-ethnic conflicts caused by colonial cohesion became unavoidable when any of the groups felt marginalised. Supporting this view, Taras holds that;

“In most countries in the third world, the rise of ethno-nationalist movements is part of the legacy of colonialism which had created artificial boundaries and even states by ignoring cultural divisions and popular aspirations. In their post-colonial political history, many of these states had to confront ethno-nationalist mobilization whenever minorities felt unjustly treated. New dormant cultural groups were regarded as neo-colonialists” [49].

The colonial fate of Cameroon became altered when in 1914, the First World War started and she together with other German colonies were attacked by the Allied forces. By 1916, Germany was defeated and ousted from Cameroon and the victorious powers; Britain and France partitioned the territory amongst them. This ushered in new cultures, languages and colonial administrative policies into the once single German colony. In 1961, part of the British acquired territory re-united with the French section of Cameroon through the United Nation’s conducted plebiscite. The country then became a bilingual country with two foreign languages; English and French used as national languages.

The unequal nature of the partition of the territory by Britain and France steered in minority problems for the nation. The Anglophone minorities felt marginalised by the Francophone majority in their socio-political and economic activities. This feeling of sidelining nurtured the Anglophone crises that resulted into a full blown war in 2016. Such feelings of disregarding by the Anglophones and other ethnic groups

which did not have the opportunity to be involved in state politics and reap benefits from the fruits of the national resources drifted them apart from national interest into ethnic loyalties which were hindrances to national integration.

The Way Out

The creation of artificial colonial boundaries had ignored cultural boundaries and ethnic divisions by bringing together people of different traditions, cultures, languages and way of life to live together as one nation. These groups had disparities in size and strength. Some were influential and some weak. Some were located in remote areas from towns and some closer to the township. The colonial masters empowered some to rule over minor groups like the case of the Bali over the Ngemba clans and the Bafut over the Obang, Bu and Tingoh clans in the name of creating paramount chiefs [50]. Many of the groups that were placed under paramount rulers became dominated and felt marginalized by the influential groups. This sowed a seed of inferiority complex amongst the minor groups that was carried into the Post-colonial period. These groups always felt suppressed and not well treated by the Cameroon government. The desire to assert their independence from the influential and domineering groups brought them into conflicts with one another and distanced them from each other. Most often, influential groups were prioritized during the government allocation of regional balance privileges thereby obliging the minority groups to do all to project their identities. These were all impediments to national unity and integration. Nevertheless, this paper hopes that some measures could be adopted to narrow down the differences between these ethnic groups which may be a positive move towards national integration;

The application of love in the socio-political and economic lives of Cameroonians could be a solution to the challenging issues raised. Love is a virtue that when applied, even the most difficult situations succumb. It is a strong feeling that pulls people together. Cameroon was constructed by bringing together 250 ethnic groups with varied differences. Most African countries were built on this same platform and it is not necessarily an obstacle to living together. Such situations take a real demonstration of love to overcome. As humans, Cameroonians could learn to love each other, demonstrate patriotism and the authorities may do same. These put together could breed a serene atmosphere where majority and not all, can feel a sense of belonging to this nation. However, Cameroonians could be made to work for the good of the nation and not only their ethnic groups. Many ethnic groups could embrace love and bridge the barrier of blocking their offspring from

⁴⁸ T. Etefa, *The Origins of Ethnic Conflicts*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ R. Taras, *National Identities and Ethnic Minorities*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ A.K.Bamwai, “Colonial Legacies”, p. 86.

marrying into other ethnic groups. Inter-ethnic marriages are likely to share some common values and aspirations which are important elements in building social cohesion that contributes to national integration.

The Cameroon government may encourage unity and make Cameroonians love their country by fighting and erasing vices like corruption, embezzlement and favoritism. Cameroonians regardless of which part of the country they come from could be given equal opportunities to enable them feel a sense of belonging. When meritorious citizens are suppressed in job opportunities and appointments and less competent citizens used because of one reason or the other, the outcome is often disgruntlement which diminishes the love for one's country. The government could restructure the justice sector and grant all Cameroonians the opportunity to be fairly judged without corrupt practices arbitrating. The forces of law and order may be cautioned to treat Cameroonians on equal bases and not giving some ethnic groups the feeling that they are superior to others. These are practices that frustrate love and when they occur, the unity of a people is jeopardized and integration hindered.

Colonial Barriers could be removed by inculcating in Cameroonians the feelings that most of those factors pulling them apart were mere colonial designs. These colonial designs were strategies to facilitate the exploitation of the territory and the African continent in general. They were a means to an end, and included European colonial boundaries, languages, cultures, policies and investments [51]. Cameroonians and Africans in general inherited these legacies and most of them became a divisive heritage on Africans. Cameroon being a bilingual country today is an offshoot of colonialism. One will hear Cameroonians saying they are English speaking and some French speaking. Others will boast of the English culture and some of the French culture. Others will make negative declarations on the both parties. These were mere colonial creations which have been a strong divisive tendency on Cameroonians and need to be erased from their minds to encourage national integration.

Cameroonians and the authorities may perhaps develop the will to act positively. This could excel in both the socio-economic and political domains within the country. Corruption and self-interest has so eaten deep in Cameroonians that both the people and the authorities turn to shy away from truth. The cause of conflict between groups could possibly be addressed and not the consequences. Addressing the consequences and leaving

the cause may prolong the problem and maintain tension among the people. The government could share the state's economic benefits equally to all ethnic groups and this might bring joy to all. The ministry of Culture could prepare a national festival for all ethnic groups in the country. The frequent come together can bridge the gap of diversity and foster unity and integration.

The Cameroon government can perhaps provide an enabling environment for its people by making them feel they are more secured within the state. This is because most African countries turn to focus more on regime survival and entrenching political and economic power rather than providing security and protection to the people.⁵² When his happens trust on the government by the people is possibly erased and little clashes and discomfort can cause them to fall back and organize themselves with the members of their ethnic groups with whom they feel secured. Such action becomes a stumbling block to national integration.

The Cameroon government may emphasise on the concept of equality across all races within the country. People turn to feel more at ease in a society where they feel they are not discriminated upon. A case was in East Africa between 1704 -1882 where the Oromo people applied the concept of equality to strangers who ventured into the land and integrated non-Oromo cultures into Oromo culture. They were open to strangers and treated them equally as theirs, contrary to other groups who were not welcoming. The resulting effects were flourishing commerce, integration of ethnic groups and peace in East Africa which would otherwise have seen major ethnic wars [53].

The notion of equality could be stretched widely to encompass interpretations as diverse as entitlement for participation in decision-making to prohibition of unequal treatment in the public sphere. That is from individual centered affirmation action to group oriented, backed by the government. With equal treatment, all citizens would enjoy equal opportunities to acquire the capacities and skills needed to function in society and to pursue their self-chosen goals. However, the recognition of minority groups as equal partners in policy-making and implementation relies heavily on the equal treatment of individuals irrespective of their linguistic, cultural or ethnic specificity.⁵⁴ This paper hopes that the practical application of equality as a virtue by the government amongst all ethnic groups may ease national integration therein.

⁵¹ A.K.Bamwai, "Colonial legacies and Impact", p.46.

⁵² T. Etefa, *The Origins of Ethnic Conflicts*, p. 2

⁵³ T. Etefa, *Integration and Peace in East Africa; History of the Oromo Nation*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 1.

⁵⁴ T.Agarin and M. Brosig, *Minority Integration of Central Eastern Europe*, p. 12.

Also, economic empowerment of Cameroonians could be the leeway towards national unity and integration. People become less tensed when they are economically empowered. The Cameroon government may emulate the example of China which in an effort to restructure and build her economy in the 1980s decided to embark on a decentralisation policy that took more powers from the central government and handed to local governments with the hopes of reaping benefits through expansion. Writing on this issue, Naughton and Yang asserts that;

“During the 1980s, China experienced a steady decline in central government control over the economy, the political system and the society as a whole. Economic reforms emphasized decentralization of resources and decision making authority which empowered local governments and enterprises at the expense of the national government. Economic liberalization fostered the creation of literally millions of new economic entities combined with new market rules and incentives. Rapid economic growth not only led to a much larger economy and more complex economy but also greatly expanded regional diversity” [55].

Here, the local governments in China became more relaxed and freedom from government pressure expanded economic activities to the regions causing expansion and employment of many Chinese. To that, revolts against the government and diversity impacts were minimised as people became more busy and happy.

Government policy could encourage the private sector by relaxing its taxation policy. This may encourage more and more people to venture into business without bottlenecks. Most African countries like Nigeria excel in business activities because their taxation policies are moderate. Cameroon may emulate this example and encourage her citizens to explore the private sector and reap benefits. This would encourage mobility of citizens to other areas and in the process national integration might be enhanced. Equally, the government can encourage small scale enterprises by granting them subventions to assist in their activities. To that, more citizens would adventure into enterprises and unemployment would be curbed. In that regard, unnecessary uprisings and grudges against the government may be reduced and Cameroonians made to see the need for national unity and integration.

CONCLUSION

This paper sets out to investigate why the Cameroon government put in much effort to realize her vision of national integration without clear success. This problem prompted the investigation of the role played by cultural diversity and cultural identity in hindering

national integration in Cameroon. Being a country that was carved from integrating 250 ethnic groups with a heterogeneous character, Cameroon was bound to experience difficulties in trying to bring these ethnic groups to live together despite the government’s effort towards achieving that vision. In this paper, concepts like cultural diversity, cultural identity and national integration like highlighted and interpreted. These concepts were defined using dictionary views and the interpretations of researchers who have explored that domain. The concepts were interpreted and analysed using the Cameroon situation. The study went forth to explore the impact of cultural diversity and identity on the vision of national integration in Cameroon. In the process, challenging issues like language, cultural ties, communal ties, cultural celebrations, heterogeneous character of ethnic groups, marriage preference and colonial heritage were examined. The study argues that these issues were striking in impeding the dream of national integration therein.

However, the study came up with possible remedies that are captioned “the way out” which could be utilised to minimize the barriers to national integration in Cameroon. Such remedies include values like love, patriotism, removal of colonial barriers the will to act positively for the good of all, the application of the concept of equality by the government as well as the economic empowerment of Cameroonians by the state government which are believed could miimise the obstacles and pave the way for national unity and integration.

REFERENCES

Books

- Agarin T. and Brosig M., *Minority Integration of Central Eastern Europe between Ethnic Diversity and Equality*, New York, Rodopi Amsterdam, 2009.
- *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges, Vol.2; The Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods*, London, Macmillan Publishers, 1989.
- Enow E.B., *The Advanced Level History Pathfinder*, Buea, Nabesk Comprehensive College, 2000.
- Etefa T., *Integration and Peace in East Africa; History of the Oromo Nation*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Fanso V.G., *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges, Vol.1*, Macmillan Publishers, 1989.
- Hornby A.S., *Oxford Advanced Learners’s Dictionary of Current English*, 8th Edition, Oxford University Press 2010.
- Mzeka P.N., *Four Fons of Nso, Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Kinship in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon*, Bamenda, Spider Publishing Enterprise, 1990.

Deng Era, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.1.

⁵⁵ B.J.Naughton and D. L. Yang, *Holding China Together; Diversity and National Integration in the Post-*

- Naughton B.J and Yang D.L, *Holding China Together; Diversity and National Integration in the Post-Deng Era*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Ngoh V.J, *History of Cameroon since 1800*, Limbe, Press Print, 2002.
- Taras R., *National Identities and Ethnic Minorities in Eastern Europe; Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies, Warsaw, 1995*, Britain, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998.
- *The Origins of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa; Politics and Violence in Darfur, Oromia and the Tana Delta*, USA, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Articles

- Canover P.J and Hicks B.E, “The Psychology of Overlapping Identities: Ethnic, Citizen, Nation and Beyond”, pp.11-49, in R. Taras, *National Identities and Ethnic Minorities in Eastern Europe; Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies, Warsaw, 1995*, Britain, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998.

Unpublished Books

- Nfi.J, “Pre-Colonial Cameroon; A Course Companion.

Internet Sources

- <https://www.familysearch.org>blog>, “Learn about Your Cultural Identity. Family Search”, accessed on the 12th of July, 2021.
- Lin. C, “Understanding Cultural Diversity and Diverse Identities”, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335608907>, accessed on the 30th of June 2021.
- Ngwoh V.K, “The Realities of National Integration in Cameroon”, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336725058>, accessed on the 30th of June 2021.
- Piergigli. V, “The right to Cultural Identity”, <https://www.persee.fr.>, accessed on the 12th of July 2021.

Thesis and Disertations

- “Influence of Community Spirit in the Process of Development of the Nso Fondom, 1800-1994: A Historical Study”, Master’s Dessertation in History, University of Yaounde I, 2012.
- Bamwai A.K, “Colonial Legacies and Impact on the Development of Anglophone Cameroon:1961-2006, A Historical Analyses”, PhD Thesis in History, University of Yaounde I, 2017.
- Ikechukwu A.B, “Traditional Communalism Among the Mbaise of Igbo Land ”, Bachelor’s Dissertation in Philosophy, STAMS, Bambui, 1991.
- Ngwa W.D, “National Unity and National Integration in Cameroon, 1961-2000, Dreams and Realities”, PhD Thesis in History, University of Yaounde I, 2006.