

# Cameroon: Gambling With Democracy

## Introduction

The return to multiparty politics in Cameroon in 1990 was met with reluctance and resistance by the current regime. Triggered by the events of 26 May 1990, that led to the defiant launching of an opposition party (Social Democratic Front – SDF), multipartyism became institutionalized following the Law of Association of 19 December 1990 (Law No. 90/056). Since then, democratization in Cameroon has had to confront a legacy of political repression and social dilemmas inherent in the asymmetrical integration of the country into the global market-based economy.

Why? In September 2004, Christian Cardinal Tumi claimed that ‘the façade of democracy’ in Cameroon ‘exists more for creating a pleasing, external image than for promoting individual and collective liberties’. Rampant ‘(e)lectoral fraud’ is indicative of why democracy in Cameroon has continued to degenerate at an alarming rate. Elections, usually taken to be a hallmark of democracy, have become a tool for predatory authoritarian kleptocrats seeking to legitimate their rule. It is not gratuitous that former *BBC Focus on Africa* editor Robin White gave his impressions of Cameroon, a country divided by language and culture thus: ‘Cameroon is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Its politics are less pretty’.<sup>1</sup>

Why such a wild contrast between the beauty of Cameroon and its ‘less pretty’ politics? The goals of *multiparty democracy* still elude Cameroonians and within the present political context of unbridled predatory demagoguery, multipartyism remains a façade and charade, promising much but delivering nothing. President Biya’s gamble with *democratie avancée* (advanced democracy) and *democratie apaisée* (mollified democracy) explains the vacuity of his commitment. He yielded to democratic pressures in the early 1990s more out of convenience than of conviction. In his political book *Communal Liberalism*, he had manifested his apprehension for multipartyism as stated thus:

The present phase of the history of Cameroon does not permit the insti-

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tution of a multiparty system. Our Party (Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement — CPDM) is therefore, responsible for the reduction of the existing ethno-cultural divisions in order to promote national integration... (Biya 1987: 127).

Biya has systematically undermined all remnants of Cameroon’s legal and political institutions to perpetuate his clinging personal rule: amputated the legislative and judiciary branches of government and totally ignored inputs from opposition parties and civil society and coopted and criminalized traditional authority, where at least 55 percent of the population lives in rural areas under the influence of powerful *chiefs* and *lamida*. Indeed, the ideological vitality that energized and united local opposition forces in the early 1990s has been ambushed and smashed by the criminalized Biya state.

One question increasingly asked in Cameroon nowadays is whether Biya’s gamble with *democratie avancée* and *democratie apaisée* is working. Are Cameroonians able to hold their government accountable for delivering the services that are important to its citizens? This question is asked against a background of increasing poverty, growing income inequality and the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, all of which have generally eroded the quality of people’s lives. The argument of this paper therefore is that the problems of democracy and political stability in Cameroon are intractably rooted in the citizens’ view of their roles within the political system, their relationship to the state and the various contradictions between traditional and modern social, economic and cultural institutions. Hence, rather than solve the problems of democratic conflicts, the state system continues to impede efforts at democratization.

What is fascinating about the controversy over the typologies and semantics of what should properly be called a ‘de-

mocracy’ is that the controversy exists at all given that there is not even a single example of a large-scale ‘true democracy’ (Dahl, 1989) in the world. The extraordinary determination to make room in the political lexicon and problem definition for systems with (so far unattained) large-scale citizen participation is a testimonial to some deep yearning to realize not just the figurative but the literal meaning of democracy defined as ‘government by the people’. Moreover, scholars worldwide increasingly see more participation as the *only* antidote to ‘system creep’ toward despotism and the only independent check on governments, corporations, state apparatus, and other wielders of power.

## State Closure of Democratic Space in Cameroon

A liberal democracy requires three things: a system of representative government; a framework of liberal political norms and values; and social and institutional pluralism. Hypothetical support for representative government, without tangible support for liberal political norms and values, and without the foundation of a pluralistic civil society, provides neither sufficient stimulus nor staying power for democracy to take root. All these institutions and processes must be mediated by the state.

But, historically, the State in Cameroon is not ‘the people’; it is not ‘the human family’ getting together to decide mutual problems; it is not a lodge meeting or country club. What, then, is it? Briefly, the State in Cameroon is that organization which attempts to maintain a monopoly of the use of force and violence in the territory; in particular, it is the only organization in society that obtains its revenue not by voluntary contribution or payment for services rendered but by brute force. The State obtains its revenue by the use of compulsion; that is, by the use and the threat of the jailhouse and the (gendarme/police) bayonet.<sup>2</sup>

Having used force and violence to obtain its revenue, the Cameroon State goes ahead to regulate and dictate the other actions of individual subjects, including the closure of democratic space for which

the populace yearns. As Mbatndah (2004) noted, those who thought that the October 11, 2004 presidential elections in Cameroon were an opportunity to show the rest of the world that significant progress had been made in the democratization process, the deception was simply enormous. For those who bothered to register and were fortunate to have cards, the whole exercise was simply not worth the trouble. The state apparatus was used as a marauding bandit giving Biya cronies chance to rig the polls to consolidate their 'political means' to wealth. The election-rigging strategies include the use of ambulant voters, bribing voters as well as polling officers and agents, stuffing ballot boxes, beating and chasing away opposition agents from polling stations, complicated electoral laws designed to facilitate rigging, inflation of voters' lists, 'theft' of voters' cards from DoS's offices, allowing minors to vote, permitting multiple voting by CPDM loyalists, announcing 'cooked-up' results as trends, intimidation and brutalization of opposition militants at polling stations, and name them.

George Ngwane (2007) laments what I may call 'gunboat democracy' that has divided most of Africa into two societies – the state society that is full of greed and the civil society that is boiling with grievance. While the state society reinforces its bonds of graft through smokescreen solidarity and prebendalism, the civil society weakens its stance through the pursuit of individualistic crumbs. In the case of Cameroon he warns that the recent solidarity by more than 700 pauperized labourers of the Cameroon Tea Estate who used their battered bodies as the last defence line of collective survival is testimony that the civil society might be docile but not dull.

In fact, the State in Cameroon, in the words of Oppenheimer, is the 'organization of the political means'; it is the systematization of the predatory process over a given territory.<sup>3</sup> The use of the state to close democratic space in Cameroon is borne out by Mbatndah's illustration that at the legislative elections of 1997, 2002 and 2007 certain irregularities worked to drastically reduce the opposition representation in parliament. The ruling CPDM party emerged with a crushing majority of 153 seats in a 180-man Assembly, which enabled it to stifle any moves by the opposition to push through any meaningful reforms. Persistent calls by the opposi-

tion SDF for the creation of an independent electoral commission have been gambled away with a wave of the hand. It took a radical move of SDF MPs participating in a march to the Presidency for the government to allow for the creation of a National Elections Observatory (NEO), a body stripped of all meaningful powers. This NEO was later replaced by another electoral commission (ELECAM) — another CPDM election-fraud instrument.

Several years after the initial lurch of Cameroon toward multi-party democracy, during the 1996 municipal elections, virtually all the major towns in the country elected opposition candidates, and in a turn of events that many considered bizarre for a supposed democracy, the Head of State and Chairman of the ruling party appointed members of his own party who were destroyed at the polls, to exercise administrative control over the municipal councils won by the opposition. Vigorous protest marches against this only led to bloodshed, arrest and torture of opposition militants. The government delegates chosen from the ruling party still hold executive power and control the management of municipal councils won by the opposition, especially in the large urban centres (Monga, 1997: 146-169).

If balloting were all that democracy required, Cameroon might be considered democratic. But there are regimes which use the façade of electoral timetables to secure international approval, advance their diplomacy, and manipulate international lending organizations. This form of democracy is on the march in Cameroon where ballots are cast and counted, yet it is secrecy, fraud, repression and kleptocracy that strengthen the regime's grip on power. Even census figures are hidden from the public. In the case of the 2004 presidential election in Cameroon, Mila Assoute, a 'modernist' CPDM member, disclosed to *The Herald* of October 6, 2004, that even with transparent ballot boxes, the CPDM had already rigged 1.5 million votes of the 4.6 million registered voters.

Edmond Kamguia in *Le Messenger* of Thursday April 9, 2009, questions why the census figures had not been released since 2005. The simple answer is that the election results that the Biya regime has been releasing from the provinces or regions do not match population figures. A lot of gerrymandering has taken place especially in Biya's ethnic Centre and

South provinces. There are more representatives from these provinces in parliament than there should be. And more resources are apportioned to these areas disproportionately than other parts of the country.

### Democratic Deficits within Cameroon's Civil Society

Concern with the nature and characteristics of civil society in Cameroon has increased, in line with the growing tendency towards democratization, even the brand Nyamnjoh (2002) describes as 'cosmetic democracy'. It has been widely assumed that the successful institutionalization of a constitutional democratic regime is dependent on the existence and development of civil society, or that the existence of certain such nuclei is a prerequisite for the democratization of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Such an assumption, the validity of which, of course, must be critically assessed, demands a more thorough examination of the concept of civil society, or rather, of the reality which this concept purports to describe and its bearing on democracy and on the possible institutionalization of constitutional democratic regimes. The most common definition of civil society found in the literature emphasizes the existence of a relatively wide range of social sectors — such as family, segments and groups, voluntary associations and the like — which are independent of the State, or autonomous with respect to the State.<sup>4</sup>

In Cameroon there is a plethora of features of civil society impeding democratization like the systematic closure of space for representation and accountability present in even the most idealistic and widely supported social movements. Forje (2008) is correct in asserting that the Cameroon State was viewed as an instrument of exploitation, pre-empting popular or individual initiative and revolt as well as fanning discriminative politics of ethnic confrontation and economic chaos. Thus civil society in Cameroon remained passive or captive and weak from 1 September 1966 to 26 May 1990. Political parties and civic associations were co-opted or coerced into a single-party structure – The Cameroon Nation Union (CNU) later transformed into Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) until the launching of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) on 26 May 1990. The gunning down of unarmed civilians by the military was indicative of

state resistance towards changing the existing political status quo of violent predatory autocracy. In broader terms, civic 'democratic deficits' include unclear representation, unaccountable leadership, and lack of autonomy from the state, political parties, or international forces.

*Representation:* Whom and what do civic organizations represent in Cameroon? Civil society's constituents depend on 'political entrepreneurs', social leaders, or outside allies to represent them. States, firms, and international organizations sometimes develop protocols to determine whether certain civic organizations are representative, such as certifying union elections. More often, however, recognition is based on the policy maker's political goals rather than on a systematic evaluation of how well a given organization represents its constituency. Generally civic society in a democracy requires organizations interested in public affairs. In Cameroon, there exists no genuine political institutional framework that articulates popular aspirations, let alone celebrating personal competence. Rather, mediocrity is ordained. Both the pauperization as well as the ethnic *divide and rule* policy of the Biya state has prompted Cameroonians to adopt a cynical and distrustful attitude towards politics and the state.

The highly militarized Biya state also creates and funds ethnic (Nkwiri and Nyamnjoh, 1997) faithfuls to neutralize feuding cash-strapped opposition parties and other civil society organizations. Thus, the way civil society is constructed has an influence on which social issues and identities are seen as public and political. An interesting analysis is given by Bayart (1993) in what he terms 'the politics of the belly'. Pointing out the issue of *divide and rule* and rewarding ethnic faithfuls, *Le Messenger* newspaper (16 March 1992) pointed out that a sentiment of disappointment gradually replaced that of hope as it dawned on Cameroonians that qualification, competence and merit was the preserve of the President's tribesmen. Slowly, but surely, they started taking over all strategic appointments once held by people of different tribal horizons. In an expansive and greatly populated divisions like Noun, disappointment soon made way for bitterness as the division was suddenly taken over by the Betis — DO, five DOs, three *chefs* (police officers), medical officers, chief magistrates, prison superintendents, etc. The deep

agenda-setting power of civil society in this regard is manifest when even external democratizers tend to ask why there are so few women in trade unions instead of asking why there are no public associations for women whose labour is 'privatized', such as maids or prostitutes.<sup>5</sup>

Outside assistance may be deficient since it could have the effect of making civil society less representative by creating a gap between groups that receive assistance and those that do not. As a result of these disparities, there are differences in levels of organization, mobilization, and even identity among entire social sectors. For instance, a civil society workshop in Cameroon took place in Yaoundé on 31 May 2007. It was hosted by COSADER (*Collectif des ONG pour la Sécurité Alimentaire et le Développement Rural*) and initiated by the Cameroon civil society platform *Jeudi de Cotonou*. The participating organizations represented different groups and themes of civil society: youth, environment, governance/human rights, food security/sovereignty, religious faiths, unions, academia and education, health/HIV, culture, monitoring of public policies, and debt. At the end of the day COSADER only demonstrated that it had been a talking drum of the Biya regime through its undercover ethnic representatives.

*Accountability:* If the representativeness of civil society is sometimes open to question, the accountability of its leaders is also problematic. Social movements, NGOs, and religious and ethnic groups are especially prone to personalistic leadership. This is more than just the result of the 'iron law of oligarchy' — it also reflects the small size of these organizations, the power of charismatic leadership, and the limited leadership pool. The requisites of mobilization tend to concentrate leadership quickly, especially in less developed democratizing countries, where skills and availability are scarce.<sup>6</sup> Civic leaders who emerge in the struggle against authoritarian rule are often less than democratic in the way they act within their own organizations; their moral certainty, persistence, resolve, and discretion necessary for survival as dissidents are not conducive to open, pragmatic, and fluid consensus-building (Tetchiada, 2006).

Worse still, personalism in Cameroon makes civic groups more vulnerable to state attack (by discrediting their leaders) and more susceptible to corruption,

cooptation, and partisanship. Corruption is also a problem in civil societies. President Paul Biya's government launched the anti-corruption drive on January 18, 2006, two weeks after sacking two magistrates accused of graft — the first such move in Biya's 23 years in power. The wave of anti-corruption fervour began as the Cameroon leader rang in the New Year denouncing the scourge and vowing to do away with it (Yaoundé, January 27, 2006 (*IRIN*)). Public funds are embezzled, like in the case of Ondo Ndong (former General Manager of the Council Fund), and disbursed in huge chunks to the President's wife's for her Anti-HIV/AIDS civil society organization, paying election rigging agents, and sponsoring activities of Biya's political machine, the CPDM (Fitzgerald and Swann, 2008).

*Autonomy:* Civic organizations are coopted by their targets, thereby curtailing their capacity for contestation, interest articulation, or even mobilization by the Cameroon state. For the Biya regime, neutralizing is the characteristic response to challenges from civil society. Cameroon's trumpeted 'political stability' has been artificially based on the suppression of political participation that lacks both a rights-respecting society and a rights-protecting regime; yet, it is formally considered a multiparty democracy. Lack of a rights-respecting society and a rights-protecting regime not only undermines the prospects for democratic consolidation, but also heightens the potential for future violence and chaos. For example, the *Fon* of Bali, Northwest Province ordered the killing of three men from the semi-nomadic pastoral *Mbororo* community over a dispute regarding stolen cattle. An official investigation was launched and an arrest warrant issued against the *Fon*, but he was not arrested, nor was any further action taken (see *US Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000*).

In another case, the *Lamido* of Gashiga village in Demra, North Province, reportedly forced his inhabitants to vote for the CPDM on 12 October (See 'Forceful Voting', *The Herald*, (Cameroon), 20-21 October 1997, 5). The *Fon* of Bafut, Abumbi II is another example of a traditional ruler who 'advised' his people to vote CPDM, because 'such a vote will attract enormous development in our area and I want to congratulate all those who came out to exercise their civic rights' (See also 'Bafut *Fon* Calls for Peaceful Coexistence Be-

tween CPDM and Opposition', *The Herald*, 27-28 October 1997, 2). Civic groups and traditional rulers that lack internal democracy are the most vulnerable to cooptation, since capture is most likely when leadership is personalistic and unaccountable. As with organizational hypertrophy, cooptation hinders representation most when the group's goals include contestation, and least when they centre on the provision of services.

*Dependency*: Two things deny civil society in Cameroon from seeking occupation of political space: (a) the lack of crucial resources as finance and an environment conducive to civic activity; and, (b) the administrative and political harassment of civil society organizations that are interested in politics. Ewumbue-Monono (2006) points out that 'when a political party is criticizing the Government, it is seen as constructive, but when such criticism comes from the civil society it is seen as subversive'.

A good example was the July 1991 banning of six civil society organizations for promoting the *Villes Mortes* (Ghost Towns) and support calls for a Sovereign National Conference. No political party suffered a similar fate for the same crimes. In effect, over 70 percent of the registered political parties in Cameroon are nothing short of civil society organizations in their scope of activities and objectives, but dressed in party uniforms. Many civil society organizations aimed at empowering vulnerable groups like the youth, women, children and the handicapped, the elderly, and workers have been registered as political parties, which explains the high number of parties (207) in the country (ibid. p. 137).

The Biya regime crafted Cameroon's multiparty Law No. 90/56 of 19 December 1990 with an eye on opposition party multiplication, fragmentation and weakening as a means to perpetuate the CPDM's tight grip on power. Exemplified by the 207 political parties in Cameroon as of 1 June 2007, Nyamnjoh (2005: 113) argues that the multiplicity of parties, most of which had no existence outside the personality of their founders, can be explained partly by the government's interest in dissipating real democratic opposition. In fact, many of the political parties created during the early years of Cameroon's multiparty experience (1991-1992) were mainly CPDM moles responsible for infiltrating opposition groupings such as the Na-

tional Coordination of Opposition Parties (NCOPA), or passing off as the 'responsible opposition' constantly challenging the 'radical and irrational' policies of the 'hard-line opposition'. Virtually all of these parties eventually joined what became known as the 'Majorité présidentielle'. For example, Dakole Daisalla's Movement for the Defence of the Republic (MDR), which teamed up with Biya in 1992 to give the latter a parliamentary majority in 1992, was in fact created by the regime.

### Elections without Democracy

The idea of democracy has become so closely identified with elections in Cameroon that we are in danger of forgetting that the modern history of representative elections is a tale of authoritarian manipulations as much as it is a saga of democratic triumphs. Historically, elections have been an instrument of authoritarian control as well as a means of democratic governance. In the case of Cameroon, Professor Asonganyi, former Social Democratic Front (SDF) Scribe and now independent thinker, in an interview granted *Pan African Visions* (www.panafricanvisions.com), observed with indignation that with the 'pre-election manipulations by the regime and the seeming helplessness of the opposition parties, there is no doubt that the CPDM is set to dominate parliament with some 160 of the 180 seats, come July 22!' From voters' registration, to multiple voters, to falsification of results, etc., the ruling party and its field agents who are the Divisional Officers, there was no end in sight to the fraud. To CPDM sycophants, President Biya or *Le Meilleur Choix* (The Best Choice) slogan was deformed to *Le Seul Choix* (The Only Choice) by those likely to lose in case of Biya's defeat.

Prior to the June 2002 elections, the repressive electoral environment had provoked calls for an independent electoral commission, which does not seem to have prompted more than a cosmetic response from President Biya and the CPDM, both intent on recycling themselves through the sterile pursuit of a semblance of multiparty democracy. In October 2000, Cardinal Tumi had added his voice to popular calls for an independent electoral commission, in an interview with *Jeune Afrique Economie* (no. 317, October 2-15, 2000), in which he was very critical of the government. The MINAT, Ferdinand Koungou Edima, fired back in a lengthy press release, accusing the Cardinal of:

lying, anti-patriotism, wanting to stand for presidential elections, violating the principle of the separation of the state and church, having little respect for those who govern, questioning the organization of elections in Cameroon, attempting to insidiously turn Cameroonians and the international community away from the huge efforts and sacrifices made by the government to bail out Cameroon from the economic crisis and insecurity, not being humble, and being tribalistic.

Election rigging has become a cultural trait in Cameroon. For example, over 232 national and international observers were deployed to about 20,600 polling stations to oversee the 11 October 2004 elections. Many electoral irregularities were witnessed, including multiple voting by loyalists, opposition voters who were refused the right to vote because their names were not on the electoral list, insufficient ballots and the poor quality of the ink used to identify people who had already voted (*Country Reports 2004*, 28 February 2005, Sec. 3; *Keesing's* October 2004, 46242; AFP 16 October 2004; *Africa Research Bulletin*, 31 October 2004, 15948). Speaking on behalf of the Commonwealth, Joe Clark, former prime minister of Canada and leader of the observer group, stated that the 11 October 2004 elections were poorly managed and 'lacked credibility' (AFP 16 October 2004; see also *Country Reports 2004*, 28 February 2005, Sec. 3; *Africa Research Bulletin*, 31 December 2004, 16019).

The USA Embassy, British and Canadian High Commissions as well as the head of the European Union in Yaoundé deemed it 'inconceivable to accept what they described as abuse of basic democratic principles and the rights of the citizens to an acceptable independent elections structure'. They noted their objection to ELECAM was not only 'because of the violation of Section 8(2) of Law No. 2006/011 of 29 December 2006 creating Elections Cameroon, but also because of apparent surreptitious complicity of the government to stifle true democracy in Cameroon by creating confusion in the definition of roles played by the different components of ELECAM'. Section 8(2) of the Law creating the electoral board states that 'Members of ELECAM electoral board shall be designated from the midst of independent personalities of Cameroonian nationality, reputed for their stature, moral uprightness, intellectual honesty, patriotism, political neutrality

and impartiality'. The appointment of principally well-known CPDM party bigwigs violates in spirit and letter the fundamental aspects of neutrality and impartiality (Ngalame, 2009).

It is difficult to envisage a free and fair election under ELECAM, given the CPDM's perennial control of the state's election rigging machinery, and the fact that its members are appointed by presidential decree — 11 of the 12 are too close to his Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, or CPDM, or have previously been appointed to public office by the ruling party. As expected, the confusion, drama, violence and controversy of the elections yielded a landslide victory of 149 of a total of 180 seats in the parliament for the CPDM, reducing every other party to a dying regional flicker, and imposing the CPDM as the only national party. In 2007, the CPDM arrogated 153 of the 180 seats in the legislative elections to itself, a virtual return to the single-party state.

Furthermore, six of the 70 articles that make up Cameroon's Constitution were modified on 10 April 2008, by a vote of 157 in the 180-member legislature. The amendments introduced three major changes to the Constitution: the two-term limit enshrined in the 1996 Constitution has been removed and Biya, who has ruled Cameroon since November 1982 and whose second seven-year term is scheduled to end in 2011, is eligible to run for office indefinitely. The president now cannot be prosecuted for any act performed in the exercise of his duties. And finally, with regard to presidential succession, if the president is unable to perform his duties or the office otherwise becomes vacant, the president of the Senate will serve as interim president of the republic and elections will be organized within 40 to 120 days. It is noteworthy that there is no Senate in Cameroon. CPDM chief whip Jean Bernard Ndongso Essomba said the bill, which also reduces presidential terms from seven to five years, 'will enhance democracy, maintain political stability, national unity and territorial integrity' of Cameroon. This is a real 'constitutional' coup d'etat decried by Ngwana (2009).

President Biya claims that limiting his current constitutional term of office 'imposes a limitation of the people's will, a limitation which is out of tune with the very idea of democratic choice'. Over the years, he has elevated feigned disinterest into

an art form in order to create the illusion that his stay in power is dictated, and even imposed upon him, by 'the will of the people'. As part of a well-orchestrated plan to set the constitutional amendment plan in motion, he has manipulated his sycophants to pour out 'motions of support' for his 'President-for-Life' ambitions. A flurry of 'motions of support', Church prayers, rallies and meetings by CPDM cronies had been calling for a constitutional amendment scrapping term limits. And, in typical style President Biya has again 'caved in' to the demands of 'the people'. The President is now the principal actor in a 'normal' process which has, without doubt, culminated in a constitutional revision that virtually makes him 'President-for-Life'.

### Conclusion

Moves towards greater political liberalization in Cameroon since 1990 do not necessarily constitute evidence of successful democratization. Rather, the democratization is flawed. The focus on elections to the exclusion of other essential features of a properly functioning democracy has vitiated much analysis of the 'democratic transition' in the country. By examining in turn the roots, meaning and limits of democratization in Cameroon, we have shown that a focus on accountability rather than on democracy per se would be more appropriate. Several variables as the deeply flawed, ethnically-based, make-believe democracy, Biya's own troubled personality, and finally, the security apparatus's backing, combine to seal Biya's fate in his democracy rhetoric. Is fighting for democracy in Cameroon like catching water in a sieve? This author answers, No!

What is to be done? The answer to this classic question may look like pie in the sky. But people cannot stand idly and look at the crushing of democratic forces in Cameroon by its bandit state, in the hands of an incurably vampiric regime, with indifference. First, people must relentlessly pursue a settlement of the feuding class/ethnic/regional conflicts on the basis of the only broadly viable solution: the permanent coexistence and mutual recognition of identities to avoid militarized domination, pauperization, and exclusion. Only the settlement of this conflict can strip Cameroon's predatory dictatorship of political cover for their abuses and free Cameroon societies to focus on the real sources of their misery and frustration.

Second, there is a need to open up the closed societies of Cameroon by promoting exchanges of all kinds with others. The current Cameroon dictatorship is a house of cards resting on a tissue of mediated lies. Its people, the most physically and intellectually isolated and totally brutalized of any in the world today, do not have the opportunity to master the clue as to how the rest of the democratic world lives. Once they find out, the regime will be forced to crumble, or else change very rapidly toward democratization.

Third, donor nations need a new deal in foreign aid and debt relief. Even with the new standards and pressures on dictatorships, the resources to sustain this system have largely continued to flow from foreign circles and International Financial Institutions. Part of this has simply been inertia and the utterly perverse structural logic of aid agencies and especially the World Bank, whose officials are given portfolios of money to lend and projects to initiate with the understanding that their careers will suffer if they do not push the money out the door. Part of it has been fear that if these institutions lean too heavily on weak, oppressive, rotten states like Cameroon, they will collapse altogether into new humanitarian emergencies. Instead, they dawdle and fund the Cameroon dictatorship while the country disintegrates more slowly and millions of its people live shorter, nastier, more brutish lives because of abusive governance.

Finally, the state itself has to be *restructured* with traditional leaders and so-called elites held suspect as they are traditional enemies of democracy. The despotic colonial, the Ahidjo authoritarian postcolonial, and the Biya kleptocratic state cannot play a popular democratic and developmental role. Its limits have been reached. The reformed state must have its roots in the people and must seek legitimacy from the people. It must seek a new social consensus and build its legitimacy not only on the ambiguous economic terrain — development — but also on the political and legal terrain of good governance. In other words, the restructured state and political system must be thoroughly reconstructed at the same time as an economy devastated by economic crimes such as institutionalized embezzlement, money laundering, pillage, exploitation, etc., following decades of colossal misrule. This scenario compels democratic dialogue to stop the volcano from erupting.

## Notes

1. BBC 'Focus on Africa', Wednesday, 7 January, 2004, 10:19 GMT.
2. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1942), p. 198.
3. Franz Oppenheimer, *The State* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1926) pp. 24–27.
4. For greater detail, see S.N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Democracy, and Modernity*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992.
5. Public associations for prostitutes already exist in the Philippines, Uruguay, and Brazil. Such groups address political issues such as police harassment, domestic violence, access to health care, and women's employment alternatives.
6. Jonathan Fox and Luis Hernandez, 'Offsetting the Iron Law of Oligarchy: The Ebb and Flow of Leadership Accountability in a Regional Peasant Organization', *Grassroots Development* 13:2 (1989): 8-15.

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## Governing Health Systems in Africa

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Drawing on various disciplinary perspectives, this book re-focuses the debate on what makes a good health system, with a view to clarifying the uses of social science research in thinking about health care issues in Africa. The explosion of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the persistence of malaria as a major killer, and the resurgence of diseases like tuberculosis which were previously under control, have brought about changes in the health system, with implications for its governance, especially in view of the diminished capacity of the public health facilities to cope with a complex range of expanded needs.

Government responsibilities and objectives in the health sector have been redefined, with private sector entities (both for profit and not-for profit) playing an increasingly visible role in health care provision. The reasons for collaborative patterns vary, but chronic under-funding of publicly financed health services is often an important factor. Processes of decentralisation and health sector reforms have had mixed effects on health care system performance; while private health insurance markets and private clinics are pointers to a growing stratification of the health market, in line with the intensified income and social differentiation that has occurred over the last two decades. These developments call for health sector reforms.