

Research Article

Juvenile Criminality and Ecological Response in the Bamenda Grassfields: A Post-Colonial Transcript

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Abstract: Criminality is an ambiguous term often used and understood according to a precise context. In any case, criminality has a lot to do with all forms of unlawful behaviours by groups or individuals in any society with binding rules or laws. Seen from any angle, acts that contravene the Law like Murder, arm-robbery, banditry, smuggling, drugging, gambling, trafficking, drug abuse, disorder, rape along with institutional misconduct like power abuse, corruption, embezzlement to name but just this few constitute, criminality in Cameroon. Though crimes and their accompanied prevention, control or management mechanisms sometimes differ from one society to the other, the ecological entropy often ushered in by such misconduct is always enormous generally posing as a serious predicament for peace and development. Criminality therefore requires greater attention by any society with a taste for peace and development guaranteed through harmonious living. It is for this reason that any detailed apprehension of criminality must make a reasonable recourse to the ecological response notably the indigenous values and structures that both define and deter crimes and sustain peace. Peace building through prevention, management or control of criminality in all its form is therefore not just a matter of institutional responsibility reserved only for the governments and its functionaries but an indispensable joint project requiring the potent contribution of all in any ecosphere. The ecology used here does not strictly conform to the environment but rather to the people (tradition and modern) who are victims, perpetrators and arbiters of criminality in this ecological zone. Indeed, each system has its ways/methods of making Laws, determining good from evil and of rendering justice. These differences do not however elude the fact that, the notion of moral rectitude, honesty, transparency, hard work, accountability and respect for all humans do bear the same tonnage of reverence across societies. Criminality in all its forms and sources is considered to be bad and punishable but it becomes accentuated when its perpetrators are of the juvenile age brackets. When youths become the main perpetrators of crime, development outcomes like investment, strategic planning and human security are seriously undermined. In this realm, so many questions arise begging for amplitude responses in all faculties of knowledge. In this preoccupying situation need arise to know whether; the value system embedded in the parental and community formation have failed in their duty to provide the appropriate mould that permeates moral rectitude and values of peace in its youths. Whether there is anything wrong with the indigenous crime definition, prevention and deterrent structures, whether the laws in force have legal and legitimate essence, whether there is no serious conflict both of definition of crimes and of the exercise of justice between the indigenous authorities and the state and most importantly, whether, the law and justice agency and its enforcement agents have the (a) enabling environment (b)moral sanctity and authority (c) mental and spiritual aptitude to interpret the laws and exercise justice without restraint. This is the mission of this paper. It has used the qualitative methods of data collection and examination from primary and secondary sources to provide a transcript for the rising crime wave in the Bamenda Grassfields as from the 1960s using the above questions as a guide. From its evidence, it submits that the upsurge of criminality here is a shared responsibility distributed between the indigenous authorities and the criminals on one hand and the state and its law enforcement officers on the other. It opines that the Cameroon judiciary system plus a serious breakdown of confidence for any constituted authority further fertilized by confusing notions of citizenship rights were among the cardinal reasons that made crime wave exceptionally high in Cameroon during the 1980s.

Keywords: Juvenile, Criminality, Grassfields Cameroon, ecology, Post -Colonial.

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INTRODUCTION

The advancement in technology with its accompanied globalization has created a borderless world which is intrinsically threatened by insecurity emanating essentially from a multitude of Crimes. Though crimes differ from one human interface to the other ,its repercussion to social, political and economic wellbeing is often endemic and similar. By any reckoning, criminality has been in a dramatic surge in Africa and the world at large during the past two decades with the developed world registering most of the awful sceneries. With this, peace and its accessories are endangered and development outcomes are most of the time short-circuited. Such unfortunate developments make it expedient for a profound policy redefinition within which veritable structures and institutions to combat crime and promote peace are erected.

It sound paradoxical getting informed that even with the means and sophisticated technology of the more advanced societies, crime wave especially among the youths is yet still high. The situation is however, not only a unique pattern of these developed societies. It has its graphic and wholesomely representation in the Bamenda Grassfields in the North Region of the Republic of Cameroon. This paper opines that the surge in criminality in the in this study locus is essentially caused by(a)Poverty and indigenous confusion/ignorance of the short and long term implications/repercussion of rising criminality(b)Drug and liquor addiction emerging from unemployment rooted in poor training and orientation (c)continuous decay in the powers and essence of traditional administration with its judiciary system that defines criminality and builds its deterrence mechanisms(d) State paralysis/irresponsibility which has ushered in indigenous confusion and a sharp loss of confidence in any of its functionaries plus(d)Corrupt, inefficient and complacent judiciary along with its law enforcement agents. To this, it adds the youths rising willingness to change their taste, fashion and standards without a corresponding change in their production capacity plus a kind of exotic exuberance that seem to adore unlawful practices. It critically engages the anatomy of crime within this traditional niche carefully situating the post-colonial offerings that have occasioned a surge in criminality here. Its findings are not only valid for the study locus but largely replicated to all societies where the discussed causes of crime abound.

Global and Contextual Essence of the study

Issues on crime and global security concerns have been topical not only because they hinge on a crucial area of development and scholarship but also because findings recorded by research in this area serve like a broad compass crucial for internal and external policy formulation. Security standards and the role/respect of Law notably the universal human rights and dignity are capital concerns in any attempt to define and classify development. Though issues on crime and

its ramification in time and space have been aggregately placed within the ambit of criminology and its sophisticated disciplines like forensic sciences, a good grasps of it cannot be wholesomely attained without the token contribution of other fields of human and social studies. It is for this reason that crime and security concerns especially its control and prevention strategies are seen to be intertwining and multidisciplinary thereby cajoling the research interest of all streams of knowledge especially Sociology ,psychology, Anthropology, Geography, Law, Political Science and History. Even at this; issues of global crime and security dynamics still need the contribution of pure sciences like mathematics, Physics, Biology, and chemistry. The question here is not which discipline is delving into this area but rather the effectivity of the approach and the angle from which certain aspects of this broad and evolving concept have been investigated and presented.

It should be noted here that any discipline gets fertilized with knowledge from other faculties to make its voice on any security and crime issue heard. Findings and assertions on crime and security levels provides clues to policy definition, investments and budgeting which are key elements in strategic planning in the global drive towards sustainable development. At the nucleus of each state or society development planning is supposed to be the plight and comfort of the youths usually graduated in their training, access to jobs ,level of patriotism and their willing adherence to laws and values that are enshrined in the constitutions of their respective states. Any society's youth can therefore be a wonderful asset as well as an intriguing liability each of this depending on variables like job availability and satisfaction, states sensitivity to their changing needs, taste and fashion accompanied by various programmes through and within which they are integrated into the governing process as well as the enabling environment for the exercise of their freedom. Any short circuit in the operation of the above named variables yields the later. Though these variables may bear differential reactions /responses between countries of the Southern with those of the Northern hemispheres, the likelihood of crime being higher in areas, communities or states with poor conception of youths programmes and their application in space and time is always eminent. To this should be added the skilful display of disregards for youths ambitions and talents through the erection of less competitive frameworks that could bring them into the governing network, refusal or unwillingness of the leading cartel to create an enabling environment for investment and nurturing of talents and above all, the lack of transparency through inefficient reporting /accountability of the management of both soft and hard resources.¹The truth

¹ Soft Resources here has been used to refer to the human resources and power management while hard aggregately stands for the assembly of natural resources that formed the basis for the community's wealth.

is that criminality in all its form has attracted international attention leading of an avalanche of research in both the developed, less developed and the developing world. See, Godson² This very subject has been vigorously handled by by Muncie J³. Pratt, J. and Erickson.⁴

Straddling all of this should be the way laws are made and justice is exercised. In appreciating security concerns and the frequency with which laws are violated by cooperate or private individuals in certain system or community, there is an indispensable need to study not only the legality of those laws but also their legitimacy.⁵ Aside the comportment of the agents within the Law interpretation and enforcement network with regards to the respect of the law also matter in determining security outcomes. In the current context of globalization, the problem of state sovereignty where security could be guaranteed simply by the ownership of superior weapons and a superb trained army is fast fading away as a result of the emergence of a borderless world wrought with profound evidences in the breach and non-respect of the established laws. Closely related to this is the issue of regional security which is intimately anchored to the growing urge of preventing, managing and solving the breach of Laws (Crimes) among the youths in both developing and developed world. Indeed, even with the sophistication in the domain of technology plus the global concern towards making the world safe from the scourge of criminality, there is yet still a dramatic rise in crime expresses itself variedly across states and continents.

Interestingly, the youths are the leading actors in this new crime enterprise which is seriously endangering world peace, undermining development outcomes and social cohesion. Laws just like value

system differ from one system /polity to the other but the issues securing the respect of human dignity enshrined in the basic text of the 1948 Universal declaration of human rights has a lot of agreeing details. In any case any activity or comportment from individuals or groups that threatens public peace and the security of persons and goods is considered as crimes across cultures. In this realm, practices like drug abuse, armed Robbery, Cyber Criminality and wanton attack on people and property are generally considered as part of world criminality. The threats accruing such vices are that youthful criminality destroys the art of good work, nation building and good sense of purpose that engineers responsible citizenship and development.

It is not an aberration nor is it an exaggeration therefore to say that the strength and pride of every nation is its youths. While the age ranges of a youthful population can differ from one country and region to the other, the fact that youths form the nucleus of the work force thereby posing as a crucial component of developments holds the same magnitude of truth across the broad spectrum of the human interface. Youths can therefore play a perfect but contradictory rule as liabilities and assets depending in their lot (training and education) in the development process of any society An important aspect where the Youths' usefulness or uselessness to the development process can be measure is the depth of its ability and willingness to participate in the development process especially its regards to the tenets of peace.

Unlike conventional Wars that are fought among belligerents with clear-cut objectives and fixed or imagined battle fields, the War against all forms of crime is elastic and compounded by the often changing and confusing nature of its actors. This notwithstanding, the need to eradicate the causes/origins of organized or haphazard individual and collective crimes remains crucial to any nation/society that has a taste and a vision for sustainable development. Interestingly, a bulk if not all the crimes committed in almost the entire human interface come from people belonging to an age group that can be aggregately classified as youthful. It is for this reason that countries do pay much attention to the kind of training or upbringing given/accorded to its youths. With a canalized training and upbringing that ensures moral rectitude and the general respect for the dignity of the human being and his environment, most states expects to have a crime free/minimal environment as the end product. Despite the strategies so far deployed by national and international actors to curb crime by educating and training its youths on values of peace and survival in the world of opportunities along with the penalties that encumbers its victims, crime wave still sours in alarming scale. This is evidenced in litany of terrorist attacks, drug abuse, rape, banditry and other forms of arson planned by or entirely carried out by

² This is prolific research in the domain of criminality research. A few of his many Publications that have erased many doubts in this field will include " Children in Trouble: State responses to Juvenile Crime in Scraton, P.(ed) Childhood in Crises? London: UCL,Press., Also see G. B.(2001) "The Demonization of children from the symbolic to the Institutional" in Foley,P.,Roche J and Tucker (eds) *Children in Society, contemporary Theory, Policy and Practice* : Basingstoke, Palgrave, G.B. (2013) Unsafe ,Unjust and Harmful to a wider Society ,Grounds for raising the Minimal age of Criminal responsibility in England and Wales, *Youth Justice. International Journal*,13.G.B and Muncie J.(2006) Rethinking Youth Justice : Comparative analyses ,International Human Rights and research evidence. *Youth Justice and International Journal*.

³ Muncie J.(2008) The Punitive Turn in Juvenile Justice, Cultures of Control and Rights compliance in western Europe and USA. *Youth Justice International Journal*, Muncie J. (2015) *Youth and Crime 4th* Ed. London: Sage

⁴ Pratt J., and Erickson A.,(2013) Contrasts in Punishment: An explanation of Anglophone Excess and Nordic Exceptionalism, Abingdon: Routledge.

⁵ Legality will have to do with the various methods used in putting into used. In modern democracies the question of whether this Law has been soundly rooted, debated, securitized and adopted by a competent body and gazetted by a legitimate elected official are answered to ensure legality. Legitimacy has to do with the wider acceptability of the Law of its popularity meaning its usefulness to the communities to which there were enacted to serve.

individuals belonging to the youthful age groups in the entire human interface.

The questions begging for answers are (a) why is it that there is continues rise in multi-faceted crime inspite the efforts so far deployed? (b) Why is crime wave so particular among youths and (c) why are policies geared towards the eradication of crimes not yielding the required fruits? While answers to these questions may provide clues to the understanding of the rise of crime wave as a result of decaying morals and wanton love for disorder including certain radical religious credos, in the developed world, these very answers may not squarely suit the Bamenda Grassfield where legal structures and policy implementation are still relatively fragile. This is the mission of this paper. It uses an interdisciplinary method of cross investigation to bring out why and how crime in the form of jungle justice, drug abuse, legal defiance, armed robbery and no cyber theft are not only common but on a dramatic rise among the Bamenda Grassfield youths.

Colonial Reality and the Dynamics of Grassfields Juvenile Criminality

Colonization and all forms of alien cultures and beliefs became a reality to most African societies especially those of Cameroon as from 1884 but the real touch to the African way of life occurred only in the later part of the 19th century or even far later. In the Cameroon grassfields which conforms roughly to the present polities of the Northwest region, concrete evidence of colonial influence could be felt only during the first part of the 20th century.⁶ In any case colonization did not simply ensure a shift in emphasis and approach to material wellbeing or world view. Either through colonization or other forms of alien abstraction like Christianity and Islam, the penetration of alien views to the African traditional psyche entailed a morass of issues deeply entrenched in change. This encompassed a change of mentality with regard to Fons/traditional leaders invincibility and infallibility, a shift in values and policy formation from a pure patriarchal polity with social hierarchies having the fon at the pinnacle to one having but a somehow unknown foreign dignitary and reversal of values and principles to a new lane dictated most of the time by alien forces.

This array of issues that sought in almost every aspect to make change so necessary even in the already venerated aspect of grassfield traditions and ignited enormous acrimony from the very beginning and brought about the War of resistances. Intriguingly, the

⁶ Nicolas Argenti(2007) *The Intestines of the State: Youth Violence and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp.6-7. He records that it was not until the 20th century that most of the whites because of greed for profit and adventure decided to push quite inland to discover the resources including the men and women that were items of trade in the coast that the transformation of the inland people really started.

wars ended most of the time with the defeat of the Grassfield traditional military recruited, trained and equipped with ideas and armoury based on African cosmology. It was this series of defeats that made change of approach and regards to almost every aspect of native wellbeing non-negotiable. In this new order of things the traditional authorities gradually found the power of limb and life over their subjects insipidly shifting away from their central command. Although the agents/officials of colonization or imperialism are said to have treated African with absconding contempt, their theoretical regard to a human person had quite contrasting conception from the Grassfields folk. It was really normal, subjected to reason and in line with the royal pattern of prestige in the pre-colonial days to refer to and treat people as subjects but European found this appellation and treatment attached to it as absurd.⁷ Even in British Cameroons where the grassfields forms the nucleus, the Europeans struggled amidst difficulties and succeeded in the main to wipe away such apprehensions from the psyche of the chieftains. This scheme just like Christianity and other alien issues like education and various forms of awareness help to pull down royalty and its accolades from the pinnacle of power to the status where cohabitation and allegiance to everything connected to power and wellbeing was to be negotiated. In was this respect that certain aspects of patriarchy and gerontocracy formed the nucleus of traditional laws and justice began being put to test. With this came serious indications of a need for the reversal of values and some figments of tradition that ascribed enormous impunity to traditional authorities most especially in the domain of the judiciary and social segmentation.

As colonization and all the accessories of change ushered in by alien cultures continued to inch forward, fissures of an emergence of a voice for Youths, women and commoners who were treated as the down trodden lot began to appear and take shape. Under colonial judicial system, people were maimed, molested and killed at will but colonial agents did everything to remove the death penalty right from the Fons to keep it only within their reach. The same thing was done to the *sash wood ordeal*⁸ which in the pre-

⁷ M.Freeden, (1978) *The New Liberalism*. Oxford: Claredon

⁸ This a Chemical Substance that was concocted locally and kept at the palaces believed to have the unquestionable powers of confirming whether a suspected person was guilty of a crime or not. It was mostly used when the traditional judiciary after all attempts could clearly establish evidence that a suspect was wholesomely guilty of a serious crime like adultery, rape, profound Witchcraft that threatened public Wellbeing or conspiracy against a royal precedence. Almost all grass fields societies had so many of these deadly deals which their people claimed to have taken oath of office. In an interview with prince Francis Chia Ngam about the relevance of this scheme, he never minced his words in buttressing fact that the effectiveness of that practice scared away most people from engaging in criminal deals. He however regretted the fact that the ordeal was suppressed by the Germans who collected samples of the concoction and conducted a lab test. According to him, the German only claimed that the concoction had lethal/poisonous qualities that could not spare the life of any person but expressed doubts in the veracity of their claim

colonial days was used as the surest test to culpability of crimes. In addition, the supposedly dignified practice of burying the Fon with able young people with the conviction that they will serve him in the land of the ancestors was outlawed. In sum colonialism and any form of alien culture anchored by the Church and Islam worked in harmony to brush off and completely outlawed any practice within the traditional system that went in the direction of killing some people. Concretely, the percolation of alien ideas, practices and customs to the grassfields traditional polities did not only ushered in cultural clashes that were limited in space. Such penetration equally altered the laws, conception of punishment and the qualities of Laws. The need to afford administration cheaper and avoid a litany of clashes with the people here made the British to apply the Indirect Rule Policy. This policy sought to protect the traditional structures as well as to harness some in order to fit them into their administrative mould. Harnessing means either reordering or sweeping aside some of the odd elements that found its faith only within the breath of African traditional religion. Like suggested earlier, these new developments provided fissures in the social hierarchies which the youths negotiated space to emerge and make their voices heard but this unfortunately landed them in a great deal of criminality. Candidly, the African youth in the midst of such changes had to be redefined a task which the traditional administration was not ready to perform even under duress? The new contours of African Youths and the challenge to the gerontocracy elite under the colonial auspices has been aptly handled by Argenti when among other things he opines that

In an infantilization throughout Africa that recurs throughout, those denied toehold on the ladder of elite hierarchies are systematically represented as children, adolescents, younger siblings or bachelors such depictions are rhetorical devices that make the exploitation by elites to pass for strict and fair paternalism and that also help to ridicule the complaints of the exploited as the tantrums of ungrateful toddlers. it is to this people –the men and the women excluded from the pyramidal hierarchies of the grass fields and facing lifelong bachelorhood, penury and servitude and to the History of their confrontation with authority that[the question of youths emergence and as a group with peculiar dignity rested] ⁹

The African youth in general and that of the grass fields in particular therefore had to do all to be liberated from this scourge else he/she finds himself submerged by the developments of the new age which changed had ushered in. Indeed paternalism as obtained in the grass fields almost throughout the colonial era

owing to the fact that some few people survived thereby proving their innocence to the suspicion.

⁹ Nicolas Argenti ,(2007) *The Intestines of the State*,p.7.

and even for some time after found its roots in the African proverb “ The Voice of the Elder is the Voice of God.” Though to some very large extent this made sense and helped to wave some unruly behaviour that have encumbered the societies with various forms of crime, such sweeping statements only went a long way to put the youths under bondage. The belief system ushered by this proverb and many more avenues that justified paternalism were going by the European regards of human dignity, crimes in themselves. So the colonial and church authority did not only seek to address issues of individual criminality. It sought equally to address issues of systemic criminality. In any case, a new offering full of promise for the youth women and bachelors who were graded by the system with disdain had come. Buttressing on the broad high way to opportunities created/ opened for the Youths in this age Argenti goes further to emphasize that:

The advent of colonialism brought about new orders of power that encouraged young men to express their frustrations and to see escape from their exploitations. Although some of the changes brought about as a result of the exploitation seemed to have been advantageous to young men and women others were undoubtedly deleterious. The main advantage of the onset of colonial authority for the minority of young men and women stemmed from the need for the new bureaucracy for skilled labour, literate clerks, secretaries and low ranking officials who could keep the machinery of government working at the national and local levels. A small minority of young men were quick to take up the opportunities presented [offered] by the new balance of power. ... Gaining an education into one of the mission schools suddenly came to be seen as [obtaining] the ticket of freedom from the protracted subordination to ones elders.¹⁰

These new pattern of wealth accumulation that ensured power and full integration of youths into the administrative framework sometimes higher in rank and essence to the traditional esteem opened up the minds of youths and gave them various forms of self-expression and worth. The fact that youths were introduced to a new pattern of life where cash and allegiance to a very sophisticated system of laws mattered far more than anything else, constituted a serious breach of social contract that existed between them and their traditional administration. With this new offering that brought in a number of teachings, doctrines and sophistications that appealed even to some of the elders taste, the survival of paternalism and its accompanied gerontocracy stood in a shaky balance and eventually collapsed. This breakdown of the traditional system following the intense pressure placed on it by

¹⁰ *Ibid*.p.8.

the church, schooled and critical mass of young men, brought about the remaking of laws and allegiance to tradition through a joint process of negotiation by the colonial authorities and the church on one hand and the colonial authorities and the traditional administration on the other.

Pointedly, not all the promises and fascination preached by the new agents of change nor the protection offered by the new Law became a living reality. So many youths jumped into the emancipation, empowerment or enrichment schemes offered by colonization and all its agencies with voracious expectations.¹¹ Like in any human endeavour not all of them became the veritable elements of change nor were they purely part of the new colonial agents. Seen to have demonstrated open divorce from the traditional administration along with its judiciary system but caught up in the web of transformation and integration in the opportunities dreamt, these class of youths imposed various forms of distortion to the social hierarchy.¹² The fact that youths could freely refuse or even ignore orders from their traditional elite and get the protection of the new colonial agency appealed to many youths and implanted seeds of upright disobedience in many. Through accumulation of wealth and the erection of a court system that buttressed the equality of all before the law, it became very common for a schooled, salaried or Christianized youth to violate any element of the customary law in hope of being vindicated by the European law. True enough, emancipated, schooled and Christianized youths in their numbers formed the memory and workforce for the agitations that shaped the fortunes of independence. It was mostly in their shoulders that the outgoing European colonial barons bestowed power and this necessitated the urgency of repositioning laws and criminality.

The Post-colonial Juvenile Morphology

To understand the Grassfield juvenile crime morphology during the post-colonial era, there is need to have a grasp of the social, economic and political climate that shaped and animated the Grassfields prior to colonization. This is important in that it helps to provide the indigenous elements of crime and justice in the traditional setting as well as the comportment and conception of criminal activity therein. To add to this should be the assembly of alien elements patterning to the definition of crimes and their corresponding forms

¹¹ The fantasies and encounters often expressed by the youths and so many African folk once they came in contact with alien principles, abstractions or practices are vividly documented by Joe Ebiegberi Alagoa in *The Practice of History in Africa, A history of African Historiography*, (Port Harcourt: Nigeria, Onyoma Research Publications, 2006), pp. 167-8.

of punishments that were introduced by the colonial administration.

The Cameroon Grassfields whose Youths' comportment and geographical area is the locus of this study represent an interesting ecological niche of the African political systems. It's socio-Political and economic structures and their change over time anchor interesting evidences for the understanding of rising criminality in this region. See Aletum, 2006, Ngam, 2013, Sama 2005. Its people are multi-ethnic but generally conforming to the centralized system of social and political hierarchies where life rotates around the fon and his dependencies.¹³ Some of these centralized political systems that were generally referred to as Kingdom by pioneer researchers are the people of Nso, Kom, Bafut, Bum, Babanki the Bali to name but just these few.¹⁴ To this should be added the Aghem and the ngemba ethnic groups who claim a different migration trajectory but happened to have also erected socio-political institutions alike with the tikari groups. Prior to colonization, life and peoples' conduct within this area was patterned in the realm of patriarchy that was firmly rooted in African traditional religion. All of this system was deeply encapsulated by a profound reverence for the ancestors and gods. In this kind of contingent and world view, laws that were the cardinal elements of shaping behaviour and provision of justice were enacted mostly by regulatory cults and fraternal groups that carried varied appellations.¹⁵ Aside, justice was dispensed by a well-established judiciary system ranging from the village council at the bottom to the palace council of notables where the fon by proxy often played the rule of the supreme judge.

In this social arrangement, women and youths had little space to participate in decision making or to express their will. This notwithstanding, parents (male folk) had the supreme duty of training their children with the ideals and values of self-respect, justice, moral rectitude which could be displayed through honesty, hard work, accountability and judicious use of cooperate or community property.¹⁶ Community property entailed and aggregately involved number of

¹³ Fisiy Cyprain F., "Chieftaincy in the Modern State: An Institution at the Crossroad of Democratic Change", *Paideuma* 14, 1995:49-62. Also see Clastres P., *La société contre l'Etat: recherches d'anthropologie politique*, Paris, Minuit, 1974

¹⁴ See a detailed profile of these centralized polities as well as how they have made and marred the fortunes of the different social groups in the Grassfields in Confidence Chia Ngam (2013) "Kom Leadership in Its Regional Sub-setting Ca.1865-2005. A study in Power and Diplomacy within a Grassfield Traditional State", Ph.D thesis University of Yaounde 1.

¹⁵ This regulatory society was called alternately as Kwifor among the Libums, Nwerong among the Nso, Kwifoyn among the Kom and the Bums.

¹⁶ The drama of marriage and divorce between the African pristine institution prior to colonization has been elaborately developed by Mback C. Nack, "La chefferie traditionnelle au Cameroun: ambiguïtés juridiques et dérivées politiques", *Africa Development*, Vol XXV, n°s 3&4, 2000 : 77-118

things that ensured societal wellbeing. Indeed Bridges, Roads, water sources, forests, food and the security of goods and lives of each person irrespective of the social class formed part of the community wealth whose preservation or protection was a collective responsibility. There was in this entire pattern an overriding non conditional respect for elders who were esteemed to be the custodian of justice and anything connected to criminality. Irrespective of the motive, it was heinous crime in all African societies to trample upon the right and privileges of the elderly, children and the handicapped people of every sort.

Indeed, pristine Grassfield societies were therefore not only patriarchal but also deeply religious and smeared with gerontocracy of a renowned kind. These established structures that trapped mostly women and youths imposed an anew functional order where the respect of the laws which were known simply as tradition was almost automatic. Though tradition reserved some measure of penalties for almost every kind of crime and a judiciary system that was which catered for all sorts of crimes, traditional crime deterrence mechanism worked for the drastic reduction of Criminality within the Grassfield society during this period. With royalty at the pick of authority and power, the youths and women found it sacrilegious to question anything that did not square in well with their thinking let alone the dream of breaching the established Laws and customs. Even with this kind of occurrences which acted like serious restraints to the breach of the Law, various forms of crimes were still committed and the traditional administration represented by the Fon had to deal with it.¹⁷ The problem of legitimacy of the law and the soundness of justice rendered did not occur firstly because the tradition did not provide space for that and secondly because the existing laws along with the way justice was dispense; had a fairer implications among the local folk.¹⁸ Aside the physical measures and somehow frightful judicial system that acted like deterrence to crime towered in the spiritual the fear of the unknown like death, curses and homelessness. These were just few of the many things that were locally held to be the consequence for anybody or groups of individuals that were guilty of any crime.

The religious implication of crimes most of time went beyond any practical or physical form of punishment. This makes it difficult to clearly asses whether it was the willingness of the local folk to respect the laws or the fear of it that kept criminality in

¹⁷ The royal social and administrative hierarchies had so many ways of dealing with crimes though in the main, crime wave was not really endemic. Crimes ranged from payment of fine, exclusion, corporal punishment to death sentences each of them depended on the gravity of the crime to societal or wellbeing of persons and goods. Death sentences, or exclusion or seclusion were considered as capital crimes and therefore allowed to be sanctioned by the v Place judiciary organ.

¹⁸ Dieudonné Miaffo, „Chefferie traditionnelle et démocratie: réflexion sur le destin du chef en régime pluraliste. Yaounde, LAAM, 1993

the Grass fields relatively low within the time on course.¹⁹ Within this religious realm too, there existed a thought pattern which fought tirelessly to push through the idea that the gods and ancestors were omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent.²⁰ This helped largely to deter people from engaging in any activity that ran contrary to the established laws and customs. Even with this, the traditional essence of power and the justice in its bosom vibrated. With all sorts of opposition and doubts to the efficiency of traditional leadership and its judiciary pushed to the rear or completely removed, the Grassfield traditional societies could aptly be describe to overwhelmingly crime free or ridden with limited crimes in the pre-colonial era. It should be underscored here that during this period, the notion of human rights and dignity had its place in each society but this unfortunately always lost it grip when it came to royal prerogatives or the desire to conform to ancestral demands.²¹ From the foregoing it sounds plausible to proffer that safe for inter-tribal wars and succession disputes that brought in a lot of instability in the Grassfields, life here was quite stable. This somehow debunks the European construct which sought to opine that African societies prior to their annexation were violent, barbaric and cannibalistic.²² Such conclusions were certainly rooted in a misconception that the European model of life and of approach to basic needs squared in for every society and was expected in that quality to pass for a religious dogma worth the veneration of all. In fact, as far as appreciating African

¹⁹ Kwasi, Wiredu,(1980) *Philosophy and African Culture*, London: Cambridge University Press, pp.33-4.

Also see other developments of the same themes in Kaptue, Léon. “Pris entre le marteau et enclume, le pouvoir traditionnel choisit-il de se prostituer au Cameroun : endoscopie de la situation de 1884 à 1992” Paper presented during the international colloquium on ‘Rois et chefs dans les états Africaines’, Paris,8-10 Novembre 1999.

²⁰ A solid development of how this sustained the privileges of the fon and his responsibility is presented by, Jean-Pierre, Warnier, “The King as a Container in the Cameroon Grassfields” *Paideuma* 39 (1993): 303-319

²¹ An understanding of this limited essence of human rights and dignity can be gotten by buttressing the fact that most grass field traditions and religious thought pattern tried as much as possible to elevate royalty to the pinnacle of general veneration by all and this spelt the plight of commoners, youths and women in the traditional societies .The voice of the youths as well as the ambitions was never brought on board in deciding the laws that guided them. The women consent before marriage was never sought and the worse was the fact that upon the death(passing away or disappearance)of each fon people considered to slaves(servants)were always buried alive following a religious conception that upheld those people were to serve the fon in the next world or in the land of the ancestors. In out interview with Francis Chia Ngam in 2006 he exaggerated this gross display of ignorance buttress by African Religion by adding that in Kom there were certain royal mask non locally as *Akum a Gwuee* whose very being or material survival depended on the sprinkling of human blood each time it was to officiate in a traditional ceremony. This only went a long way to paint the frustration of the commoners especially owing to the fact that there was also guilt detection liquid and death penalty imposed of criminals that most of time got the wrong persons.

²² Quite a lot has been done in the direction of establishing the Potency of African societies prior to Colonization. Davidson Basil in *Lost Cities of Africa*, Walter Rodney In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* are just a few of the many.

laws and tradition was concerned care had to be taken about the founding principle that guaranteed their legitimacy and not judged and sentenced in the light of foreign (European). Colonization or European imperialism and other alien cultures therefore met an established African system complete with patriarchy and gerontocracy but relatively free of any organized collective or individual criminality.

Grassfields Post-Colonial Juvenile Deviancy and Collective Response

The question of the age and types of people to be grouped into the juvenile class construes wide scholarly and policy debates in any society. This varies sharply between countries of the South and north with the age limit usually pegged at 18 for societies with early patterns of wealth accumulation and access to jobs.²³ In tropical African at large and the Cameroon grassfields in particular, the legal stipulations dictates that juvenility falls within any time before the age of 18 years. Practically, juvenility within the Grassfields context implies youthfulness and this is rather used to denote the population youth group ranging from the age of 18 to the fringes of 35 years. Juvenile deviance employed here does not convey the same international meaning that goes with the universal meaning of juvenility. The deviance or delinquency in it is used contextually to mean the youths individual and collective comportment that violates the law or the established ways of doing things. It is therefore construed on the bases of Cameroon and most particularly the grassfields geopolitics than the internationally accepted standards.²⁴

On account of differing views, juxtapositions and manipulation by Britain corroborated with anticipation by the political elite that emerged from the religious mould and the various colonial pre-colonial platforms, the British Cameroons which the identified Grassfield region forms an integral part acceded to independence on the 1st of October 1961. As an integral part of Anglophone Cameroon, developments in the Cameroon grassfields were going to move in tune with other development here. Although a federal framework was worked out prior to independence to guarantee the

survival of the foreign plus traditional cultural tenets in each of the two states, matters surrounding the judiciary especially the breach of the Law, crime deterrence measures like Punishment and security depended on (a) the humour of the president (b) the prevailing circumstances, (c) the availability, ability and willingness of the Law enforcement agents to dispense justice as well the legitimacy (acceptability) of the Laws in force by the people for which they were enacted to serve or protect. To understand how the above mentioned conditioned worked for or against the juvenile criminality deviance in the grassfields during the post-colonial era, it will be important to observe it in light of the socio-political and economic developments during the (a) Federal/United Cameroon era 1961-19812 and (b) the new deal era.

The Federal/United Framework and Juvenile Criminality in the Grassfields

As announced shortly, on the 1st of October the Federal Republic of Cameroon came into reality constituted by two states through an arrangement within which so many things were gained, lost and compromised at both ends.²⁵ This gained and loses combined with the ecological realities, the political climate and the humour of the political actors to define the fortunes of the youths which greatly shaped their approach to justice and crime. The Federal constitution that emerged from the debates of the Bamenda, Fouban and the Yaounde conclaves drew the pattern for the enactment of laws as well as the application of justice in Cameroon. Indeed with regards to Laws, justice and crime, the constitution stated unequivocally that Laws in the Federated states shall be made through submissions and debates by the federal assemblies.²⁶ Through this courts of differing grades were set up with special ones (native courts) created and authorised to handle matters that failed within the ambits of native world view and material wellbeing all deeply entrenched in African traditional religion. In the grassfield area, the native's courts ran in the spirit of the British House of Common and officiated/judged matters mostly patterning to marriage, succession and ancestral prerogatives that appealed strictly to native Laws and customs. This allowance helped in the early days to prevent criminality mostly because the settlement of most of the cases agreed in details to the expectation of the people and summarily crafted out a conviction in

²³ See such classic age demarcations and its reasons in juvenile or youthful developments varied developed by Andrews M. (1994) *Dickens and the Grown Up Child*, Basingstoke: Macmillan. V. Bailey (19817) *Delinquency and Citizenship: Reclaiming the Young Offender, 1914-1948*, Oxford: Clare don. H. Cunningham (1991) *Children of the Poor*, Oxford: Blackwell. L.C. Barry (1999) *the Child, the State and the Novel*, Charlottesville PA., University of Pennsylvania Press

²⁴ There is an often mismatched between the classifications of a youth in the African Context. For the most youthfulness is used to refer any person who still very strong to perform certain task, like running, hunting, and farming, fishing and digging. Most of the time age is not used as a defining pillar though any person beyond the age of 18 Or almost 20 years is generally accepted to belong to the youth group. While it is possible to set a lower age limit to who can be held as a youth in a traditional society, it is difficult to know the upper age limit because youthfulness gets out of the context of physical looks to anchor issues like responsibility to material and public Wellbeing.

²⁵ To understand the fine filaments of the Cameroon Federation see Neville Rubin (2007) *The Cameroon Federation*, London: Pall Mall Press, pp 110-14. Viewing the fact that the two section of Cameroon had significant undergone an immersion into alien culture; one French and the other British from 1916 to 1961, the federation did not only prove to be the only workable framework but was also arrived out through a kind of negotiation during which a lot of opportunities were gained, lost or simply compromised on both ends.

²⁶ With the special circumstances that prevailed in southern Cameroon which became known as West Cameroon as from 1961 she, was exceptionally allowed to have two Federal assemblies. One of this was constituted by elected official called the West Cameroon parliament and the other known as the Southern Cameroon House of chiefs (SCHC).

most of chieftains psyche that every person was equal before the Law. The Federal constitution upheld the competencies of courts clearly in part VI when it stated that;

Justice in the Federation shall be administered in the name of the people of Cameroon by the competent Court of each state... the Federal Court shall have jurisdiction (a) to decide conflicts of jurisdictions between the highest court of the Federated states (b) to give final judgements in such appeals as may be granted by the Federal Law from the judgement of the superior Court of the federated state where the application of the Federal Law is in issue.²⁷

Though the earlier parts of this very constitution most especially part III defined the office and duties of the president, outlined so many outlets for possible annulment of courts decisions through presidential decrees, communiqués and memos, there was still room for some judiciary arrangements most especially in West Cameroon which largely acted like a deterrent for criminality from across the age groups. In the grassfields the attempt to restore the decaying powers of the fons and native customs through the creation of the Southern Cameroon House of Chiefs along with its native courts systems also acted like a crime prevention strategy not only among youths but throughout the different age groups. True enough, the colonial agencies through its various structures and institutions had formed a number of youths who were already acquainted with a new way of interpreting and dealing with the Law but this did not entail a sort of wholesale rejection of those figments of punishment that had profound relevance in the traditional philosophy. The modern administration represented by the, governor, D.O sub D.O or any other appointed official was prepared in this new order to pamper some traditional ways of rendering justice most especially by the traditional authorities who according to the 1976 presidential decree, were graduated into various levels of administrative hierarchies.²⁸ Indeed, the immediate post-colonial administration represented by the Laws and traditions of the West Cameroon government, strove and incidentally pampered the Fons/chiefs or native authorities and succeeded in the main to integrate them into the administrative mould where the modern and the traditional systems of crime and justice interpretation and deterrent had a warm intercourse. In

²⁷ See the entire readings of all of this sub elements in Article VI and VII of the Federal Constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon that was signed into effect by President Ahmadou Ahidjo on the 1st of October 1961.

²⁸ See the 1976 Law that carefully worked out the condition for the procedure of recognition of a traditional authority. Although this was not a novelty in the grassfield because Fons, chiefs or Lamidos had always been recognized, this Law was certainly informed by the native administrative system that had flourished here to graduate these natural rulers into First, Second and third classes each having its own specific rights and responsibilities over its own sphere of influence.

this spirit, these traditional authorities though not sufficiently informed of the inner workings of the modern governance helped in their own way to provide the administrative and judicial necessities that curbed crime, rendered justice and initiated local developments.

By so doing, there were rare chances of administrative short circuits of any kind with regards to crime provocation, management or prevention that arose as a result of a "center periphery" administrative decay.²⁹ Even though these authorities were still as much enveloped in the realm of patriarchy and gerontocracy, the new schemes of assignments abounding /emerging in the new order like secretaries, clerks, administrators, pastors, priest, policemen, sanitary inspectors, lawyers, teachers, custom officials, nurses, auditors and agricultural technicians suited and appealed more to the youths. Training youths for such sophisticated assignments required not only the knowledge of psychology, Mathematics, Geometry, Physics and logic that cut across most disciplines but significant emphasis were laid on ethics which buttress moral righteousness in every aspect of public and private undertakings. Infact, Self-worth, Societal mastery, disciplines and a demonstrated ability to serve and not always to be served constituted important elements of training in all the different institutions that were erected to train youths in the multiple assignments that sustained the symbiotic governing system.³⁰

Working in harmony with these moral shaping institutions, was the church. At independence, the Cameroon constitution did not mince its diction on the position of the church in state affairs. It spelt out very clearly that the state was going to be secular meaning issues of religion and faith were not going to intermingle in state affairs. However, this only became a matter of principle because the various peoples that formed the Cameroon nation were deeply religious. The northern part of Cameroon corresponding to present day Adamawa, North and Far North Regions were either deeply Islamic or had their lifestyles patterned on Islamic religious credos. The rest of the country was Christians, Muslims or laying obedience to some kind of cults that found its full expression in African traditional religions. From 1961 hence, Ahidjo in

²⁹ This is a concept/theory which holds that in a centralized system where power is concentrated mostly at the center, the people at the fringes often feel neglected and most of the time turn to withdraw their allegiance to the central command in favour of erecting their won structures or at worst negotiating different forms of allegiance to the same or different authority.

³⁰ To see how all of these values arose and got intrinsically calcified in public space read Confidence Chia Ngam in(2016) " Tracing the Southern West Cameroon Soul in the Southern West Cameroon Political leadership" in Begono (ed), *Ethique et Politique*, Yaounde: Harmattan, pp .44-68. Similar ideas have been vividly developed by the same author in " The Survival of trihe Bamenda Spirit in the Cameroon Federation: The West Cameroon Search for Political Space and Identity published by African Journal of Social Sciences(AJOS)Voume 6,No 4 pp-4-21.

accordance with the West Cameroon deep immersion in issues of religion sustained by a need for a moral building scheme encouraged the growth of religious groups whose preaching and world view did not contradict the Laws of the state. With this, the Church and the other religious groups of good standing adopted schemes of mind training and moral formations that awakened the youths especially in West Cameroon where the Grassfields forms the nucleus into good works. Incidentally, these religious authorities happened to be people sufficiently endowed with moral rectitude and a demonstrated sense of justice. With the exception of the Catholic Church that had a very limited well trained clergy, the rest of the churches were manned by people of appreciably very light educational training but their ability to do good in private and public dealings towered in all their functions and intent.

In West Cameroon, the Church and the Mosques plus all their different associate institutions served like budding centres for youths who were often recruited and trained to perform state functions. Additionally, the state erected several check mechanisms to ensure that Churches, Mosques, worship centres operated according to state established norms. To tidy up the environment for a crime limited/free society the West Cameroon government worked out a scheme where, the consumption of liquor and all sorts of intoxicants that could otherwise engineer criminality were highly checked and defaulters punished accordingly.

To all of this should also be highlighted the passion and objectivity with which those making, interpreting and executing the laws on daily basis performed their various assignments.³¹ Throughout the length and breadth of the existence of West Cameroon, Lawyers, Policemen, Teachers, priests, pastor and tax agents were men of reference with regards both to character formation /shaping leading to crime prevention.³² The overriding impact of all of this was that the courts in Southern Cameroon and most especially in the Grassfields became a source of judicial reference, Lawyers were seen as veritable legal luminaries bestowed with exceeding legal mastery and sound judgement. Either as a police, nurse, custom officer, teacher or any other warrant job, the sense of duty and of rendering of justice within the ambit of merit became the watchword. The fluidness and transparency in in most public transactions was replicated in private deals and all of them worked in the direction of curbing criminality almost everywhere by

producing multiple platforms of understandings. Youths therefore formed the nexus both as raw materials and the end products in which the West and the federal Cameroon governments relied on.

These emerging forms of fascinations opened multiple frontiers of opportunities for the young folks and pressured the traditional authorities to collaborate with the government by supplying youths to be trained for the various assignments in view. In the 1960s and 70s there was some mass movement of youths away from traditional assignments that hitherto shaped their wellbeing to take up training and offices available. The rise in functions of administrative headquarters like Bamenda (old Abakwa), Kumbo, Wum and Nkambe also provoked a deal of rural-urban migration that did not only moderated lifestyles but also occasioned paradigmatic shifts and turns in the apprehension of criminality. These alterations were generally reinforced by the fact that young folks got enormous transformation in their new assignments through their full-scale immersion into the modern statist system. Though the understanding of crimes and the punishment due them differed in many aspects between the traditional and the modern system of administration that were incidentally forced to function together, the West Cameroon government in keeping with the Anglo-saxon tradition formed and promoted the civil police and graduated it into various grades. In West Cameroon at large and in the Grassfields in particular, the curbing of juvenile criminality in the 60s and 70s was a coordinated work of the different species of Police units, the non-prejudicial, nature of the law with its various interpreting and enforcement agents along with the abiding pride that came with being just.

However, there was need to collect revenue for public spending established a system in both West and East Cameroon where everybody was to pay a tax. Though these taxes were most of the time within the reach of the targeted population, the lack of a culture of blind obedience to new instructions especially when such laws were sourced in alien contraptions made tax evasion high in the Grasfields. There were in all very rare circumstances when the chieftains either fled their homes or were into confrontation with the police as a result of an unwillingness to pay the annual taxes homologated. This notwithstanding, political Developments³³ in French/ West Cameroon plus the humour of the Federal President; Ahmadou Ahidjo to undertake a couple of measures sanctioned by a series

³¹ Ibid. The laws in West Cameroon were built in the spirit of the Federal framework but were made through a reasonable consensus through intense scrutiny in the state assembly in Buea. The lawyers that were mostly trained in a typical anglo-saxon system where moral probity and fair judgement was of repute were in charge with the interpreting the laws while the Police was in charge with the civil execution of the Laws.

³² *ibid.* Ndi A. Calls this *The Golden Age of British South/West Cameroon.*

³³ Unlike West Cameroon where political progress was hampered by internal wranglings and constant clashes of the nature and implications of some federal prerogatives, life in French Cameroon was full of acrimony, suspicion of different Kinds. More than anything else there was the UPC scare known locally as *Maquisards* led in the jungle mainly by the Ernest Qundi and Um Nyobe which posed as a major threat to the political balance in East Cameroon. See How the UPC made and marred the Political Process in both French and British Cameroon in Richard A.J oseph () *Social Origins of the UPC.*

of Presidential decrees which significantly moderated the power of the state courts and the Law enforcement officers. In all, Ahidjo veiled himself behind the much cherished need of ensuring national cohesion, unity and a high sense of decency in public conduct to sign decrees that intimidated/frightened people in the federal states to be scared from committing any sort of crime. Faced with enormous perils and extensively handicapped by the Federal arrangements and in order to confer sufficient powers to himself and by extension the state, Ahidjo proceeded by ruling most of Cameroon by Decrees. One of such Decrees that impacted heavily on judicature and shaped the fortunes of crime and criminals in Cameroon was that of 12 March 1962. In it, Ahidjo minced no words in ordering that:

Any person who in any manner whatsoever incites other persons to resist in any manner whatsoever, the application of the laws, Decrees, or orders of any public administrative authority shall be guilty of misdemours and shall be liable to a fine of 100,000 to 1 million francs or to from a period from three months to three years of both such fine and imprisonment. Any person who acts in any manner likely to bring to contempt or ridicule any public authority or who incites hatred against the government of the Federal Republic or any Federated state or who takes part in any subversive enterprise against the authorities or Laws of the said Republic or federated states or who aids and abets in such enterprise, shall be guilty of misdemours and shall be liable to affine of 200,000 to 2 million francs or to imprisonment for a period of 1 to 5 years or to both such fine and imprisonment.³⁴

Besides this, the Police, Gendarmes and other auxiliaries of justice and public administration through a number of ordinances were authorised to take prompt measures whenever the sovereignty of the state and security of goods and person was threatened to maintain peace, bring honour to the state and ensure public order. Indeed, the way things worked in Cameroon after 1961 and the interpretation of it literally translated into and confirmed Abel Eyinga Contention that Cameroon under Ahmadou Ahidjo was in a perpetual State of Emergency.³⁵ Generally, criminality in the Cameroon Grassfields during the Federation and almost throughout the Ahidjo Era that lasted till 4th November 1982 was minimal. This was due in part by the fact that from 1961-72, the Federal arrangements still provided

sufficient allowance for traditional way of crime prevention through training and orientation to thrive and also by the fact that through brute force and skilful leadership Ahidjo took a lot of measures which tactfully integrated youths in their numbers into the administrative hierarchies. To this should be added the overall comportment of Law enforcement officers notably the Police who overwhelmingly gained a reputation of moral probity and job consciousness in British Cameroon. Unfortunately, this trend that had given repute to the grassfield area and by extension all of West Cameroon began fading away during the era of the United Republic of Cameroon

Criminality Transcript during the United Cameroon Era, 1972-82.

Under the guise of reinforcing National Unity and Integration sustained by a conspicuous claim of curbing public spending, by avoiding the duplications of functions, along with the complications or ambiguities of the Federal experiment, Ahidjo used his skewed constitutional allowance and pushed the Federation out of Work by 1972. With this came a grotesque attempt to harmonize every aspect of public life. This harmonization scheme that was certainly rooted in a mistaken feeling that unity was directly synonymous to uniformity opened wide fault lines, in the judicial landscape which in turn opened new flood gates for urban and rural criminality. The case was particularly perilous when gendarmes' officers of predominant East Cameroon origin were transferred or appointed to administer and reinforce justice in the Cameroon grassfields. In substance, the culture of administering justice along with the definition of crimes bore different apprehension between the Gendarmes and the police which were the main actors of crime prevention on the ground. To this should also be highlighted the fact that the Laws in force within these two states had diametrically differences. Passionate and xenophobic scholarship holds that most of the Gendarmes, lawyers, nurses and different echelons of administrative cadres sent to the west Cameroon grassfields majoring from East Cameroon were found to be of very doubtful moral conduct. However, it suffices to note that most of them were people with a different culture and worldview with regards to crime, punishment and justice. The case was appalling with the comportment of Gendarmes who were already versed with the intimidation of civilians in the name of rendering justice. The few people in the grassfields who were savvy both of the Law and their rights found these gendarmes to be experts in breaching the law or in trampling on any of its aspects. In the main these agents turned to engineer rather curbing criminality.

In this realm so many fissures of Law violation or its non-respect by key members of the agency became noticeable thereby motivating some people to start withdrawing their trust in such public authorities. Even at that, it was rare in that era to hear of fragrant

³⁴ See article 1 and 2 of Decree No62/of/18 of 12vMarch 1962 See Full text of this decree pointedly likened in the Jacobin order in the appendix II B of Richard A, Josephs(1978) ,*Gaulist Africa: Cameroun Under Ahmadou, Ahidjo.*, Enugu Nigeria :Fourth Dimension Publishers,p 2010.

³⁵ Abel Eyinga (1978)" Government by State of Emergency " in Richard A. Joseph, *Gaulist Africa: Cameroun Under Ahmadou Ahidjo*,pp101-3.

cases of rape, armed-robbery/burglary, Fraud, drug abuse, murder, corruption, burning, looting and destruction or any sort of organized crime. Public property both within the traditional and statist circle was not only hallowed by all but expected in collective memory to be protected. True enough, the police and gendarmes who were in charge of the day to day functioning of the citizens were not by present day standards better equipped and trained, but their willingness coupled with their ability to do good through selfless and non-prejudicial service to the public incidentally reduced crime wave especially among youths to the barest minimum. Indeed brute force and skilful leadership that had the respect for the state and their governing institutions succeeded to reduce criminals thereby checking most forms of criminality especially in the urban local. The availability of jobs in almost every sector for the youths plus a thriving private sector combined with some sort of rigour not only for the judiciary but most of the agents in the laws enforcement schemes to keep criminals on check. There was some credible limits of harmony in public morality that was assured through an accountable use of public property, impartiality in the dispense of justice, transparency in the making of the laws along with a growing willingness plus a desire alive with the auxiliary agents of both the administration and the Law to respect the institutions erected to protect it. The buoyancy of the Cameroon economy at the time and the stability of the government provided just the best kind of environments that warded off criminals. This new twist of things gave most of the gendarmes and the police little assignment in the courses of enforcing the Law. However, matters took a turn for the worst with regards to juvenile criminality during the era of the New Deal.

The New Deal Era and Juvenile Criminality

Upon assumption of office as president of the United Republic of Cameroon on the 4th of November 1982, Paul Biya seemed to be the kind of person Cameroonians had been expecting for a pretty while. To drum up support at home and abroad he was forthright in declaring that he was giving himself to Cameroonians as candidate of the New Deal. As carefully worked out this deal seemed in theory to be just the kind of magic cure for the number of political, economic and socio-cultural problems that the people of Cameroon had at the time.³⁶ Its doctrine and practical

essence was emboldened in its basic text Communal Liberalism³⁷ Among other things, it centred on rigour and moralization which prized the employment of a moral conscience in performing every function in both the private and public responsibilities. The cardinal aim of the New Deal was the moralization of every aspect of the society and to ensure justice and equitable distribution of public power as well as goods and services. It depicted an end to public indiscipline, waste of time and resources, lack of accountability as well as transparency in the conduct of every business and function that entailed public consumption. In principle, it was designed to inaugurate a new era in administrative functionaries by providing a blue print model for any other thing especially justice and fair competition. The New Deal package therefore entailed a deal of promises for the youths and this was sustained by the fact that the Cameroon economy compared to its peers in Central Africa fared well by the time this deal was launched.³⁸ This notwithstanding, juvenile criminality became a worrisome element that grew with astonishing tonic following the launched of the deal as a result of a combination of failures both collective and individual but much of the blame hinged on state paralysis.

State Paralysis and its impact of Criminality

There seemed to be no set of events with a contemporary match of self-contradiction and essence like those that unfolded in Cameroon during the New Deal Era. Indeed, from 1984 when the New Deal doctrine was pushed into action, till 2010 and even beyond, none of the intrinsic New Deal envisaged elements became a practical reality even for a while. Substantially, the much trumpeted exciting package promised to Cameroonians amounted to an empty political dream bargain that lacked both the will and the mastery to sustain it. This was evidenced in the fact that by the end of the 1980s Cameroon like most African countries was bedevilled with a hampering social economic malaise with corruption, contempt of the state and the various judicial institutions rising dramatically. In a way, the economic malaise was not only a Cameroon issue alone. It was indeed part of the general malaise that gripped almost all of Africa but that of Cameroon was particularly worrisome owing to the fact that, almost every giant institution herein was state owned or sub vented.

³⁶ By 1982 when President of Ahidjo resigned there was growing concern most especially among the youths and liberal democrats the Cameroon governing cartel offered few opportunities for self-expression and actualization. The organic content of the New Deal sought to offer such opportunities and therefore appealed to a cross section thereby dissuading them from activities that could contribute to growing criminality. To see the alternating matrixes opened and closed by the shrewd and sometimes very dictatorial functions of Ahidjo read Ndi Michael Ndi, *The Naked Truth about the Ndu Genocide* Onitsha, Reina Arts, 1995, V.G Ngho (Ed) *Cameroon ,From a Federation to a Unitary State ,1961-1972. A critical Study* ,Limbe, Design House ,2004,

³⁷ This is a book purported to have been written by Paul Biya himself. It sought to elaborate his political philosophy and governing mechanism through and within which under the New Deal each and every citizen was required to ensure that rigour and moralization were the guiding principles.

³⁸ See Joseph Takougang and Milton Krieger (1998) *African States and Societies in the 1990s: Cameroon Political Crossroads*, West View Press, for the buoyancy of the Cameroon economy by the early 1980s. They argue with convincingly evidence that management of the economy going by its growth rate and gross domestic products with regards foreign earnings and international reserves served as a model to broad range of developing economies.

With this new trend, so many companies that supplied jobs and a means of survival to many youths collapsed. In the Grassfields alone so many para public enterprises that supplied sources of livelihood passed into moribund institutions. Amongst the lots were, the Wum Development Agency (WADA), The Santa Coffee farm and the North West Development Authority (MEDINO) that were dramatically forced by circumstances to succumb to these fading fortunes. Even those structures that narrowly escaped complete collapse like the North West Cooperative Society limited (NWCA Ltd) and The Upper Noun Valley Development Authority (UNVDA) were forced by circumstances to down size its work force. Another sore that brought about manic depression among the juvenile folk which had a direct effect on criminality was the collapse of some financial institution that were pillars of development and youths survival like FONADER, the Meridian Bank, as well the drastic rise of interest rates of loans for those who dared to survive through lending money from the surviving limping financial houses.³⁹

As if these ills were not enough, the structural adjustment programmes adopted as a remedy to the crises emphasized on the drastic reduction in public spending which brought about the privatization and mass reduction of the number of civil servant plus drastic salary cuts. This very situation only went further worse with the devaluation of the CFA in 1994. Records suggest that about 80000 Cameroonians lost their jobs and even those who survived found themselves in a quandary owing to many responsibilities to handle.⁴⁰ In any of these situations youths were in a disadvantage not only because entrance examinations into professionals became almost non-existent but also because, many of them dropped out from schools, jobs and other businesses. Ultimately, the Cameroon state and governance could aptly be described to have been like an epitome of failure with the 80s and the 90s. Investments in a broad range of activities were not only stalled by lack of money but more by insecurity which was further sustained by an impartial judiciary and administrative ambiguities surrounding any sort of investment. Indeed, anything linked to investment that was fundamentally crucial for development was ruined by insecurity produced by various forms of crime waves. These crimes ranged from drug abuse, armed robbery, pick pocketing, wanton assassination, rape and all forms of arson against state property orchestrated by youths to state intransigency, abuse of power and denial of justice at various levels.⁴¹

³⁹ World Bank economic Reports on Cameroon from 1989 to 2005 consistently portrayed Cameroon as being in being insolvent. Apart banks were often lacking in liquidity and in 1993 civil servants went three months without a salaries.

⁴⁰ See Napoleon Kungaban Lukong (2005) "Civil Disobedience in the North West Province, 1990-1996". M.A Dissertation, University of Yaounde I.

⁴¹ According to 1997 watch dog report on Cameroon corroborated by the year 2000 report of the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC),

Aside the new deal government also thought of liberalising the landscape to include most portions/segments of the Cameroon society where youths could express themselves. This was the fundamental substance of the December 1990 liberty Laws which opened the flood gates to a number of liberal practices in Cameroon. Among these were the freedom of expression, association, worship and belonging. Though this was a main gate to so many political reforms that were virtually non-existent during the era of Ahidjo, the loss of trust in both the state and personalities that incarnated the system made the whole attempt of liberalisation or democratisation to appear futile and at best functionally counter-productive. The grassfield folks especially after the formation of the SDF party on the 26th of May 1990 used this liberal atmosphere to ignore the law or violate it at any given opportunity. The slogan of Power to the People used by the SDF appealed to a good lot of the frustrated masses but it was ill conceived to imply the absence or order or legalisation of criminal behaviour. In Kom, Nkambe and Bui and to some extent Bafut of grassfields Cameroon, jungle justice that took the form of mob lynching of presumed criminals became rampant.⁴²

The problem with this is not only that the New deal failed almost wholesale to translate its philosophy into concrete realization and rendered the state and its leadership cabal paralysed in executing its designed projects but also that, this incidentally destroyed the youths love and respects for the institutions that formed the inner ligaments of the state. The youth's loss of hope, love or both for the state and the people in its leadership structure had a lot to do with rising juvenile criminality in the Grassfields in particularly and all of Cameroon in general.

Poverty and Its toll in Criminality

Desperation arising from economic and social uncertainties plus the acute lack of various types of basic needs produced a very fragile environment with crime wave in a dramatic rise. Youth's moral was dampened not only by the inability of the state to provide jobs or an enabling environment where jobs abounded but far more by sustained financial hardship.⁴³ The loss of jobs almost everywhere between

Idleness and hopelessly occasioned by scaring poverty were the key elements of rising crime wave in the urban and sub urban areas in Cameroon.

⁴² In our Interview with Honourable Emanuel Chia Ngam who was Member of Parliament for Boyo in Boyo from 1997-2012, jungle justice was adopted by the masses as a result of the inability of the government to render justice where it was due. He asserted that flagrant cases of rape, armed robbery and arson that were caught and submitted to the forces of law and order often bribed the authorities and returned to rain havoc on those who arrested them or helped in their arrest.

⁴³ This is usually the predominant situation that generates crimes. This has been graphically documented by Robert Bachman and Russel K.Shutt, *The Practice of Research in Criminology and Criminal*

1986 and 1993 was sustained by the devaluation of the CFA in 1994 to make life very unbearable to so many youths in the grassfields. This situation ruined the hopes of any responsible behaviour plus sound judgment and hard work. This general moral decay was further reinforced by the forces of law and order (Policemen and gendarmes) who became very unruly in rendering services to the public. Even within the circles of the Lawyers and other administrative surrogates that were to safeguard the judicial system, matters were far worse.⁴⁴ State and collective interest was functional sacrificed in lieu of individual gains.⁴⁵ In this realm, justice became a sort of a commodity that satisfied only the interest of those who could financially afford and this only went a long way to accelerate crime wave. Jobless and very poor parents found it difficult to discipline their children who were into drugs, excessive alcoholism, rape, armed robbery and various forms of crimes. The inability of the state authority too to protect the justice system often displayed through their corrupt and inefficient way of rendering justice only helped to accentuate criminality here.⁴⁶

Another development deduced from the inner logic of these unfortunate events was that of financial hardship accruing from everywhere and animating the spirits of parents and sponsors of most youths. As discussed shortly, the number of youths and parents that were kept at bay following general economic malaise increased with ravaging tonic between 1986 and 1998.⁴⁷ The poverty/ peril brought about by these surprising ill fortunes was enormous. This directly affected the parents wish and ability of control over the conduct of the people under their responsibility as well as the desire to care about habits that were hitherto considered as incriminating. Practices like money laundry, counterfeiting, gambling and even armed robbery that were viewed with complete disdain prior to this moral paralyses gained space and blossomed with raving tonic among the local folks. As said shortly, the

Research in Criminology and criminal Justice, (London: Loss Angeles and New Delhi USA, Sage Publications, Inc, 2014), pp.77-83.

⁴⁴ See I Collin Legum, William Zartman, Steven Langdon and Lynn K. Mytelka, (eds) *Africa in the 1990s: A continent in Crises*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, USA, 1980). Read especially on the introduction by Catherine Gwin titled "Introduction: International Involvement in a changing Africa, pp.1-20. The case of Cameroon has been vividly carved out by Joseph Takougang and Milton Krieger in *African States and Society in the 1990s, Cameroon political Crossroads*, (Colorado: Westview Dimension publishers, 1998) pp.90-115.

⁴⁵ Bribery and corruption in the Cameroon civil service has its ancient roots in this kind of atmosphere. The absence of an effective control mechanism plus acute poverty as a result of the devaluation made the gendarmes and the policemen who were in charge of public security to indulge in very corrupt practices and criminal used this very effectively to perpetuate crimes.

⁴⁶ David Chiatoh Nkain of Kom never minced words to declare that states irresponsibility to deliver worthy projects plus its alienation in most matters of collective and personal wellbeing water the seeds of criminality in Kom as it became common to here that some people were either killed or bugled by youths. Interview conductor on the 18th of May 2017 in Belo Kom.

gendarmes, policemen and lawyers who were key agents in curbing crimes instead began succumbing to obscure practices which most of the time accelerated rather than curb criminality here.

Religious Plurality and Its Shaping of Criminality

The December 12th 1990 presidential decree on the liberalisation of space for the formation of groups of different expression and ambitions opened the arena for the percolation of some many religious and social ideas. Prior to this period Cameroon as a secular state, provided little allegiance to religion though the Catholics and protestants had strong influence in the Southern regions with the Islam predominantly shaping the cultural and the political wellbeing of people in the Northern part. This age of liberalism was accompanied by rising poverty and to create a pluralistic landscape where so many churches and fraternal groupings with claims of magic therapies for the dampening morality emerged. Notorious among these groups were the free-lance Pentecostal churches with elastic concept of rights and approach to prosperity or treatment to poverty. With very little control further reinforced by the willingness of state authorities to be complacent with these groups, so many churches and fraternal groupings mushroomed especially in the urban local with the Bamenda urban sphere almost topping the chart. Almost without exception, the programmes of these new churches and fraternal groups captured the attention and minds of most unemployed youth who through their doctrines found themselves in a sort of a trance world where jobs, money and all the niceties that were complete delicacies in the 80s and 90s were in abundance. There was a sort of self-esteem and moral redemption which tacitly failed to bring back the pride of the state and the respect due it.

In substance, the churches temporally distracted most youths from idleness and fed them with assurances of a better world that loomed in the horizons but unfortunately very few of these assurances became a reality. In the grassfields region in the 1980s and 90s at least 10 out of every 50 youths abandoned their old religions and even main churches to seek refuge in these new religions groupings.⁴⁸ The overwhelming failure of these assurances and promises offered by the church to yield the expected fruits later brought in enormous frustration among the youths. Left with no options of survival, the youths overwhelmingly indulged in new forms of crimes and went most of the time unidentified or caught. With this, notable areas of scam, spiritism, gambling and brainwashing incidentally became part and parcel of the grassfields urban geography. In this very realm of religious plurality was the emergence of cultic groups with variations of approaches and means of survival that appealed to another segment of Youths. These groups

⁴⁸ Three of my step kid sisters were victims of these new religious fantasies.

heralded some form of allegiances to mythic deities requiring spiritual obligations that were for the most part heinous crimes. With improved technology and communication idleness forces youths into deals like trafficking of human parts, rape, abortions and sex deals with domestic and wild animals with orientations from these mythic fraternal groupings.

CONCLUSION

Researching and documenting issues on and around the ecology of criminality amongst youths in Cameroon at large and in the grassfields in particular remains a compendious area of scholarly interest requiring multiple dimensions of research. This interest is not only limited for researchers strictly within the field of criminology but equally to all faculties of knowledge. Present world trends most especially the terrific rise in virtual and analogue crimes makes anything new insight connected to criminology topical. This article is therefore an attempt in that direction. It has attempted to employ the joint process of interdisciplinary research to bring forth the ecology of crime stressing on the geographical and Historical elements/agents that have made and marred criminology among the Cameroon youths. It hinges its emphasis on the grassfields during the post-colonial era. Based on critical analysis of primary and secondary data, complimented with in depth interviews and participant observation/personal experiences, this study submits that (a) a combination of both traditional and modern factors all coordinated by governmental policies and institutions helped to curb juvenile criminality in the Cameroon grassfield from 1961-82, (b) the change of policies along with the personalities and institutions that were embodied in NEW Deal created a liberal atmosphere for various forms of freedom to strife but that this era was bedevilled by an economic malaise that opened flood gates to various forms of juvenile criminality to flower and blossom. (c) as per the abundant evidence in store, crime wave in in Cameroon during the New Deal Era has been in constant rise due in part to the lack of a sustainable political will to integrate youths into the mainstream of nation building and national integration as well as the parochial training and education which these youths do obtain. Over and above anything else this study posit that corruption, ethnocentric concerns and personal greed combined with state paralysis plus the youths' change in taste and consumption pattern without a corresponding change of production to normalise criminality in Cameroon at large and the Bamenda grassfields in particular. Such trends can be potently operational relevant to any society with the same or similar giving in the development threshold.

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