

Carpet Crossing in Cameroon Political Landscape (1953-2020): Reasons and Impact

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Abstract: The paper examines causes of carpet crossing and its impact on the political growth of politicians in Cameroon. It argues that the tendency of carpet crossing in Cameroon is mostly the manipulation of grass root militants by top leaders of political parties, as well as the political imagination of militants with high aspirations. Therefore, many were carried away either by empty promises of political leaders from other parties or due to their own selfish political interests. The carpet crossing was first common in the former British Southern Cameroons which later spread to the whole country after reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1990. The advent of democracy and multiparty politics in Cameroon made overzealous politicians to abuse their political rights. This has been very evident in the political space because no limit of the number of political parties was shrined in the country's constitution. Since over 253 political parties existed, they were excited either to move from one political party to another or even to create theirs. This phenomenon caused most of them to remain "baby politicians" for a long time because they never bothered about their political career. In the face this, the political landscape of Cameroon was negatively affected. Our findings reveal three central issues about carpet crossing in Cameroon. That carpet crossing occurred due to lack of sincere political will among politicians, weak democratic institutions and the absence of a strong political competition. The paper concludes that if Cameroonian politicians were faithful and the electoral system in Cameroon is improved upon, the rate of carpet crossing would reduce tremendously.

Key Words: Cameroon, Carpet Crossing, Obstacle, Political Maturity and Electoral Code.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term carpet crossing has become a household name in Cameroon even with the horseshoe-shaped democratic institutions and rubber stamped Parliament. Carpet crossing means leaving one's party entirely and joining another caucus. For example, leaving an opposition party to support the government and vice versa, leaving or being expelled from the party one ran with at election and sitting as a clear independent, or even leaving one opposition party to join another. In parliamentary systems, politicians are said to cross carpet if they formally change their affiliation to a second party after being elected as a member of a first party or voting against the approved party lines. [1] Voting against party lines led to consequences such as losing a position. While these practices are legally permissible in Cameroon, carpet crossing had led to controversy and attracted the attention of researchers. The term carpet crossing originated from the

British House of Commons, which is configured with the Government and Opposition facing each other on rows of benches. In Cameroon, the term carries not only this meaning, but also simply voting against the party line on a bill.

Carpet crossing in Cameroon started timidly before independence but became intensive after independence. On the eve of Cameroon's independence, there was high aspiration in the rank of politicians concerning the form in which the country needed to achieve independence. In former Southern Cameroons House of Assembly (SCHA) it was difficult to take an important decision about political future of the country because the two parties represented in the SCHA had equal status or seats. Out of the 26 seats in the Parliament, the ruling party Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) had 14 and Opposition Party Kamerun National Congress (KNC) / Kamerun People's Party (KPP) Alliance in the parliament produced Cameroon People's National Convention (CPNC) had 13.

The Opposition party CPNC led by EML Endeley, succeeded on March 11, 1960 to convince Hon. John Mendi Boja cross to CPNC. But failed in the second attempt to get another Member of Parliament of KNDP, Hon. Dickson Mbi Frambo to cross the carpet and tilt the balance of power in their favour. The resignation of Boja changed the party affiliation in the Assembly where the KNDP and the KNC/KPP alliance had 13 seats each. [2] With this balance of power in SCHA it became almost impossible to decide the political future of Cameroon in the Parliament. A plebiscite became an obvious answer to this worry. [3]

After independence, the political space was closed with the introduction of single party system in Cameroon on September 1, 1966. [4] Against this backdrop, carpet crossing became out-dated. However, in 1990, the reintroduction of multiparty politics in Cameroon the political space was reopened. Carpet crossing was intensive due to so many political parties in Cameroon. By the years, 2021 there were more than 253 registered political parties. About 10 of these parties had significant levels of support and only five had seats in the National Assembly. [5] A good number of these

² H.K. Kah (2016), Impact of Independence of the Republic of Cameroon: Social Science Review Volume 2, Issue 2, December 2016 ISSN 2518-6825, p.11.

³ P.M Ninjoh, (2011) "Advanced Level Cameroon History Since 1800": Bamenda, 2011, p.142.

⁴ Ibid.p.165.

⁵ <https://2009-2017.state.gov> > organization retrieved on March 15, 2022.

¹ Julie, Alyssa (December 20, 2014). "[Danielle Smith's move to PCs 'unprecedented'](#)"

were regional parties without national character. There were political parties that appeared only during elections and disappeared after elections. Political parties founded to join “presidential majority”. The creation of political parties with various interests out of the main objective of a political party, which is to win an election, and come to power were the reasons for carpet crossing in Cameroon. [6]

II. REASONS for CARPET CROSSING

The reasons for carpet crossing in Cameroon can be classified into two categories: manipulation and imagination. The two terms were not in any case, mutually exclusive. There were principles that emerged because circumstantial arguments such as geopolitics played a role at a given time. Meanwhile there were natural situations where due to lack of patience some politicians just decided on their own to cross carpet. A number of reasons are behind carpet crossing in Cameroon.

As a matter of fact, many politicians of Cameroon have crossed carpet not because they intended to move but because they were being manipulated to do so. Their reasons for carpet crossing were usually termed from poverty on the part of some militants, poor handling of the party’s affairs by the party’s hierarchy and lack of patience from militants. The principles of utmost good faith and reciprocity were usually absent. For example, in 1960, Dickson Mbi Frambo a member of SCHA under KNDP ticket, informed E M L. Endeley leader of KNC/KPP alliance in SCHA that he wished to cross the carpet to join them but needed money to settle the debt, KNDP his present party lent to him before doing so.

Another reason he gave for his desire to turn his political coat was that he was under pressure from his electorates to do so. The frequency of such a strong desire convinced Endeley to send N.N Mbile to Tali to strike a deal with Frambo who insisted on £2,000, which Mbile failed to reduce the amount. Mbile then returned to Buea where the KNC-KPP Alliance leadership raised the money through loans. On May 8, 1960, Mbile and Endeley arrived in Tali at midnight and gave Frambo £2,000 to enable him settle his debt at KNDP. After that, Frambo read the resignation statement, expressed his satisfaction with it, and then signed all the copies.

That done, Endeley left for Buea leaving Mbile and Frambo behind to follow him at dawn to Buea. But, at dawn, Frambo instead went to the Mamfe Police Station to report what they did not know. Meanwhile, Endeley was waiting for Mbile and Frambo at Buea where Frambo was to declare his resignation from the KNDP to join the KNC-KPP Alliance before the Commissioner for the Cameroons on May 9, 1960. Endeley was only told that Frambo had instead gone to the police and reported them. The above case is typical example of carpet crossing due to poverty on the part of Hon. Frambo who almost sold his conscience for £2,000. Even though, he did not cross carpet but it had been a revelation to young

politicians who had done that because of poverty and lack of patience.

Lack of self-discipline and patience within the rank of politician was responsible for the inability for militants to stay in one political party. In 1963,

there was mass influx of people into a KNDP. The party presented very wonderful manifestoes through their propaganda programme, this attracted so many people such as the unemployed, youths, civil servants and militants of different political parties like KNC, KPP, OK to cross carpet into KNDP hoping to make economic, social and political gains. [7] Unfortunately, most of them what they met when they joined KNDP did not meet the expected gains. Many of them were frustrated and disappointed with the party. Lack of self-discipline or patience made them to abandon their parties to other parties like Ok, CPNC that presented wonderful manifestoes to the public. Some politicians always believed that the “grass might be greener” on the other side of the political divide.

The desire of leaders to make themselves life chairpersons of political parties had caused many aspiring militants to leave their parties to another party where they were hoping to grow politically. In 1965, J N Foncha declared himself as the life chair of the KNDP this declaration caused crisis within the party. This made it difficult for his supporters to accept another leader within the party. This proclamation by Foncha divided the party because it frustrated the ambitions of other members who aspired to become the chair of the party. This declaration led to a serious political infighting that broke out in 1963 within the KNDP. [8] Many crossed to other political parties like CPNC and One Kamerun(OK).

Refusal to accept defeat in an election within a particular political party especially during primary elections and in the event of filling in a vacant position had caused carpet crossing in Cameroon. In 1963, following a Vacancy for the post of Vice President of KNDP, Solomon.Tandeng Muna and Augustine Ngom Jua contested for the post. A N Jua defeated S.T Muna by a vote of 175 to 73. Muna refused to accept defeat. For the Secretary-Generalship, Emmanuel Tabi Egbe and Nzo Ekhah-Ngahaky locked horns. Nzo Ekhah-Ngahaky defeated Emmanuel Tabi Egbe by a vote of 159 to 95 to become the Secretary General of the KNDP. [9] Egbe attributed this defeat to the plotting machinery of the KNDP members. He also claimed that the election was characterized by massive fraud and rigging.

He argued that it was the president of the federation who supposed to appoint the State’s Prime Minister and not by conducting internal election within KNDP. This rift between

⁶ J. B. Ebune., (1990) *The Growth of Political Parties in Southern Cameroons 1916-1960*: Kumba: ISBN. p.164.

⁷ G. E. Batey, (2008) *Effective Modern History for Colleges*: Tiko: Navi-Group Publisher .p.208.

⁸ V. J. Ngoh. (1996) *.History of Cameroon Since 1800*. Buea: Presbook, Limbe. p.238.

⁹ *Ibid*. p.239.

Jua and Muna and Nzo and Egbe threatened the unity of the KNDP. Both losers in the elections, Muna and Egbe left the KNDP and created their own political party in West Cameroon in 1965 called Cameroon United Congress (CUC). This party was founded by Muna, Egbe and eight militants who were dismissed from the KNDP. [10]

A way from that, Jean Jacques Ekindi was a staunch member of CPDM and also an eminent critic of the party. He was elected president of the Wouri Section of the party in 1986. His election was considered part of an effort by President Biya to reconcile factions in the party considered disloyal in the past, to take prominent leadership roles as Section Presidents. In 1990, at the beginning of the period of multiparty political reforms, he was considered to be among the leading progressive figures within the CPDM. In early 1991, Ekindi was re-elected as President of the Wouri Section, defeating Albert Dzungang. However, he left the CPDM in May 1991 due to his growing popularity all over the national territory.[11] Ekindi was hoping to be the national president of a political party and even the president of Cameroon. After all, he was considered the most important CPDM member to defeat the opposition at that time.

As a popular opposition leader in the early 1990s, Ekindi founded his own party, Progressive Movement (MP); he became national president of the party, since it was founded by him on 23rd August 1991. He participated in a rally held by the National Coordination of Opposition Parties and Associations (NCOPA) in Douala on 23–24 September 1991, and on that occasion he was arrested and treated so badly that he required hospitalization. 30-60 of his militants and sympathizers were arrested when they protested in Douala against Ekindi's arrest. Ekindi was in custody for less than 24 hours and was released without charge at the request of foreign consuls. Ekindi was the MP candidate in the October 1992 presidential election. [12]

Hon. Rose Agbor Abunaw Makia was voted a Member of Parliament on the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) ticket in 1992 from the platform of an opposition party. At the end of her five years mandate as the parliamentarian of UNDP she discovered that the party was no longer popular in her Manyu constituency, with time, the female parliamentarian crossed over to the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) with all her militants. In 1997, she was elected Member of Parliament (MP) this time under CPDM ticket. As a CPDM MP, Abunaw said:

I have contributed in the political as well as the social domains and I have made the Manyu people to know it pays to be with the CPDM; even those in the Southern Cameroons

National Council (SCNC). I have as well contributed in lobbying for projects for Manyu and made sure peace is bestowed in the area. In the food riots of February 2008, I made sure the Manyu people were not involved. As Women wing of Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (WCPDM) President for Manyu, I empowered so many women and youths to work as a group. [13]

Surprisingly, the earlier wrongs of CPDM and its leader that she openly criticized were irreparable; she still decided to be part of the problem instead of being part of the solution. The former staunch member of UNDP for Manyu division drastically changed her language for CPDM and the party's chair, Paul Biya. She extended invitations to other comrades to join her, in her new party. The pronouncement above gave the impression that politicians in Cameroon were for their personal interest not for the interest of the people. This also went along way to confirm the assertion that in politics, there is no permanent friend, no permanent enemy but permanent interest which, in most cases personal.

In the same light, Martin Nkemngu, was the Assistant National Communication Secretary of the Social Democratic Front, (SDF) party, resigned on Thursday, March 9, 2006, crossed the carpet to join the ruling CPDM party. Accompanied by two other SDF National Executive Council (NEC) members - Sylvester Ngemasong, one of the auditors of the SDF party and Dr. Steven Fomin. Nkemngu and his 'followers' gave themselves up to V. Nганu, a CPDM baron and Assistant Secretary General at the Prime Minister's office. It was alleged that Nkemngu was promised a ministerial post by chief Ephraim Inoni, then Prime Minister in the CPDM led government. [14] It should be recalled that, Nkemngu was the fellow former schoolmate of chief Inoni at St. Paul College Bonjongo.

As the story goes, Nганu had travelled to Lebialem where he chaired a Joint CPDM Section Conference convened to discuss options for development efforts. The conference held on Saturday, April 8 at the grandstand in Menji, Lebialem Division, then South West Province. Talking after the crossing-over ceremony, Nkemngu expressed disaffection against what he termed SDF Chair John Fru Ndi's repressive regime. He blamed Fru Ndi for forcing them out of the party. He said the Chair of the party had turned into a Bokassa or an Amin Dada of sorts. Nkemngu denounced the Chair's expulsion of people like the former Secretary General, Prof. Tazo2acha Asoganyi, the Provincial Secretary of the South West, Atabong Asaba, the District Secretary of Menji and the SDF Chair for Limbe, Francis Anu. [15]

Furthermore, in 2009, Some 520 militants of the Social Democratic Front, SDF, Nkambe Electoral District crossed the carpet to the CPDM. The militants were counted publicly at the Nkambe Grandstand on November 6, 2009, on

¹⁰Martin, A. A (2011). Former British Southern Cameroons Journey Towards Complete Decolonization, Independence, and Sovereignty, A Comprehensive Compilation of Efforts. Vol One p.45.

¹¹Cameroon Tribune No. 79 of 17th February 1992.

¹²J. D. Pefok (2007) "Ekindi To "Tie Knot", with SDF at 2007 Election" The Post Cameroon, 6 January, 2007, p.4.

¹³ Interview with Rose Agbor Abunaw Makia, Age 65, Former Parliamentarian, Yaounde, 2020.

¹⁴Up Station Mountain Club, 12 April, 2006, p.23.,

¹⁵ Ibid.

the occasion of the celebration of President Paul Biya's 27th anniversary. [16] The occasion was presided over by Emmanuel Ngafesson Bantar, a CPDM Central Committee special envoy, who also doubled as the Secretary of State for Penitentiary administration.

In his address, Ngafesson appreciated the CPDM militants of Nkambe for what he said was their hard work, whose result he said was the landslide carpet crossing. He told them to keep their doors wide open to those who would realize themselves to go in. He congratulated the new converts for "finding the right path, and for choosing the winning team. According to him: "it was a show of political maturity especially on the count that they were free to militate in any party of their choice. Describing the CPDM as the party that delivers the goals, he assured them that they will never regret their decision." [17] In a special reception, the Secretary of State shared some CPDM material to the newcomers.

In 2011, Nkambe, Donga-Mantung divisional veteran politician, Hon. Samuel Ngeh Tamfu, was marveled at the large crowd of militants who openly cross-carpeted. He predicted that before the 2011 Presidential election, all of Nkambe and even Donga-Mantung would have turned to the CPDM. He called on those still hesitating to make hey while the sun shines or risk missing the winning train. Tamfu told the population that the North West CPDM has pleaded to President Paul Biya to visit the North West Region soonest and that they have received assurance that Biya would come to Nkambe. [18] Hon. Tamfu preached dynamism in politics; politics of love and development as against politics of hatred and egoism. Earlier on, the President of the Donga-Mantung I Section of the CPDM, Paul Ngabir Bantar, counted a litany of Biya's achievements for his 27 years in office. Although he had little to count for Nkambe in particular apart of peace, he raised a lot of optimism for more as far as Biya remains in Etoundi.

On his part, the SDO for Donga Mantung, Mbiwan Nchaffu, prayed the people to collaborate with the forces of law and order and the administration in the maintenance of peace and order. It should be recalled that the Nkambe SDF has been suffering following the wrangling within the SDF won council after the 2007 municipal election. The wrangling has been transformed from political ideologies to individual antagonism characterized by threats of lives and witch-hunting. It was suspected that it is this poor state of the party in the area that caused most of the militants to cross carpet.

We are not losing sight of the divide and rule policy put in place by the government that had created the situation of carpet crossing in Cameroon. Maigari Bello Bouba went into exile in Nigeria after the failed coup attempt against Biya in April 1984. He created National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) on May 25, 1990 in Paris. After its

legalization UNDP in March 1991, Bello returned to Cameroon on August 17, 1991. At the UNDP congress held in Garoua on January 4 and 5, 1992, Bello Bouba became president of the UNDP, thus ousting the party's former leader, Samuel Eboua. [19] He was elected to the National Assembly in the legislative elections of March 1992 as a deputy for Benoué.

Issa Tchiroma Bakery was the Secretary-General of the UNDP in the early 1990s. In the March 1992 parliamentary election, he was elected to the National Assembly as a UNDP candidate in the Bénoué constituency of then North Province. He was appointed to the CPDM led government as Minister of Transport by Biya on 27 November 1992, along with another UNDP leader, Hamadou Moustapha. This appointment created tension within the party. He and Moustapha accepted their appointments without the approval of UNDP President Maigari Bello Bouba; the appointments were viewed by some as a way of dividing and weakening the opposition by imprisoning certain opposition figures. [20] but despite their indiscipline, the two were not immediately expelled from the party.

In July 1994, Moustapha and Tchiroma again accepted government posts in a cabinet reshuffle; Bello Bouba declared on July 23, 1994 that this would mean the end of their UNDP membership. Subsequently, during his visit to Maroua on July 30, 1994, Moustapha's vehicle was attacked by their distractors who threw stones at it. As a result, one person was killed and several others injured. Twenty-eight UNDP personnel were arrested for the attack. UNDP denied responsibility and blamed the government for the attack, saying it was used as a pretext for a crackdown on UNDP. Bello Bouba and the other UNDP deputies have launched a boycott of the National Assembly on 8 November 1994 to press for the release of arrested UNDP activists; however, they ended their boycott a few weeks later. [21]

The UNDP Central Committee eventually expelled Moustapha and Tchiroma in January 1995 from the party. They challenged their dismissal from the party, after their expulsion, Moustapha and Tchiroma created their own "authentic" UNDP faction, rejecting Bello Bouba's leadership. This faction later became the National Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ANDP), a new party characterized by a slight change in the name of the UNDP. Despite the creation of a new party, Moustapha and Tchiroma still legally contested the direction of the UNDP by Bello Bouba. [22]

Following the June 2002 parliamentary election, Tchiroma and four other notable northern politicians released a

¹⁹ fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/BelloBouba_Maigari

²⁰ Milton H. Krieger and Joseph Takougang, *African State and Society in the 1990s: Cameroon's Political Crossroads* (2000), Westview Press, pages 143–145.

²¹ Cameroon Tribune, Emmanuel Kendumut, 15th February 2010. Esuke, Francis D. "The CPDM Fights for its Life" News link, No 716 My 1994, pp 21-23.

²² ^ a b c d Achille Chountsa, "Issa Tchiroma : Un rebond à la Communication", *Le Jour*, 1 July 2009 (in French).

¹⁶ Interview with Tabe Edward Besong Age 54, Teacher and Politician, Bamenda, 17th July, 2021.

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/list_of_political_parties_in_Cameroon

¹⁸ Idem

statement in July, in which they alleged electoral fraud and announced the formation of a "resistance front". They warned that the governing CPDM was moving the country back to single-party rule and called on politicians "to transcend any divergence, selfishness and personal ambition in order to create a movement capable of saving Cameroon from collapse".^[23] He also joined other northern politicians in signing a September 2002 memo decrying the government's alleged marginalization and neglect of the north and urging that more attention be paid to addressing the north's problems.²⁴

A few years later, Issa Tchiroma left the ANDP and founded a new party, the Front for the National Salvation of Cameroon (FSNC), which was officially registered in January 2007. At the time, he said that the FSNC "intends to contribute to the advent of a free society and promote the democratization process in Cameroon".

On the other hand, in 2015, some four militants of the ruling CPDM in Kumba crossed carpeted to join the SDF as they commemorate the 25th anniversary of the party. The move was led by Mayor John Kona Makia, and Jude Njinjuh E. The four CPDM militants, one from Kumba I, two from Kumba II and one from Kumba III declared their resignation from the CPDM and pronounced their commitment to be active militants of the SDF party in Kumba. One Ayuk Johnson popularly known as 'Kabila' in Kumba I, was a militant of the CPDM who decided at the anniversary to cross-carpet in the presence of all the militants. In Kumba II the cross-carpeting had a more severe impact as it involved high-standing executive members of the CPDM.

Thomas Fomukong Nchinda, a CPDM Sub-Section President in Hausa Quarters and a strong force in CPDM Meme 1 B and Elias Mbianke, Treasurer of the Kosala Sub-Section expressed the grudges they have had during their years of militancy with the CPDM. In Kumba III, Simon Nkongho Ekeke an executive member of CPDM Meme 1C section also cross-carpeted. The four decamped CPDM militants were received amidst jubilation and fanfare from the SDF crowd who gathered to celebrate their silver jubilee at Liberty Square in Kumba.^[25] According to Thomas Fomukong Nchinda, his reasons for cross-carpeting was due to the fact that he has seen the SDF as a party to reckon with in Kumba II given their constant outstanding elections victory. Elias Mbianke, on his part, noted that the CPDM party in Kumba II has been flooded with indiscipline, disrespect of party hierarchy and amongst all frauds. To him, the SDF from their manifesto was a party that has promising future for Kumba II. Decamped militants shared whisky with their new

comrades as a sign to welcome them and indicating too that better days were ahead.

The SDF Member of Parliament for Kumba Urban Constituency, 8Honourable Bolivie Mbanya, who received the new comers before handing them over to the various District Chairpersons, poured out champagne as a form of libation and jubilation for the newcomers who promised to lobby more CPDM militants to cross to the SDF. The day proper was celebrated with euphoria as the streets in Kumba were jam-packed to capacity with SDF uniforms, flags and other party materials flooded the quarters. After the unending crowd pulling caravan across the three Districts in Kumba, the militants and other observers including the administration and forces of law and order, were addressed with the message from the National Chair, Ni John Fru Ndi, while the various District Chairpersons including the Member of Parliament and Mayors all took off time to speak to the crowd. At the end of the Liberty Square rendezvous, militants of the various Districts undertook another motorcade to their respective Districts where celebrations continued. Raphael Tanyi, SDF District Chair, Kumba I. had this to say:

I think that our achievements in Kumba I for just two years in office is enough reason for us to celebrate the silver jubilee with fanfare and enthusiasm. SDF will always and continue to grow from strength to strength in Kumba I. We have no major differences amongst the party all our plight is to transform Kumba I during our tenure in council. The activities of the SDF in Kumba through the work of the council is enough reasons to explain that we will have an unending mandate. SDF in Kumba is committed to develop the municipality and this is clearly seen from our work. Our anniversary has proven the popularity of the party by itself, given the massive crowd of militants who turned out. ^[26]

According to them, what they did for two years other parties took six years yet they were unable to realise even half. They concluded that before the end of their mandate, Kumba III was to be completely transformed into a vast construction site. A litany of what they have already constructed was read out, namely: the construction of business centres, markets, and other facilities to improve the standards of the population. The party promised to continue to work for the population. The populations gained confidence on the SDF, placed their trust on them, and promised not to betray them.

From the above analysis, we discovered that party politics in Cameroon was centred on manipulation of members and imagination from members themselves on how they could improve on their living standard instead of entire community or country as a whole. Politicians depended on these vices to gain militants rather than providing social, economic, and political opportunities to win militants. The spirit or cornerstone of a political party was gradually being swept

²³Five former Cameroonian ministers allege vote rigging", Panapress, 15 July 2002.

²⁴ Martin A. Nkemngu, "Issa Tchiroma Bakary – «President Biya is Out to Eradicate Corruption»", Cameroon Tribune, 29 June 2009.

²⁵ Cameroon Tribune, Emmanuel Kendumut, 15th February 2010. Esuke, Francis D. "The CPDM Fights for its Life" News link, No 716 My 1994, pp 21-23.

²⁶file:///C:/Users/PC/Desktop/Female%20MPs%20Aren%E2%80%99t%20Inferior%20%E2%80%93%20Rose%20Abunaw%20%E2%80%93%20Cameroon%20Postline.htm,

away and instead the seed of hatred was sown. How carpet crossing have affected the political landscape of Cameroon would be illustrated in our subsequent paragraphs.

III. HOW CARPET CROSSING HAD AFFECTED POLITICAL PROGRESS of CAMEROON

The context of carpet crossing, with strong divisive forces, presented far-reaching impact on Cameroon political system. This gives us the green light to discuss the impact of carpet crossing in Cameroon.

The phenomenon of carpet crossing in Cameroon led to the creation of a new political vocabulary called “presidential majority”²⁷. This had discouraged a strong political competition in the country. Most politicians had made to believe that they could climb the political ladder with their hands in the pocket. They have believed rightly or wrongly, that by joining the ruling party CPDM or the winning team or party closer to power, they could easily climb political ladders and vision achieved. Many of them had failed to put the government into task through constructive criticisms rather they have resorted in telling the government what she wanted to hear. Father-son kind of relationship was created so the politicians continue to remain immature since the son can never be over and above the father, they continued to remain behind. Some of them were bought over and politically brainwashed by the ruling CPDM, through political appointments to cross the carpet. It said that: “When the people fear their government, there is tyranny; when the government fears the people there is liberty.”²⁸ Unfortunately, in Cameroon, politicians had not made the government to fear them but they feared the government.

Carpet crossing complicated the independence struggle of the former Southern Cameroons as the plebiscite became the only way for independence. J.M. Boja, crossed from the KNDP to the KNC/KPP alliance on March 11, 1960 gave the opposition the same number of elected seats in the House of Assembly as both the government and opposition had 13 seats each. It was no longer possible to decide the political future of Southern Cameroons in the National Assembly. The issue of plebiscite came in which some electorates voted without knowing what they were voting for. A good number of voters voted for reunification thinking that they were voting for a separate political entity for Southern Cameroons. [²⁹] In fact,

²⁷ ‘Presidential Majority’ is define as a situation in Cameroon whereby during election periods, some political parties decide to join the ruling party, CPDM in a bid to form a government of national unity. They consider ruling CPDM as winning party. Therefore, everyone will want to be part of the winning party or team. Due to poor electoral code elections were never free and fair. Some opposition parties were discouraged to go in for elections as independent party.

²⁸T. J. Tabe, (2015) “The Chieftaincy Institution Among The Banyang and Ejagham of Manyu Division (1922-2011): an Intersection of Tradition and Politics In Cameroon”: University of Yaoundé I Yaoundé; Ph.D. Thesis .322.

²⁹Ngoh, History of Cameroon Since 1800, Buea, Presbook, Limbe, 1996, p.227. 8

what lawmakers or experts would have handled was left in the hands of ignorance masses.

At the end of March 1, 1992, the first ever-multiparty legislative elections were conducted in Cameroon after 26 years. Out of the 180 available seats in the parliament, the ruling CPDM of Paul Biya won 88 seats, the UNDP of Maigari Bello Bouba, won 68 seats, Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) of Augustine Frederick Koudock won 18 seats, and the Movement for the Defense of Republic (MDR) of Dakole Daissala won 6.^[30] Since no party had absolute majority, not even the ruling CPDM had majority in the House, the party negotiated an alliance with the MDR and got the 6 seats to constitute a simple majority in the parliament. Many were quick to conclude that some opposition leaders were not for the interest of their people but for their personal and family interests. This was so because the carpet crossing of MDR with 6 seats to CPDM was a big blow to the country’s future. The 6 seats were very essential to turn the political table and change the fate of Cameroon in favour of opposition. If the 6 seats were used to form an alliance with the rest of opposition parties. [³¹]

This action benefited Daissalla as he was appointed Minister of Posts and Telecommunication in the government of Paul Biya on April 9, 1992 alongside four other members of his MDR were appointed in Biya’s government. [³²] This was compensation from president to him for tilting the balance of power in favour CPDM. He served that ministerial department from 1992 to 1997. It was clear evidence of the kind of politics practice in Cameroon. Simon Achidi’s [³³] coinage at the time of reintroduction of multiparty politics in Cameroon in 1990 defines politics as “Njangi: scratch my back I scratch your own.” [³⁴] This is politics that politicians have concern only about their stomach. This action had hampered serious parliamentary debate in the house.

The politics of carpet crossing had sown a seed of hatred in Cameroon. It had constituted a serious distraction in the political scene of Cameroon. Instead of the opposition parties be united under one umbrella to fight a common enemy, ruling party, they have concentrated on attacking one another. The negative impression that one cannot live in opposition all lifelong pulled lazy and impatience politicians to the ruling party. They crossed to the CPDM hoping to reap where they have not sown. According to them, opposition is a choice not by birth. They continue moving from one political party to another without respecting their own road maps. Accepting alliances with the same ruling party that they themselves had publicly criticized without any visible change

³⁰ See Article 19, of Global Campaign for free Expression, Cameroon a Transition in Crisis.

³¹Interview with Botela Enow Enow, Age 55, Secondary School Teacher, Buea 26th January, 2021.

³² Page on daissala at ministry of communication website

³³ Simon Achidi Achu, Prime Minister of Cameroon on CPDM Campaign Trail to Bamenda during the Parliamentary Elections, March, 1992.

³⁴ “Njangi: scratch my back I scratch your own” Means that politics is a game of give and take.

from their bench was an indication of them having a hidden agenda and a mockery to democracy in Cameroon. They made politics look like a:” dirty game”.

The spirit of nationalism, courage and self – determination were destroyed in Cameroon. Politicians never believed in themselves or have confidence in one another any longer. Imagine the leader of the opposition like, Ni John Fru Ndi, contented with the presidency of his party, SDF. This is so because since 1992 presidential election, that SDF’s chair accused president Biya of “stolen Victory “, he had never again be so vocal and serious about the presidency of the country. We doubted whether for him, being the chair of a political party meant attaining a political pinnacle. If not, how could a man who triggered the start of democracy in Cameroon was not enabled to unite the opposition leaders to form a unify front during elections against the ruling CPDM. This action caused the main aim of creating a political party to be defeated which is to win an election and come to power. Cameroon as multiparty democracy became more or less a one party system as the leading opposition leader, Ni John Fru Ndi was allegedly believed to be collaborating with president Biya behind the scene. Of course, they were political opponents not enemies.

The opposition parties supposed to ensure that there were checks and balances but they failed to play this role. They instead concentrated on moving from one party to another or even infighting among some parties. They were shortsighted not to know that the problem of Cameroon rest on the poor electoral system not moving from one political party to another. In fact, the opposition in Cameroon had not helped the government by mounting pressure on her to carry out meaningful constitutional reforms.

The direct consequent was the domination of the political space with one political party, Cameroon National Union (CNU) and only two presidents in Cameroon since independence. The first person who headed the party was President Ahmadou Ahidjo from 1960 to 1983 when he resigned as the chair of the party.³⁵ In 1982, President Paul Biya, took over from him. In 1983, Biya became the chair of CNU. In 1985, he changed the name of the party from CNU to CPDM.³⁶ Since 1960, other countries in Africa such as Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Senegal had boasted for about five presidents or more, Cameroon could only boast of only two (Ahmadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya) This can be attributed to political immaturity of opposition parties. They have not realized that with a weak electoral system to face an incumbent president in an election in Cameroon in particular and Africa in general, they supposed to unite under one umbrella.

The political distraction because of carpet crossing made the government to develop a lukewarm attitude towards improving on the economic, political and social structures of

the country. In the 1990s, the opposition leaders demanded for a Sovereign National Conference [³⁷], an Independent Electoral Code to ensure free and fair elections, Two-round Election and many other demands. But due to political distraction, infighting and division they did not mount enough popular, persistent and regular pressures on the government to grant these concessions. Democracy was regressing instead of progressing in Cameroon. If democracy is advancing in some African countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal etc it because of a strong, united and focused opposition political parties.

The phenomenon of Carpet crossing had caused politicians to create political parties for creating sake. Some of these “mushroom” parties appeared only during elections and disappeared after elections. These parties appeared during elections to collect funding allocated by the government for political parties for their election campaigns. When this money was collected it used for different purpose from that of election. The intention of creating these parties was no long to contribute to nation building as a party or to takeover power but to join the ruling party during elections. For instance, Cameroon Reformation Party (CRP) of Foligar Kum Lang, Parti Republicain du Cameroun (Republican Party of Cameroon) of Georges Gilbert Baongla, Believe in Cameroon (Croire au Cameroun) of Bernard Njonga, Cameroon Party of Democrats (Parti des Démocrates Camerounais) of Mohammed El-Maghrabi to name but few all joined CPDM during 2018 Presidential elections.³⁸

Carpet crossing contributed to the creation of untruthful opposition parties in Cameroon. Many people had created political parties with hidden agendas. Even traitors transformed themselves into leaders of political parties. The strong desire to become a minister had influenced some of them to sell their consciences. Issa Tchiroma Bakery, is a good example of the type of opposition leaders we are talking about. He was the President of the Front Pour le Salut National du Cameroun an opposition party. At a press conference on 20 February 2008, he announced his party's support for constitutional amendments. Among other amendments, the constitutional revision included the elimination of presidential term limits.

Although other opposition leaders viewed the amendments as a transparent effort to allow Paul Biya to remain in power, Tchiroma since he was longing for ministerial appointment in

³⁵ Ngoh, History of Cameroon Since 1800, p.285.

³⁶ Ibid.p.297

³⁷A Sovereign National Conference is one convened to reconsider the country’s political future. It is designed to carry out political transformation, in other words, to chart a new course. It is appropriate where the economic, political and social structures seem incapable of solving the problems of the country as it is in Nigeria today so that instead of resorting to arms, a peaceful and orderly change can take place. The distinguishing word “sovereign” in a Sovereign National Conference therefore connotes that the body is not merely advisory or consultative. Rather, it is an assembly of elected representatives of the Cameroonians people, backed by an enabling law, with the mandate and power to fundamentally restructure the political, economic, social and constitutional future of the country.

³⁸https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Commons:Wiki_Loves_Africa_2022/en

the government of Biya, argued that the amendments should be considered on their own merits. He particularly stressed his support for extending the 45-day period for organizing a new presidential election following a vacancy in the office, arguing that it was "almost impossible" to do so within that length of time. He also argued that removing the presidential term limits would promote a climate of peace and stability by avoiding the uncertainty associated with a presidential succession, and he said that would in turn encourage foreign investment in Cameroon. Tchiroma defended President Biya in the midst of media claims about his wealth and argued that Biya was working to "eradicate corruption". He also alleged that foreign agents were working to destabilize Cameroon. [39] The stance held by Issa Tchiroma in favour of president Paul Biya, prompted Biya to appoint him Minister of Communication on 30th June 2009. Since January, 1992, although as one of key opposition leaders, he had been part of president Paul Biya's government.

Carpet crossing had affected the outcome of election results in Cameroon. Coupled with voter's apathy, elections were no longer competitive and interesting. Unlike, the 1992 when elections were highly competitive, no elections had reflected democratic elections or better still there had not been any match. In 1992, the Supreme Court reluctantly proclaimed the results that gave President Paul Biya winning results of 39.5 % of the votes, as against 35.5% for John Fru Ndi and 25% for Maigari Bello Bouba.[40] In 2018, Presidential election, the winner of the election incumbent Paul Biya of CDPM got 71.28%, the runner up Prof. Kamto Maurice of Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MDR) got just 14.23%, Cabral Libil of Pour La Réconciliation Nationale (PCRN) got 6.28%, Osih Joshua of SDF got 3.35%. In 2020 parliamentary elections, CPDM led by incumbent Paul Biya had 152 seats, NUDP led by Maigari Bello Bouba had 7, SDF led by John Fru Ndi had 5, Parti Camerounais Pour La Réconciliation Nationale (PCRN) led by Cabral Libil had 5, Union Démocratique du Cameroun (UDC) led by Patricia Tomaino Ndam Njoya had 4, Front Pour le Salut National du Cameroun (FNSC) led by Issa Tchiroma had 3, MDR led by Dakolé Daïssala had 2 and Union des Mouvements Socialistes (UMS) had 2. The above statistics is eloquent testimony of the fact that there was complete absence of competitive elections in the country.

Largely, Carpet crossing had negatively influenced the democratic process in the country. The phenomenon had discouraged a strong political competition, complicated the independence struggle of former British Southern Cameroons in 1961, encouraged politics of the "stomach", sown the seed of hatred and deceit in Cameroon political space and among other vices not mentioned. There are historical facts, which are not intended to create any prejudice, but to elucidate problems.

³⁹ In an interview with Issa Tchiroma Bakery, Cameroon Tribune, on 29 June 2009, p.12

⁴⁰ . Le Messenger Volume 11, Monday, September 14, 1992,

IV. CONCLUSION

This is a recapitulation of the highlights and the main findings of the paper. As already mentioned, Carpet crossing was caused by lack of genuine opposition parties in Cameroon that is parties were created with hidden agendas, Traitors in the name of political leaders created parties, poverty influenced militants to sell their consciences and absence of favorable political atmosphere. We also discussed the impact of carpet crossing in Cameroon. In which carpet crossing had helped to consolidate the selfish and hegemonic interests of politicians. It has led to appearance of political parties during elections and disappearance after elections. However, renowned politicians are steadfast to their courses. Those who cross carpet cannot convince Cameroonians in any way that they were fighting for their interests; instead, they might be playing for time and gaining grounds to crossover to "greener pasture". To cross carpet is a sign of defeat and failure, because success demands that you remain where you are and fight for what you believe in, even if it means signing your own death warrant. That is true commitment.

In the final analysis, to curb the rate of carpet crossing in Cameroon the following measures should be implemented. Namely: the establishment of strong and powerful democratic institutions, an independent election-monitoring organ had to be created, the putting in place of electoral calendar and the reduction of the number of political parties from 253 to 5 and improvement on the electoral code. These measures if adopted will give room for a flat playfield for all political parties. A good number of politicians will be encouraged to play politics in the country because it is said: "if you do not play politics, politics will play you". Hence, If carpet crossing has no place in Cameroon then modus operandi of the politicians would be known and transparency and accountability would be fostered. With transparency and accountability, the fight against corruption and embezzlement would be successfully won at the level of party politics. In the face of this, the vision 2035 as envisaged by President Paul Biya will be achieved.

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