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## History: A Sword or Olive Branch for Contemporary Africa? The Cameroon Case

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**ABSTRACT:** Progress in the domain of science and technology during this current age of globalisation highlights the need for state governments to form continental and regional blocs with shared interests and governance having the ultimate aim of striking strong economic, social and political bargains, which are crucial developmental signposts. In this new twist, state governments and markets systems even of former rivalling states are systematically being suppressed in favour of agglomerations where single state authorities do play very minimal functions. The EU, Schengen and EEC emerged and operated in the likeness of this contention. Curiously, most African people or elite are still either caught up in the dream of state creation through some sorts of very scary attempts to correct the past. In these brackets, they are entangled in a web of self-imposed guilt that displays itself in enormous complexes. The ability of African History or historians of African descent to remind the African people of their ugly past accentuated by their growing willingness to be trapped by it; makes it crucially expedient to question the relevance of history to the African peoples. In a dispensation of peace building and call by professional historians for peoples of all races not only to know but rethink and write their past placing supreme interest on human development and cohesion, need arises to know whether history is really a divisive element/weapon of destruction (Sword) or an ornament of peace in African social and academic dialectics. Using broad and specific evidences from primary and secondary sources, this paper analyses and repositions the usefulness of History to Africans in this current dispensation. It offers an argument which is valid for all societies that History can either be a sword or an olive branch depending on the willingness of the people therein to reconcile the past from the present and to judge and sentence the human past with the context of that era in mind. It further proffers that African present stagnation in the realm of development is to very large extent intricately connected to the fact that they have decided to be trapped in their past rather than using it as a springboard.

**KEYWORDS:** *History, Sword, Olive Branch, Africa, Cameroon*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Postmodernism and New historicism have a concord on the fact that; each scientific discipline should/must employ rigorous techniques that encompasses a disciplined usage of appropriate theories and methodology in its investigation and analysing of any given matter. Together with historiography, this trio emphasize that any established thesis can only convey broad spectrum scholarly meaning if the analyses construed from the issues investigated have taken into account the complexities of the time and geographical context. Seen from this angle, some concepts and themes like Afro-centrism, Euro-centrism, radicalism and complacent contentions that have generated rancour rather than enhanced historical knowhow in Africa at large and Cameroon particular will certainly not generate the height of acrimony (swords) alive in scholarly discourse at present. This certainly justify why they are as many as 32 groups<sup>1</sup> fighting either for complete secession or reconfiguration of the political map of Africa inherited from their colonial past. Besides the fact that Africans are constantly questioning everything about the past and seeking to remake it in the likeness of the present, which seriously undermines the current established structures thereby provoking, hunger, strive and stalled development programmes, should be added the fact that, such contentions have positioned African countries and Africans in the undignified pedigrees of guilt.

<sup>1</sup> The reasons for these splinter groups littered all over the African continent seeking for recognition as states range from political to religious discrepancies all of them having a discreet or opened link to colonialism and other issues intricately cued to alien abstractions. With a glaring example from the Cameroon Anglophone crises, most post-colonial governments have largely failed to provide lasting solutions to the problems often raised by this group and the situation has been the constant resurgence of War and crises that have stalled so many developmental programmes.

As a country with a triple colonial heritage widely held to be Africa in miniature because of its history and geography, the Republic of Cameroon fits into this narrative very squarely. This paradox of timing and approaches to issues under same world dynamics call to question several issues all of them intricately connected to history. A few of such questions will include (a) Is it only the History of Africa that is so pregnant with vile that is worth correcting? (b) can it possibly be that Africans have a poor way of teaching, writing, understanding and using their History?(c) How relevant is History to man(Africans)and how can the knowledge of the past be used to serve as an olive branch(peace) than sword(war and palaver). This paper has used multi-disciplinary primary and secondary sources with Cameroon as a case study to answer the above preoccupations. This narrative opines that Africans and all human communities needs to be cautious of relevance of History in place and time. It buttress further the African elites reconcile the past with the present, the continent will continue to stand as veritable theatre of division, hunger, strike and poverty which are pervasive elements both to development and globalisation.

The case study Cameroon is a victim of; Slave and Legitimate trades, triple colonial heritage (German, British and French) as well as the on-going neo-colonial North/South intrigues. Her people are multi-ethnic while her geography keeps her both in a strategic and risky position within the West and Central African sub-region. This precarious situation is reinforced by visible religious cleavages accompanied by a disturbing battle between the governing and the governed as well as minority rights and majority rule. In a way the history of Cameroon to some large measure fits and its wholly representative enough to stand for a veritable theatre where all the fascinations plus fantasies often expressed towards their past is dramatized. There is no better way of understanding the place of history within the current dispensation other than understanding the problem that surrounds and compounds its functional relevance in place and time.

## II. THE PROBLEM OF/OR IN HISTORY

As a distinct discipline caught in the web of change and human prejudices, the development of history has had a fair deal of problems with lasting implications on the social landscape. The first problem which is even yet unsolved among most minds and even distinguished scholars is the fact that the knowledge of History for the most part reawaken some odds past of human kind. Since the World is built on the debris of strive, failure and success, history is seen most of the time as a boring discipline, which preoccupies itself with the sarcastic job of chiselling old wounds and making them a subject of current interest. According this school of thought, history remains a major point of distraction from important and crucial issues of the time. As an enterprise whose relevance is morphed up in some societal prejudice, Arthur Marwick records that historian do often rant themselves as full-fleshed social scientist and established scholars in public meanwhile in private they come to terms to the nude reality which is that history is a reserve for those who wants the sub option in the learning process.

By suggesting, that the discipline lies within the reach of all and sundry without any basic requirement for it to be studied at any level this scholar insinuates that the whole discipline is like athletic or any other discipline whose relevance circulates just around amusement.<sup>2</sup> Even at this, post renaissance and Enlightenment historians continued to steer up debates about key issues in world politics trying to redistribute blames and seeking for redress and this kept ardent addicts of the old order that glorified Absolutism worried. Maddened by the intriguing revelations and arrogance of the findings established some of them clearly figuring out the weaknesses of monarchy critics of History never minced words in accusing the entire profession of history of having no clear aims, no special methodology, no sense of its place and purpose.

Concretely, most of these critics were very acerbic in stressing that this discipline is in no way related to social science as often claimed because as he put it best ‘ distinguished social scientist places Historians in a private world inhabited exclusively by penetrating but unfathomable insights and ineffable understandings.’<sup>3</sup> As to the intellectual probity and relevance of history in the human interface, they attacked history of being. Vague, cliché ridden and devoid of basic standards and from the popular ;lowlands of being pedantic and over concerned with the detailed pursuit of the insignificant even to those with Interest in the maintenance of intellectual standards and unfamiliar with the pedantries, the very name of history often smell with ranked boredom. ..[because] the Historian is loaded with old mouse-eaten records, authorising himself [sic] for the most part upon other histories whose greatest authorities are built upon the noble foundations of hearsay, having much to do in according differing writers and to prick truth out of partiality acquainted with 100 years ago than with the present age . [ even at this]yet better knowing how the world Goethe than how its owned [sic] is runeth. Curious of the antiquities and inquisitive of the novelties, a wonder to young folk and a tyrant in table talk.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Marwick Author, *The Nature of History*, (London: Macmillan Publisher Ltd,1985),p.12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.p13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Going by this and many more, the likelihood that history as a discipline could not have survived the storms of criticism levied on her by amateur and professional scientists through the generations remains very high. While the works of Trevor, Augustine Karl Marx, Gibbon, Voltaire, Hegel; and Ranke strove and brought forward a distinct pattern and method of studying and writing history, the African past posed a new kind of problem especially at the dawn of independence (source needed here prof).

### III. THE PROBLEM WITH AFRICAN HISTORY AFTER COLONIZATION

As colonization drew to a close in the 1960s and the 70s Africans were coming to terms with new realities requiring prompt attention. One of such tragic truth was that there was no place and time where they will return to their pristine traditional values and indigenous approaches to basic needs and worldview as dreamt. For just a little more than half a century (1884-1960), colonization with its accompanied strings like Education, Christianity Islam and markets systems registered profound modifications of African worldview bringing into fore three distinct classes of people that were to be hired into one mould by the emerging local governing elite.

The first of these three groups were those who could be broadly termed the radical class of pre-independent African thinkers. This group had mainly those whose mental outfit were skewed to see only the odd segments of colonization like Slavery and slave trade, exploitation of raw material the maiming of African traditional religions with the values in it as well as the implantation of an educational system that was systematically tailored to buttress the supremacy of the colonizer.<sup>5</sup>

To this class of Africans, colonization was to be a logical end to all the injustices suffered by the Africans and a dramatic return to the age of normalcy where absolute monarchism was to be rank as supreme. This class had an overwhelming majority mostly in the British territories where indirect administration and freedom of speech and association had left tremendous impact. It also prevailed in the German territories where ruthlessness had cultivated enough enmity for the colonial project.<sup>6</sup> Pointedly, those immersed in this school of thought were prepared to push the hands of history as far backward as possible seeking to remake African history anew. Besides the general eagerness often expressed to discard colonial contentions about the African past, this class of thinker believed that a worthy African past could only be documented by Africans using sources and methodology specifically relevant to African realities alone. Basing on the Hegelian and the Hamitic hypothesis that sought for the most part to discredit anything of African value, this class became grossly motivated to take every action to make Africans write or rewrite their own history based on a methodology akin to African realities alone.

The second group that formed part of the problem facing African past is the critical generation. The difference between the critical and the first group was that, this second group was manned by those who had a firm mastery of the negative and positive contribution of the colonisation and European amputation of the African past. Unlike the first group, they were ready to tolerate and even borrow some of those practices and approaches of foreign abstraction that provided a reasonable way forward. With regards to History or the available documented past, this critical generation believed like the Radicals that their past was really largely truncated by the Eurocentric hypothesis. They buttress that, this was largely because, the African past lied buried in the soils together with the fact that the methodology employed by this scholarship to research and document the African past could only produce such half-baked and most of the time misleading contentions.

Instead of battling for a full-blown divorce with the past like did the first class of thinkers this critical group advocated for a sort of a careful scan to pick out the worthy segments of African past as documented by the Europeans and to use them as some pointers or leads to document their history. In a sense, this critical generation of Africans were clamouring for a kind of complementarity between the two approaches for a worthy African past to be established. It was based on such joint approach clamoured for by this critical mass those positive configurations of the way forward for the African continent were figured out after independence. It was indeed, a positive approach that shunned hatred for the past and the people therein and praised cooperation with the possible potent elements of alien abstraction to chat the way forward for the emerging African states with their governing systems.

A less functional group that was part of this post colonization of independence mutations was the complacent generation. This was constituted mainly by the assimilated Africans made up mainly of schooled men/women plus Christians. The enchanting opportunities that were gained through education and Christianity

<sup>5</sup> See Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, p.54.

<sup>6</sup> Through the policy of Indirect Rule and in line with British openness, so many people found fissures to trap down the odd segments of colonialism and to seek for redress at any opportunity. Though patterned to ensure automatic respect for the British rule, this policy instinctively gave the native elites the feeling of a possible return to a pristine Africa someday. The case was different with the Germans that used mainly the direct rule and were for the most part very brutal in their administration. This brutality made the African to yearn for the departure of the Whiteman and anything connected to him at any time.

profoundly metamorphosed their worldview especially their appreciation of the mutuality of Africano-European relations. Indeed even when the momentum of decolonization gathered steam and gradually off rooted any structures and institutions that sustained the colonial project, this complacent class still found much of essence in the colonial game. They were by this token ready to keep alive the colonial project all over African as long as they was no further nuisances mated on them by the colonialists. Interestingly, the complacent generation was not the kind of people that always sought to protect every aspect of colonization blindly. They were for the most part very aware of sinister activities and pain brought into play by colonialism and its accessories but strove most of the time to move with the realities and the changing times.

The veritable problem with Africa and Cameroon History and Historians after independence is that, most of these sub groupings usually developed a caustic and colossal habit of hiping tones or blames on Europeans for anything bad or funny which has ever happened in the African continent thereby taking credit for any good thing thereof. In this distorted mind-set, most African do ignite the absence of a veritable national spirit in writing or teaching History but do very little or nothing to identify the form and content of this kind of project. For the most part, blames for the absence of this spirit are pegged on foreign-born forces notably colonialism and all its accessories. Even when introspection is made, there is a high tendency of attributing wholesale blames on the writer/teacher without a corresponding attempt of taking into account the historical context and personality coefficient that conditioned the matter.

This spirit makes the African past to be more of a black box where only blames (swords) for past actions than credits are found. This paper identifies not only the conditions under which the knowledge of the Cameroon past can be employed in nation building but also the quality and character of a veritable national History. It argues that inspite of the somewhat scattered natural and political environment that defined the African past and by extension that of Cameroon, the known or unknown past insipidly flow into the present thereby making any attempt to correct the past both a futile initiative and a wild dream. From this, it elects for the employment of a positive spirit in appreciating historical facts making them not to appear as swords but as love branches. It makes a claim, which can be valid for all African states that were forcibly put together at independence. In this realm, African contemporary problems can better be appreciated and solved using a very mature and home-borne positive spirit. This employs a contextual approach is employed in questioning, documenting as well as teaching and using the knowledge of the past.

#### IV. HISTORY IN TIME AND SPACE

The human interface (world) is niche of both harmonious and contradicting arena born of modern interpretation and of ancient moral and sarcastic insight. It is much more of a stage where the human drama of – coexistence-interdependence, war, peace, exchange and all sorts of crises plus clean and shady deals operate. As the confluence between the past and the present, the knowledge of not only history but how to use it becomes an indispensable need. The most updated statement of the commission of standards and conduct in History states un equivocally that The veritable problem with the African past is not only that much of it is not known but rather that, Africans do have a skewed way of using the knowledge of the past. If history remained within the shackles of the narrowly defined pattern of the past to be a plane record of investigating and reporting on it without a corresponding desire to correct or use it wisely, then the mission of history could have been a very confused one. The fun that has come with historical matter is that developed societies like Western Europe have used even the darkest moments of their past as veritable learning sign posts while developing societies have been rather trapped by their past. Though instinctively trapped in all human action, it is not up to any society or people to choose its history. The question therefore is what is this seemingly boring but crucially unavoidable course or subject call History?

#### V. THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL AXIS OF HISTORY

The definition just like the relevance of history of developed, developing and underdeveloped societies has tremendously grown or expanded over time. From the era of Herodotus, through Ranke, Spencer, Ajayi, Trevor and Harry Johnsons to name but this limited few, the definitions of history turn to vary in some slim portions but most of them do concur on the fact that; History is the sum total of any and everything that man has done either in the distant or near past.<sup>7</sup> Being a unique kind of study of investigating issues that are not directly accessible to our observations, the historian summons all the known sources to study a particular issue of human interest. In doing so he gets confronted with the issue of time and in most cases a remote time span that is not directly available for scrutiny by the researcher but rather wrapped up in some absurdities. Unlike other faculties of knowledge whose raw material can be reassessed, history deals with the aspect of time which

<sup>7</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History*, Harmon worth: Penguin, 1961, pp.13-14.



can hardly be recalled or replayed in full. It is of course this nuance of time that has reawakens a new debate about history of the presence.<sup>8</sup>

The dramatic improvement in science and technology has not only extended the frontiers of historical relevance but has opened more fissures that can serve as sources and again as aspects of historical study. The Present Historical guild/scholarship is no longer only stingily interested in human action but on everything connected to man like the environment (ecological evolution , nutrition trends and other intricate issues of human growth that were a reserve of pure sciences.<sup>9</sup> These developments have made history no longer a subject of Kings and great events and people as it was in the past. It strives to put together mans; past; big or small, central or at the periphery. By so doing, the historian in his workshop<sup>10</sup> summons and analyses the human past as crude as it is carefully separating zones of triumphs from those of failure and trying to connect the traceable events to the present. It is no longer a parody of praise or vague veneration as it was in the Feudal age and the Victorian times but a critical record of what has ever happened or affected humanity in the past. For some time and even right up to this our very age historians have been disagreeing not only on issues of facts dissonance but also of the kind of past that can be investigated. This attitude emerging even from established scholars of the discipline do compound the already existing criticism about its essence in time and space but do not in any way compromise its usefulness to generations present and to come.<sup>11</sup>

Often embattled by uncertainty arising from human unpredictability, makers of history especially those of African genre are often praised or blamed for their actions by amateur or non-professionals.<sup>12</sup> These blames are most of the time hinged to double pronged inadequacies. The first is the fact that Europeans and other developed societies who are sufficiently aware that any action of their past goes into record as History or ingredients of it, are using that consciousness to avoid future blames. Unfortunately, Africans for some weird reasons have a nonchalant attitude in piecing part of their actions together let alone the consciousness of their present actions to future generations.

The second reasons that explains this blame is the fact that every person with no clue on how history is made or can be made to convey its rightful meaning places him/herself in the shoes of a Historian and seeks to pass out information in the name of a historian.<sup>13</sup> The problem with this is not only the gruesome ignorance and claim often made even by established faculties that every person is qualified to document reliable or time honoured history but more that, the past especially the errors that came with it are being regarded with disdain plus an ever willing spirit to seek for its redress.<sup>14</sup> With tones of blames and accusation heaped on a History

<sup>8</sup> In Cameroon this is an emerging part of History that has emerged because of the rigorous argument often pushed through that much can be recovered if Historians turn to write their History about the events and people that are still either alive or nearer to us in space and time. It built around the contention that the past overlaps with the presence, can be traced, and reconnected with the actors are still alive. It survives of the invincibility of eyewitness accounts. See V.B. Amaazee, "The Case for Teaching Contemporary History In Cameroon" in *Science and Technology Review vol.IV*, 1986, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> These new dimensions of History have enormously grown and taken shape in Cameroon. Pundits of this scholarship are renowned scholars Like saibou Issa, Amadou Adama, Gormo Jean, Armel Sambo, Ahidjo Paul, Taguemfa Gilbert and Fonka Mathew to name but just a few. These scholars have through hectic research and publication have broken the whirlpool of prejudice to established newer insides not only about man but more about the environment that has shaped his world view in no little way.

<sup>10</sup> As a science, Historians are like professional industrialists who prepare his tools and set out to investigate matters with all possible prejudices and biases pushed aside. In the field the Historian does the job of craft man carefully collecting data ( evidences and figures) from sometimes mute and obscure sources. A professional Historian in the field is ever cautious of the unique and the specific and from data much more like little grains he gets back to his workshop (laboratory) to cross examine the data and tickles it to talk and convey sense to some aspect of a summon past. It is this aspect of methodical investigation

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Marwick, *What history is and Why is it Important*, Bletchley, Buckinghamshire: The Open University Press), 1970, pp.44-5.

<sup>12</sup> Gratitude to some efforts of the past is hardly easily ascertained. Buried in the bosom of African traditional religion, Africans have a vague and most of the time ungrateful feeling of their past. A thorough reading of this is developed by E.J. Alagoa, "The Encounter between and western Historiography before 1800", (*Storia Della Storiografia*, 1991, pp.73-87. Also, see similar developments in *The Python's Eye, the Past in the Living Present*, (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 1981), pp. 37 -40.

<sup>13</sup> See the dichotomies of historical relevance and the dimensions of truth in Adams Schaff (1979) *History and Truth* (Oxford: Pergamum Press, 1979, p.14 and R.I. Marshal, *The Historical Criticism of Documents* (Oron : Mason Publishing Company, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> As an established locus of knowledge, History is to be documented by professional Historians who are vested with historical methodology of writing plus the techniques of collecting and analysing data. It therefore goes

every day the ignorant public as indicated above wholesomely place History within the limits of conflict provocation and sustenance (sword). Either in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, America or continental Europe History performs the same tasks. This past is often full of scars and regrets at some points with episodes of victory and domination having an elastic intercourse. The ability of each generation to seek to know the past not with the willingness to be trapped by it in trying to correct it makes the difference. As indicated, earlier the problem does not lie only about knowing the past but how it is perceived and adapted to suit developmental motives. Without doubt history of all societies, describe, narrate or analyses some aspects only of chosen past because the whole course of history is a compendious project that can never be wholesomely apprehended in one or a few studies. While most aspects of the History of societies where history is consciously made can be researched only by visiting libraries to get well-preserved archives, books, diaries, pictures, maps with clear names or statistics, this is almost a forgone or remote possibility with African History. It is in this direction that African lay emphasis on a strong complementarity between written, oral and archaeological finds to ascertain its facts.

## VI. STAKING THE INDISPENSABILITY OF HISTORY

From its identified, multiple axes one can faintly or vaguely concludes that History still has its place in time. A cued up conclusion can be established that history inspite of its weaknesses really become an indispensable discipline worthy to study write and know for the advancement of human mentality and its accompanied progress? As a separate discipline with well specified and stratified norms, History does not only perform an academic role like many sciences may do but go further to be like an indispensable social utility to all human regardless of sex, age or race. The usefulness of History in place and time immediately dismisses the often-posed question whether it can be discarded because of the fact that it serves as a sword.

By so doing need arises for us to emphasize the swords often associated with History and Historians do not come from just the bear knowledge of History. It grows from the society's perception and intent to use historical knowledge. It is not therefore the discipline of History that is a problem it is rather societal usage and interpretation of historical knowledge that sometimes renders the stuff sordid. The African do not from the foregoing harbour problems because its history has more scars (slavery, Colonization, exploitation, Neo-colonialism) than Europe ,America or the Carribean but rather because there are growing tendencies to attempt the impossible mission of correcting even the far distant past. Like suggested earlier, the past is a silent string of time that has flown into some absurdity with the passage of time leaving sometimes only the context and the actors that animated the events who might be consciously overburdened with the task of keeping the account in some form .

Though most of the time much of the past flows into the presence , the likelihood that the circumstances that might have warranted a certain class of people to act or react to situations in a particular way might be diametrically very different in a new context. Seen from this angle, the knowledge of the past should be seen from its particular context of the events ready to rethink and give credit to meagre beginning with an overriding ambition to advance earlier arrangements. In trying to provide the unifying dialogue that most of the time performs the function of awakening the dead or sleeping past, Historians do indeed disagree on quite a number of things. Although these disagreements do arise from some of the fallacies of the art like facts damage, fraud or evidence falsification together with skewed analysis, scholarship out of the matrix of History is advised to understand that this is difficulty associated with the rigour involved in the deeper scrutiny of historical facts in bringing the past to life. As a noble discipline these disagreements are rather required to strengthen rather weaken the Historical guild. It is within these brackets that the most updated (2017) standards of the conduct of graphically opine that:

*History [meaning the discipline] is the never-ending process where people [of all classes, ages and race] seek to understand the past and its many meanings. We all interpret and narrate the past which is to say that we all participate in making History. [Understanding history is the most fundamental tool worthy of making us to understand not only ourselves but also the world around us. ... individuals from all backgrounds have a stake on how the past is interpreted for it cuts to the very hearts of their identities and world views. This is why history can invoke [both]passion and controversies in the public realm Professional Historians are wise to understand that they do not have a monopoly of facts over their discipline. The openness of the discipline is among its most attractive features. Historians strive constantly to improve upon our collective understanding of*

that though every human beings actions constitute substance for the documentation of History not every human has the quality of narrating talk less of documenting a past. For detailed account on this, see John Cannon (1976) *The art of Historian*. Similar emphasis of History being like an established with assignments carefully distributed are vividly expressed by E.H. Carr (1961) *What is History?* (Harmsworth: Penguin), A.K Dickenson and P.J. Lee(1978)(eds) *Teaching History and Historical Understanding*( London: Heinemann)and E.L.Elton (1967) *The Practice of History* (London: Methuen)

*the past through a complex process of critical dialogue- with each other, -with the wider public and -with the historical record in which we explore former lives and worlds to search for answers to the most compelling questions to our time and place.*<sup>15</sup>

From the foregoing, a verifiable conclusion can be made that history as earlier stated seek to satisfy an all-round curiosity and the defects of such a venture does not arise from the venture itself but rather from the scientific limitations and other biases that might have been induced by amateurish contentions. In reading, teaching or seeking to understand any aspect of history it should be borne in mind that any worthy study or history offers its contentions only from its own position of the scientific balcony. Though relative objectivity and truth may be seen to have been maintained in a particular research issue or area of study, this does not cancel the fact that worthy issues of human interest can still be established by another historian, which can complement or even discredit the already known facts.

As pointed out above, professional historians fine this as just the worthy aspect of knowledge because one research and established contentions opens the wide gate for other investigation; meaning in essence that most researchers build their argument from the existing scholarship. However, History or the knowledge of it is more consumed by a wider amateurish and non-historians than its professionals and so the understanding of the impossibilities of harmony or the sought just for similitudes in fact establishments is always overpowered by the ignorant amateurish majority. History both as a course and as a subject gives humankind the latitude to examine his past; to instruct the present and to orientate at least the near future. History in all its forms seeks to (a) inform man about his distant or immediate past, (b) reminds him of the activities (forms and methods of production and belief system) of his ancestors as well as (c) create the allowance which he can question and document the past based on primary, secondary and oral sources. In whole, history is that specific discipline of humanities that gives man both broad and specific ideas of where he came from, why he is found where he is, as well as some vague idea of what may await him in the future. This study therefore informs this wider ignorant public of this worthy exception. If history at all has aspects of evil, it should be judged and sentenced as unavoidable evil because its beneficial tonnage to the entire human interface is wholesomely overwhelming.<sup>16</sup> History therefore is all about lessons. It is about successes and failures of those who made and marred the past together with the individual and collective response plus the general and specific impact/consequences of such actions. The knowledge of history enables an individual to be able appreciate received traditions and to see which part of it is worth keeping or discarding.

Concrete examples abound in Africa to justify the fact that it's beneficial to use the failures of the past as lessons for present arrangements. To this should be added the crucial question which is how useful or detrimental is the knowledge of history to Cameroonians in the context of the present crises or how can the knowledge of history be judiciously used as an olive branch? It should be borne in mind that in everything; the discipline of history is infinitely tied up to the element of time, which is classified into the past, the present and the future. Based on the events endured by humankind with the string of time, this past has been further subdivided into convenient appellations while the present and the future are treated most of the time in broad spans.

## VII. HISTORY AND ITS INTERCOURSE WITH TIME

History indeed is concerned with the past not just because of that naked past but more because that past has an overlapping impact with the present. A human being or a society is a sum total of his past actions (experiences or encounters whether successful or not. It is only the science of History and the knowledge from within it that; the truths can be brought to the fore. Without a knowledge of the past humanity will stand adrift, sufficiently confused in the endless sea of time owing mostly to the fact that only the knowledge of the past gives us foreground to understand where and why we came to be where we are found. Here, history is seen to be performing both an academic, spiritual and nutritive function. It informs, builds confidence, directs and nourishes individuals and societies great and small with the knowledge of their traceable past at any point in time. With regards to history's lone ability and qualification of questioning the past and its relevance both to the present and future, Leopold Von Ranke opines, 'to history has been assigned the office of judging the past,

<sup>15</sup> See the most updated (2017) Statement of professional standards and conduct published by the American Historical Association aimed at settling some of the intriguing dilemmas and contradiction surrounding the practice of History in public and private place. See page 1 and 2 that preambles the Document. I have taken the liberty of science to add the words in the interpolation brackets.

<sup>16</sup> See succinct developments of these facts by Fernand Braudel in *On History* (translated by Sarah Mathews), Weindefiel and Nicolson, (1980), Braudel and Henry James, *The Dawn of conscience*, (New York: Charles Scribner, Sons, 1968)

of instructing the present for the benefit of the future ages ‘<sup>17</sup> Bernard Norling further corroborate this thesis that religiously sustain the relevance of History to the present by buttressing that;

Anyone who respects the truth will want to acquire extensive information accurate information about the past in order that he may judge for real knowledge rather than ignorance or prejudice.... Every institution, idea or practice of the present has been formed by the past and it will influence the future.<sup>18</sup>

About Africa and more particularly Cameroon, the Knowledge of history gives us broad and specific messages about early tribal and ethnic formations, colonial amputation of traditional prowess and elegance, the influence of Islam and Christianity as well as the thought and imaginations of the early actors of Cameroon state. Being an encompassing subject a well-researched and neatly documented History of any country like Cameroon will give the living generation a broad mirror for everyone to see the past. An issue worthy of note in a people attempt to read and extract meaning in/on the event of the past is not ultimately the desire to correct it.

Interestingly, the past belong to a rigidly established stream of time with its only quality and characteristics, which cannot be, adjusted even one bit. For instance, there is absolutely nothing Africans can do to alter the damage done to their youthful population by the slavery and slave trade just like America even as a leading world power can do nothing to alter the fact that Britain once colonized and maltreated them. The Chinese can do nothing to alter the Taipings and the Boxer Revolutions that consumed lives in alarming proportion. Some issues of the past are natural but all of them have influenced human action, which is part of worthy history.

In any case, the knowledge of the human past in all its form is supposed to inform present action meaning therefore that human events of the past gently slide into the present. There is an interesting paradox involved in the palaver of time, which is that the relation between the past, present and future is a one directional headway. While the past has a meaning and even influence in the presence, the presence can only have but a reflective relation with the past and not otherwise. While the present can have a direct and influential relation with the future, the future can only have reflective relations with the present.

In this realm, it is up to the present generation of Africans to use their present to mirror the past. A worthy practice require in this direction is to reconcile their spirit with the actors and events of the past and to seek to use the lessons drawn from the odd practices of this past to correct the present. It is for this reason that scholars uphold this discipline to be and plays the function equalled in essence to the society as that of the memory is to the brain in human beings. Bestowed with such a noble but quite challenging mission the teaching, study and writing of history is indeed a complex task. Seen in this direction historiography which simply the art or science of documenting the human past is a thrilling and dangerous job. It is thrilling when the facts are placed or sorted out and interpreted within their proper historical context with elements of bias and self-centeredness scatted away. It turns dangerous when the episodes, events and people that animated the scenes of the past are studied or appreciated without taking into consideration the circumstances and philosophy of the time with and during which the event willingly or forcibly occurred. In casting the rigour and craftsmanship required to make history worthy of its essence in time and place, the publishers of the 2017 statement of standards and conduct never minced their words when they ascertained that;

What is true of History is also very true of Historians. Anyone who comes to study of History brings with them a host of identities, experiences and interest that cannot help but affect the questions they ask of the past and the answers they wish to know. When applied with integrity and critical fair mindedness, the political social; and religious beliefs of a historian can appropriately informed their political practice. Because the questions we ask profoundly shape everything we do- the topics we investigate, the evidence we gather, the arguments we construct and the stories we tell, it therefore becomes inevitable that different historians will produce different histories.<sup>19</sup>

History will therefore not ascertain its facts and contentions with exactitude of numbers, and figures like pure sciences do because researchers of this discipline are dealing with fragmented even forgotten issues and events, which time, fading memory and lack of resources plus mental development always do deny and even fail them most often. These are aspects that must be born in mind when teaching the subject or dealing with any of its aspect to any wider public. How then is the Cameroon problem intrigued in this narrative?

<sup>17</sup> Leopold Von Ranke a German historians outclasses all of his contemporaries in piecing together the facts of history and carving out a worthy place of history for scholarship. He is credited for his positivism in modern historical scholarship. The quotation here is religiously cited by V.B. Amaaze, *Historiography: History and Historical Method*( Bamenda :Patron Publishing House, 2001, p.30.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Norling, *Towards a Better understanding of History*, Notre Dame: Indiana, 1960, p.2.

<sup>19</sup> American Historical Association *Statement of standards*, 2017, p.4.



### The Complexities/Contradictions of Cameroon History

As an epicentre of the African continent aptly represented in terms of geography, cultural traits, governance and poverty, the History of Cameroon is wrought with contradictions and startling complexities. These absurdities are rooted not only on its rich colonial heritage but more also on the citizen's engagements with the past and the actors that made it. On the colonial package, there are issues that defines horrors like the ruthlessness of the French in exercising the corvée, indigenat, La mise en valeur plus the opaque governance that created very little room for the exercise of individual and collective freedom. This is vividly read in the way riots and dissensions of the French way of life like the exploits of the UPC were crushed plus the surveillance system that destroyed the Geramanophilia syndrome.

To this should be added the British blatant neglect of most aspect of infrastructural and welfare development. The problem with the present generation is not just that these odd and ugly segments of their History are made known. The veritable problem is that of the tendency of thinking that these issues can be corrected. This makes historians guilty and the noble discipline of history to appear as the reveller of bad news. With the progress registered in the domain of technology and advancement in the historical guild, the historical scholarship has been invaded by all kinds of amateurs both of Cameroon and of foreign origins seeking to do a lot of fact damage and identity fraud. Unlike established Cameroonian Historians like Engelbert Mveng, Martin Njeuma, Idriss Mouhamadou, Amadou Adama, Daniel Abwa, Victor Julius Ngoh, VG. Fanso, Anthony Ndi, and NN Mbile who have been able to document worthy aspects of the Cameroon past, these breed of self-proclaimed scholars do nuanced the past with a lot of clichés and providing reasons for revenge at each interval. In tune with the current crises plaguing the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, a sort of regret seemed to be in the making especially within the humour of the secessionist rooted mostly in tilted historical reasoning. The error in this is not that reasoning and claims built on historical providence but rather the failure to examine the special climate and possibilities that guided the actors of history in the past but rather the ingratitude involved in judging the actors of the past. The next problem that undermines this reasoning is the blindness involved in considering the complexities that have come and gone with the triumphs and failures of the events of history. Such parochial contentions that have sustained this reasoning have given birth to a feeling that History and Cameroon History for that matter seem to master only the art of chiselling old wounds and revamping old, buried and even forgotten sordid issues of the past. However, the Cameroon political edifice is tramped by a widening gap between the governed and the governing, a despicable gulf between the centre and the periphery as well as xenophobia and claims of identities that threaten state institutions and the entire project. All of this are working together in fertilizing this shrouded notion of handling history.

A question of pedagogy and ethical deontology that arises with such caution is how best an History be taught in bad neighbourhoods especially in areas of tragic cases replete with harm, domination and hate like Rwanda<sup>20</sup> and Cameroon<sup>21</sup> to site but just this two? Will it be server to ignore history in order to avoid the contradiction and conspiracies that such knowledge can revamp? On the other hand, the reasoning of pushing back the hands of history has not risen in a vacuum. It is rooted in the ignorant of history or the denial of it. If the revelation of new and startling facts of history has initiated revenge, the ignorance or denial of it has done even worse. Until very recently, Issues of Cameroon History were taken either very lightly or for granted. Even with the Unitary State, the tendencies of not knowing History or writing and teaching it to glorify French Cameroon and victimize the Anglophone minority became a norm. The segmentation of history and the documentation of it to suits tribal and power barons than igniting the national spirit remains the disservice done to History in Cameroon and all of Africa.

Unfortunately, these wrong apprehensions of a worthy enterprise as if history has not only remained with academic centres but also have insidiously trickled into governance. With this speaking, writing and understanding the truth of the past from historian scholarly perspective seem to be at variance with the

<sup>20</sup> In 1994 the ethnic units of Rwanda were engulfed in ethnic rivalries which ultimately produced one of the macabre scenes of human slaughter in human History. Graphic images of children crawling to tap milk from the lifeless breast of the mother slaughtered in cold blood plus other terrible scenes or arson constitute part of that scene. Most of the people who lived the events are still very much of it and mention of it anywhere may rekindle the same emotions.

<sup>21</sup> The Southern part of Cameroon that was formerly colonized by Britain is currently embattled by a violent crisis of identity and search for better representation or isolation. While poor governance may be blamed for the escalation of the crises that is mounting to the heights of genocides, a wider majority of people seem to place the entire blame on history and historian. At some points history is blamed for constantly reminding people of that dirty past or historians are blamed to have skewed or falsified the History. These blames have enable those on the frontline of the present crises to attempt the impossibility of attempting to correct that physical that the mental and spiritual past.

leadership cartel who are paradoxically supposed to be the custodians of the state. Another questions tied to this unfortunate trend of events is whether the History of Cameroon like that of the entire Africa should be written and taught to glorify men in office or to reveal events? Cameroon like any organized enterprise is an edifice of so many elements borne out of the sacrifices of so many, peoples, tribes, and governments. It's a state crafted out of self-abnegation, abandonment of religious credos, fusion of cultural values, political orientation and even denial of climatic inclination. Such an edifice require a conscious mastery of its history and its careful usage of it in space and time.

Without the material and immaterial essence of History provided above, these questions will intrigue this study and also modelled history as a scary subject replete with the undignified duties of pitting the presence against the past thereby playing the role of a sword to any human society. It should be stressed here that the knowledge of History is known and shall always be made known by researchers from home and abroad. What may save the discipline will be the proficiency of those transmitting it to teach the facts and figures without compromise but to inculcate a reconciliatory or developmental spirit in making its analysis. It is difficult but not impossible but not impossible to convert swords into ploughshares in the teaching of History. This analogy finds its premise in the fact that other societies of the Western world have adopted that approach and the scholarly contention vigorously sustained by the American Historical Association, which among other things ascertains that:

Teaching is basic to the practice of History. It occurs in many sites not just classrooms, Museums and historical sites, documentaries, textbooks websites, articles and popular History. Whether it occurs in a classroom or public realm, it performs the essential of work of assuring that the past remains as part of the living memory in the presence. Good teaching entails accuracy and rigour in communicating information and strives always to place such information in a context to convey its wider significance. Integrity in teaching means presenting competing interpretations with fairness and intellectual honesty. Doing so can support one of the most important goals of teaching, exciting the interest of those who are encountering the topic for the first time leading them towards the insight that History is a living inquiry not just an inert collection of accepted facts.<sup>22</sup>

Carefully taught history should produce two or more kind of audience. One can be a critical mass of historically minded people who are aware of their past but not guilty of it or trying to correct it. The second should be those who are aware of that past but seeking to correct its influence of the present and doing everything to avoid a replay of such a thing in the future. Here two brands of stands out clearly namely history for development and history of victims. The former informs humanity of the path he or his ancestors have covered, the successes and failures registered including the impact on the political, economic and socio-cultural timescale. The later stands out to be what this paper with regards to Cameroon History calls the "history of blame or accusation" In this kind of History mankind is reminded of his past in such a way that vengeance or revenge is made not just to be an option but indispensable. Africans in general and Cameroonians in particular have been bedevilled by this history of victimisation, which wholesomely blame the West and other actors in the past to have kept Cameroon progress in bondage. This has brought to fore a fierce and continual debate anchoring Africanized claims and Euro-centric response with no precise solutions to the present problems.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

Using almost the same kind of facts and concepts/episodes, this paper has attempted to move a way both from the European and the Afro-centric stands which suggests either that Africans are entirely responsible to their fate or that the African stagnation at any point time was externally induced. It validates the fact that slave trade, colonialism and all their accessories brought forth a new pattern within which most African traditional systems were maimed and rendered obsolete but that these same concepts and events were not entirely bad. It submits that the missionary enterprise, education including other technical and infrastructural provided the basis for development. It asserts that the culture of blame incumbent in present scholarship is not a positive approach to questioning the past. In as much as the paper insist that historical facts should be the basis of all investigation, it makes a claim which is valid for the whole of African History that in context of abounding opportunities in a fast changing world, a positive regard is required in understanding the past.

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