

**Review Article**

## The Intersection of Tradition and Modernity in Peacebuilding Mechanisms: A Cameroonian Perspective

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**Abstract:** This chapter examines the impact of modernism on peace mechanisms in Cameroon, exploring how modernisation processes have shaped the country's peace landscape. Using a historical research approach with the consortium of primary and secondary sources, including archival documents, oral histories, and scholarly literature, the study analyses the evolution of peace mechanisms in Cameroon from the pre-colonial period to the present day. The research reveals that modernism has had a profound impact on traditional peacebuilding mechanisms, often undermining their effectiveness and creating new conflicts. The study also highlights the challenges and limitations of modern peacebuilding mechanisms in Cameroon, including the failure to address underlying causes of conflict and the neglect of traditional peacebuilding practices. This chapter thus concludes by recommending a balanced approach to peacebuilding in Cameroon, one that combines the strengths of traditional and modern peacebuilding mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Modernism, peacebuilding, traditional peace mechanisms, conflict resolution.

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## INTRODUCTION

Cameroon, a country located in Central Africa, has experienced a complex history of conflict and peace. From the pre-colonial period to the present day, the country has been impacted by various modernisation processes, including colonialism, urbanisation, and globalisation. These processes have introduced new institutions, practices, and values that have transformed the country's peace landscape. Modernism, as a philosophical and cultural movement, emphasises the importance of reason, science, and progress.<sup>1</sup> In the context of Cameroon, modernism has been associated with the introduction of Western values, institutions, and technologies. However, the impact of modernism on peacebuilding mechanisms in Cameroon has been a subject of debate among scholars.

On one hand, modernisation processes have introduced new peacebuilding mechanisms, such as formal systems of justice, police forces, and administrative structures. These mechanisms have been designed to maintain order and stability in the country

and have been instrumental in promoting peace and security in many parts of Cameroon. On the other hand, modernisation processes have also undermined traditional peacebuilding mechanisms, such as reconciliation rituals, mediation ceremonies, and community-based conflict resolution practices. These traditional mechanisms have been an integral part of Cameroonian culture and society and have played a crucial role in promoting peace and stability in many communities.

This study aims to examine the impact of modernism on peace mechanisms in Cameroon, exploring how modernisation processes have shaped the country's peace landscape. The study will use a historical approach, analysing the evolution of peacebuilding mechanisms in Cameroon from the pre-colonial period to the present day. The following questions were then posed to well develop this chapter: What were the foundations of endogenous peace mechanisms? How has the emergence of modernism transformed peace mechanisms? And finally, what are the tensions and

<sup>1</sup> Berman M., *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

challenges posed by modernism to traditional peace mechanisms and the way forward?

By examining the impact of modernism on peacebuilding mechanisms in Cameroon, this study hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between modernisation, peace, and conflict in Africa. The study also aims to provide recommendations for policymakers and practitioners working in the field of peacebuilding, highlighting the importance of combining traditional and modern approaches to peacebuilding.

## I- The Foundations of Endogenous Peace Mechanisms

Endogenous peace mechanisms in Africa in general, and in Cameroon in particular, are based on traditional practices deeply rooted in local cultures. These practices play an essential role in promoting social cohesion and a culture of peace. This first part of the first chapter examines the origins and components of these mechanisms.

### 1. Origins and Components of Traditional Practices

Peace is a central concern for societies the world over, including Cameroon. Local ethnic groups have developed various practices to strengthen social cohesion and prevent conflict. These include joking kinship, inter-ethnic marriages, board games, cultural festivals, collective work and traditional rites. These initiatives act as catalysts to ease tensions and promote peace within communities.

### Community work and the importance of collective participation

African cultures, particularly those of Cameroon, are distinguished by their ethnic diversity and the richness of their know-how. This cultural plurality gives rise to both divergences and similarities, particularly visible in community work, festivals, dances, games and rituals, which are essential forms of sociability. They foster mutual aid relationships that reveal the socialisation of individuals.<sup>2</sup> For example, when building huts or wells, or at weddings or funerals, it is common for community members to mobilise collectively to support a family. These are also occasions for sharing meals and drinking traditional beer. Eric

Garine points out that “daily life provides few opportunities to share ball-and-sauce meals beyond the domestic group or the immediate neighbourhood; this is the case only during major festivities”.<sup>3</sup> These breaks are also marked by convivial exchanges, jokes and funny stories, reinforcing the climate of conviviality and social ties within the community.

### Festivals: vectors of social cohesion and cultural transmission

Cameroon is ethnically and culturally diverse. This diversity is perceived as a means of cohabitation between social groups. These social groups are each distinguished by their own cultures. Cultural festivals are an essential means of promoting them and strengthening social cohesion. These social events are gaining ground in Cameroon.<sup>4</sup> They can be national in scope, such as the National Arts and Culture Festival (FENAC); regional or local, *Maroua en fête* (MAFE); or organised by cultural associations such as Nguon, Ngondo, etc. A cultural festival is a festive event that brings together several ethnic groups. It is an event organised at a fixed and recurring period, around an activity related to entertainment, arts and leisure, lasting one or more days in a city. It is also a cultural gathering that not only provides a solid basis for promoting cultural diversity but is also an important factor in fostering peace and stability and promoting mutual understanding.

### Ritual and social cohesion functions of traditional practices

Festivities and community work play a central role in the integration of groups within Cameroonian societies. These practices strengthen social ties, repair any fractures and prevent conflict.<sup>5</sup> They provide opportunities for individuals to forge new friendships and for children to learn modes of sociability through sharing, play and collective celebration. These events promote cultural tolerance, as they bring together participants from diverse backgrounds. The exchange of gifts between friends during celebrations, accompanied by “hospitality, sympathy and gratitude, form the basis of sociability”.<sup>6</sup> Playful activities at these gatherings take the forms of board games involving many participants and contribute to cultural mixing, integration and living together in diversity.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremie Diye, « Les travaux communautaires et les fêtes dans les monts Mandara: formes de production des liens sociaux et de l'histoire », in Hamadou A., *Patrimoine et sources de l'histoire du Nord-Cameroun*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 2016, p. 77-90.

<sup>3</sup> Garine, E., « Les céréales comme aliment de base des agriculteurs Duupa du Nord-Cameroun », in Juhé-Beaulaton, D. and Chastanet M., *Cuisine et société en Afrique : histoire, saveurs, savoir-faire*, Paris, Karthala, 2002, pp. 243-263.

<sup>4</sup> B. Gambo, *Les Relations Intercommunautaires et Mécanisme du vivre ensemble dans la ville de Maroua*

1990 à 2019, Master thesis in history, University of Maroua, 2019, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremie Diye, « Les modes sacrificiels de résolution des conflits dans les monts Mandara », in Guitard, E. and van Beek, W. *Rites et religions dans le bassin du lac Tchad*, Paris/Leiden, Karthala/Afrika-Studiecentrum, 2017, pp. 149-158.

<sup>6</sup> Nouhou Rougaïyatou, « Don, politique et société dans les abords sud du lac Tchad du milieu du XIXe siècle à 1992 », Master thesis in History, University of Ngaoundéré, 2007, p. 46.

## 2. The Value and Effectiveness of Traditional Peace Mechanisms

For centuries, Cameroonian societies have developed traditional mechanisms for preventing and resolving conflicts, thereby fostering social cohesion and community stability. These practices, deeply rooted in cultural and social structures, have proven their effectiveness in managing internal tensions. However, these mechanisms have had to adapt to the contexts of the advent of colonisation and subsequent socio-political transformations.

### The peace-building among the peoples of Cameroon: the value of conflict prevention

The peace-building is a process of building trust and cooperation between peoples. The term encompasses the dynamic, positive and participatory process of conflict prevention, dialogue and resolution in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation. To achieve this level of stability within populations, education is the most appropriate means of raising children's awareness of the need to preserve social harmony during childhood and adolescence. Traditional peace education is therefore a preventive approach to conflict resolution. Peace-building involves learning all the positive endogenous values needed to establish a state of peace. Educating children and young people about peace is considered by peace-builders to be a particularly effective long-term strategy. Educating future generations in the values of peace is essential in areas affected by conflict, as it helps to establish a lasting balance in the social, political and economic spheres. Peace is a perpetual process of construction, hence the term "culture of peace" to describe the sociability that contributes to conflict prevention.

Prevention consists in taking measures to ensure that a conflict does not arise or does not occur in the first place. There are many modern and traditional conflict prevention mechanisms in Africa. Conflict prevention encompasses all initiatives aimed at limiting the spread of conflict or enabling its resolution. It is in this perspective that, among certain ethnic groups in Cameroon, dances, songs, tales, collective work, "commercial exchanges, rites and sacrifices, palavers, exogamy, expiatory ceremonies and many other practices serve to prevent conflict or restore peace".<sup>7</sup> Symbolic practices, such as the use of quivers of arrows and sheaves of millet by the Vouté of central Cameroon to signify war and peace, respectively, demonstrate the desire to favour non-violent solutions.

### Adapting traditional practices to new contexts

Before the arrival of outside influences, the peoples of Cameroon managed their conflicts through

traditional mechanisms such as ordination, divination and chieftaincy assemblies. These practices reflected a deep understanding of social dynamics and a commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes. However, the arrival of Islam and Western colonisation profoundly altered these traditional systems. Colonial authorities established customary courts, often located in chiefdoms, where chiefs, assisted by notables, enforced local customs, albeit under colonial supervision. This evolution limited the autonomy of traditional mechanisms, transforming them into "ethnic courts" where justice was dispensed according to modified customary rules.<sup>8</sup>

Since independence in 1960, Cameroon has gone through various phases in its quest for peace. Initially, a state-centred approach, inspired by the "*pax romana*", was favoured, emphasising political stability and the fight against internal violence. However, in the face of social mutations and crises, a more inclusive approach, integrating local communities and their ancestral practices, has emerged, recognising the value of traditional mechanisms in peace-building.

In short, the adaptation of traditional practices to colonial and post-colonial contexts demonstrates a resilience and capacity to evolve in the face of contemporary challenges. Integrating these mechanisms into modern governance and justice structures offers a holistic perspective for resolving conflicts and promoting lasting peace. Recognising and valuing these traditions is crucial to strengthening the social fabric and ensuring harmonious coexistence between the country's diverse communities.

## II- The Advent of New Actors and the Transformation of Peace Mechanism Methods

Through a number of organisations and programs, the Cameroonian government actively engages in security apparatuses, human rights advocacy, conflict resolution, and reconciliation projects, among other peace mechanisms. Even though the old actors are still important in the process, Cameroon's peace-building needs to adapt to the growing complexity and the new sources of conflict. The traditional actors that have remained relevant to peace-building are the local or grassroots actors, individuals and traditional institutions, religions, national actors, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and civil society, and at times the international community. The activities of these actors are not compartmentalised, as being presented as peace-building is always a coordinated process by several

<sup>7</sup> Issa Saïbou, « Conflits et problèmes de sécurité aux abords Sud du lac Tchad (XVIe-XXe siècles) : Dimension historique », Thesis for the Doctorate/Ph.D. in History, University of Yaoundé I, 2001, p. 220.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

actors.<sup>9</sup> As an endeavour, peace-building necessitates the involvement of numerous actors. Eliminating risks to the underlying causes of social disputes is the first step in an effective peace-building process. Therefore, maintaining peace both before and after a conflict is a part of peace-building.

### 1. The State Involvement in Peace Mechanisms

In Cameroon, national institutions play a major role in peacebuilding strategies. This is especially true in situations where preventing violence or a return to conflict is the main objective. In addition to other players, state institutions are crucial participants in Cameroon's peace-building efforts. Through a number of organisations and programmes, the Cameroonian government actively engages in security apparatuses, human rights advocacy, conflict resolution, and reconciliation projects, among other peace mechanisms.

In all, new, modern or Western-based formal adjudication processes in Cameroon, like elsewhere in the world, tend to adopt a "win or lose" rights-based approach, as opposed to the reconciliatory approach of traditional processes. Western systems also often tend to rely on a formal rights-based approach to settle legal disputes rather than the interest-based approach of traditional systems. In Cameroon, the Western-style courts are usually accessible only to those who can afford them and are formal, rule-bound, time-consuming and expensive, instead of the easily accessible, informal, flexible, expeditious and cheap traditional systems.<sup>10</sup> The formal courts are also located mainly in urban areas and are not accessible to many people living in rural areas, unlike the traditional structures that operate at grassroots levels in the communities.

The modern processes in the courts require strict adherence to procedural rules regarding pleadings and evidence, rather than the flexible adjustable approach of traditional systems which was well instituted in many centralised societies of the country. Furthermore, proceedings are conducted in the official language of record of the state through translators if necessary, unlike traditional systems where the local language or vernacular of the community is used. The formal criminal justice systems also tend to focus more on punishing and retribution than restoring and reconciling social harmony between the parties as is done in traditional systems.<sup>11</sup> Despite this, many Cameroonians prefer the more flexible, adaptable,

cheaper and accessible traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, which have the societal benefit of reducing the burden of litigation in the formal sector.

There are certain similarities between Cameroon's modern and traditional peace procedures, particularly in the judicial system, despite the previously noted distinctions. For example, as has been the case in traditional systems for ages, there has been a growing movement in the formal judicial system to decrease litigation by promoting the use of alternative dispute methods including mediation, conciliation, and arbitration. There is a push in the formal criminal justice system to use restorative justice more widely. When it comes to children who are in trouble with the law, diversion programmes involve taking them out of the criminal justice system and using restorative justice techniques to make amends with their victims and reintegrate them into society.<sup>12</sup> This again is congruent with the customary law values of social harmonisation and reconciliation in Cameroon.

In the same light, the formal justice system in civil matters in Cameroon recognises the usefulness of opinions from persons who are not parties to the case and intervene as "friends of the court". Although much more restrictive, this method is not unlike traditional adjudication procedures where the adjudicator takes into account the comments, questions and other interventions by members of the local community who are not parties to the dispute but "have a vital interest in the successful outcome of the case". Similar to the relatively recent advancements in contemporary alternative conflict resolution techniques, Cameroon has a number of traditional processes. In order to lessen the burden of excessive litigation in the formal legal system, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration are being used more frequently to settle conflicts. The growing application of restorative justice, especially in criminal cases, is another mechanism shared by the formal and traditional justice systems.<sup>13</sup>

### 2. The Role of NGOs and Civil Society

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have developed a wide range of conflict prevention and resolution activities, including monitoring conflict and providing early warning of new violence; opening dialogue between adversarial parties; playing a direct mediating role; strengthening local institutions for conflict resolution; and helping to strengthen the rule of

<sup>9</sup> Moses Ukiyedeikimie Ugo, "Peace Building in Africa", *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, Volume 6, Issue 4, 2023, pp. 60-74.

<sup>10</sup> David McQuoid-Mason, "Could Traditional Dispute Resolution Mechanisms be the Solution to Reducing the Volume of Litigation in Post-Colonial Developing Countries Particularly in Africa?", *Oñati Socio-Legal Series*, Volume 11, Issue 2, 2021, pp. 589-604.

<sup>11</sup> P.M., Sone, "Relevance of Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution in Justice Systems in Africa", *Africa Insight*, 46(3), 2016, pp. 51-54, Available from: <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ai/article/view/154169>, Retrieved March 21, 2025.

<sup>12</sup> J.J., Gabagambi, *A Comparative Analysis of Restorative Justice Practices in Africa*, New York: Hauser Global Law School, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> David McQuoid-Mason, 2021.



law and democratic processes in countries affected by violent conflict.

After the Cold War, new forms of conflict have broken out around the world. NGOs have emerged as important partners to both national governments and international agencies engaged in diplomacy and conflict resolution in dealing with conflict and reconstruction. Also, these NGOs have played a critical role in seeking to turn loose talk about “global civil society” into a concrete reality on the ground.<sup>14</sup> NGOs that concentrate on conflict resolution, like international aid organisations, react to significant shortcomings in the international community’s ability to address global issues. As shown in Bosnia, Rwanda, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Darfur, multilateral groups and agencies have far too frequently proven to be excessively slow and unwieldy in handling newly arising severe crisis situations. Additionally, institutional and political constraints frequently prevent countries and international organisations from being effective in highly delicate and complex circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

NGOs organise current, comprehensive fact-finding trips, converse with a variety of conflict-related organisations, develop conflict defusing tactics, and inspire national and international governments to take action to help calm difficult circumstances. The role NGOs can play as partners with the government and intergovernmental organisations in the agenda for peacebuilding and conflict resolution has gained more attention in recent years. Examples of situations where NGOs have been instrumental in preventing significant conflicts include the present Anglophone issue, state civilian conflict, and the succession of interethnic wars in Cameroon.<sup>16</sup>

NGOs have a significant influence in the Anglophone dispute, according to their convincing assertions. Their demands, which amounted to a buildup of multiple degrees of discontent and caused the situation to worsen, were only addressed seriously a few years later. This highlights the crucial role that NGOs play in Cameroon in particular; if those needs and requests had been brought up more frequently before 2016, it would have been simpler for the government to address them. Since 2016, every effort to halt the disaster has failed, and as of 2025, nothing has changed. The conflict has been more detrimental to the government and the people

living in the regions, even if the government has complied with some demands and made plans to ameliorate some problematic locations.

As a case study of NGOs, the case of the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) of the Catholic Archdiocese of Bamenda was underpinned by the inter-ethnic conflicts in the North West Region of Cameroon and the importance the Catholic Church attaches to the promotion of justice and peace in the world. The Northwest Region of Cameroon, which corresponds with the area covered by the Archdiocese of Bamenda, has been hit by many inter-ethnic conflicts since colonial times, with some traced back to the pre-colonial period.<sup>17</sup> The conflicts have caused economic hardship, population displacement, loss of human life, and destruction of property. Some of the injurious conflicts include Bali Nyonga and Bawock, Balikumbat and Bafanji, Oku and Mbessa, Balikumbat and Bambalang, Esimbi and Musaka, and Baligham and Awing. As these conflicts dragged on in a context of failing government initiatives, authorities of the Archdiocese of Bamenda, whose followers also suffered from the violence, saw the need to promote peace through conflict management and peacebuilding mechanisms.<sup>18</sup> As such, discussions on the creation of a faith-based institution to be given such a task began in the Archdiocese.

JPC’s activities include human rights monitoring, training, access to justice, and conflict settlement. In addition to addressing concerns of social, economic, political, and theological justice as well as the respect for human rights, the JPC is founded on the Christian values of love, justice, and freedom. Three overarching goals serve as the foundation for the organization’s work: identifying and publicising human rights breaches; advancing respect for democracy, justice, and peace; and encouraging communication, tolerance, and harmony among all societal segments. They constantly organise workshops with the objective of helping participants know the difference between trauma and stress and understand the causes, symptoms and effects.<sup>19</sup> This was triggered by the ongoing armed conflict in the Anglophone zones of the country.

As a significant step in its early recovery programme from the current Anglophone crisis, JPC provides start-up funds for income-generating enterprises to more than ten female IDPs in October 2020. This followed the analysis of the business plans

<sup>14</sup> Ndung’u Wainaina, ‘The Role of NGOs in Conflict Prevention Crucial’, *Kenya Times*, May 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Pippie Hugues, “The Role of NGOs in the Resolution of the Ongoing Anglophone Conflict from 2016 to 2021”, *Zien Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol.2 ISSN NO: 2769-996X, pp. 32-43, November 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Barnes, C., “Agents for Change: Civil Society Roles in Preventing Wars & Building Peace”, *The Hague: Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict*, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Nchoji Nkwi and Jean-Pierre Warnier, *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields*, Yaounde: SOPECAM, 1982.

<sup>18</sup> Pippie Hugues, “The Role of NGOs in the Resolution of the Ongoing Anglophone Conflict from 2016 to 2021”, November 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

these IDPs had submitted to the JPC office and the monitoring trips to their individual company locations for evaluation. Over fifty people have received training from JPC in March 2021 on topics related to justice and peace, including tracking, recording, and reporting human rights abuses. They have equally made visits to inmates at the Bamenda Central prison. They have been very vocal in condemning the human rights abuses that have are recurrent in the region since the inception of the Anglophone conflict.<sup>20</sup> It has been covering the situation in the Anglophone areas, where there has been an ongoing increase in violent clashes between separatist gunmen and the military.

### 3. The Influence of Modern Religion in Peace Mechanisms

In Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular, the churches are some major component conflict resolution mechanisms. These, like the government, are modern components of the conflict resolution process, sometimes overshadowing and sometimes functioning in neutrality towards the traditional methods, but only occasionally cooperating.

Church pastors are largely responsible for resolving disputes inside their churches by facilitating dialogue between the parties. In this sense, the pastors serve mainly as mediators, advisors, and unbiased third parties to promote peace or, at the very least, provisional ceasefires. Only in cases where a self-proclaimed church member has committed a moral transgression is “church discipline” used. As an illustration, consider the time a man in the church became so enraged and violently attacked a member of the community, causing the man to suffer physical pain. His public apologies to the church body and temporary removal from his teaching position were the most visible forms of his punishment, while there were other aspects as well.<sup>21</sup>

Churches are frequently utilised as forums for resolving interpersonal disputes. The parties may bring their disagreement to the pastor or another church leader if they think he can act as an impartial third party, relying on his discernment and wisdom to resolve it. In one such case, friends couldn't agree on who should be in charge of a property. In addition to being a well-respected member of the local church who had seen both sides of the dispute, it was brought to the notice of a religious authority, such as reverend fathers, pastors, etc.<sup>22</sup> He was therefore given this intermediary role because of his standing in the community and church.

<sup>20</sup> JPC, “Annual Reports”, for the 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Nathan Michael, “Conflict Resolution Systems in Wuli’ Culture Donga-Mantung Division, Northwest Region”, *Ministry of Scientific Innovation and Research*, SIL Yaounde, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

On behalf of the Catholic Church, the most respected organisation in the nation, the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (CENC) has called for dialogue and an end to the violence surrounding national concerns such as the ongoing Anglophone crisis. It has often urged the administration to try to comprehend Anglophones’ annoyances and their requests for greater autonomy.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the Church has volunteered to mediate, but the government has declined. The Episcopal Conference unsuccessfully requested two times in 2018 to meet with the President of the Republic to resolve the Anglophone situation.<sup>24</sup>

### 4. International Actors in Peace-Building Mechanisms

The foundation for strong international involvement in peacebuilding in Africa and beyond was established by the 1992 United Nations Agenda for Peace. The international community has established several structures and institutions to support peace-building globally as part of its commitment to this goal. The Peace Building Commission (PBC), Peace Building Fund (PBF), and Peace Building Support Office (PBSO) make up the UN peacebuilding architecture. In the process of promoting peace, each of these institutional structures plays a distinct function. All facets of any worldwide community peace-building initiative must be coordinated by the Peace Building Commission. This entails 112rganizing resources for any peace-building assignment and coordinating the actions of other parties. Therefore, the main 112rganizing force behind the extensive attempts to bring about peace in any conflict-ridden nation, such as Cameroon right now, is the Peace Building Commission (PBC). It reports directly to the General Assembly and operates under the Secretary General’s office.<sup>25</sup>

In general, the United Nations is in charge of organising the efforts of regional organisations, NGOs, the private sector, foreign donors, multilateral institutions, and international financial institutions to promote peace. The international community's goals are implemented under the direction of a Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) or a Resident Coordinator. The UN’s coordination is essential to the international community’s achievement of peacebuilding goals. Particularly in managing the peace-building fund and assisting the international community in achieving its peace-building goals, the Peace Building Support Office (PBSO) supports the

<sup>23</sup> Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°138, “Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis: How the Catholic Church Can Promote Dialogue”, 25 April 2018.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Moses Ukiyedeikimie Ugo, “Peace Building in Africa”, *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, Volume 6, Issue 4, 2023, pp. 60-74.

Peace Building Commission (PBC).<sup>26</sup> The Peace Building Fund (PBF) is the United Nations fund set aside to support countries emerging from conflict, and Cameroon is not an exception.

In addition to the contributions of international groups like the Arab League (AL), the European Union (EU), and others, continental and regional organisations are essential to peacebuilding. The African Union (AU) frequently initiates and signs peace agreements between warring parties and deploys peacekeeping forces to successfully start post-conflict peace-building in any African nation. For instance, the Organisation of African Unity, which is now the African Union, was the driving force behind the 2000 Arusha Peace Agreement, which signalled the end of hostilities in Burundi in 2003. It wasn't until there was widespread peace that the UN became involved. The leadership of the continental organisation is typically admired by the larger international community.<sup>27</sup> The AU is also a platform for mobilising international support for peace-building efforts on the continent. The AU therefore plays a crucial role in any peace-building endeavour on the continent.

In the context of Cameroon, cooperation between sub-regional bodies like CEMAC and ECCAS and adjacent nations is essential to fostering peace. Sub-regional economic groups have played crucial roles in promoting peace since the conclusion of the Cold War and the extraordinary increase in conflicts on the continent. The assistance of these institutions has become more and more necessary for continental initiatives. Sub-regional organisations have taken on significant roles because of their proximity to conflict zones and, consequently, their superior comprehension and awareness of the local conditions.

### III- The Tensions and Challenges Posed by Modernism to Traditional Peace Mechanisms

Traditional peace-building techniques have been essential in fostering stability and peace in Cameroon, especially in rural areas where contemporary legal systems are sometimes nonexistent or ineffectual.<sup>28</sup> Modernism's arrival, however, has presented these conventional peace-building techniques with serious conflicts and difficulties. Cameroon's conflict resolution process has changed as a result of modernism's

introduction of new institutions, values, and practices. Western-style modern justice systems have been forced upon traditional civilisations, frequently upsetting long-standing peacekeeping efforts.<sup>29</sup> Some of the key tensions and challenges posed by modernism to traditional peace-building mechanisms in Cameroon include:

**Cultural Disruption:** Modernism has disrupted traditional cultural practices and values, leading to a loss of cultural identity and a sense of disconnection from traditional peace-building mechanisms.<sup>30</sup>

**Institutional Conflict:** Modern justice systems have often been imposed on traditional societies, leading to conflicts between modern and traditional institutions.<sup>31</sup>

**Values and Norms:** Modernism has introduced new values and norms that often conflict with traditional values and norms, leading to tensions and challenges in peace-building.<sup>32</sup>

**Power Dynamics:** Modernism has often empowered new elites and marginalised traditional leaders, leading to changes in power dynamics and challenges to traditional peacebuilding mechanisms.<sup>33</sup>

However, the introduction of modern security forces has marginalised traditional peacekeeping mechanisms, leading to tensions and challenges in peace-building. Several case studies illustrate the tensions and challenges posed by modernism to traditional peace-building mechanisms in Cameroon.

#### 1. Challenges from Western-based Legal Processes in Peace Mechanisms

On contrast to traditional systems' reconciling approach, formal adjudication methods established on the West typically take a "win or lose" rights-based stance. In addition, Western systems frequently use a formal rights-based strategy to resolve legal issues as opposed to traditional systems' interest-based approach. In contrast to the easily accessible, informal, flexible, quick, and affordable traditional systems, Cameroon's Western-style courts are typically only available to those who can afford them and are formal, rule-bound, time-

<sup>26</sup> United Nations, "Peace building: an orientation", *Peace building support office*, 2010, cited by Moses Ukiyedeikimie Ugo, "Peace Building in Africa", 2023.

<sup>27</sup> W.A. Knight, "Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration and post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa: An overview", *African security*, Vol. 1 (1), August, 2008, pp. 24-52.

<sup>28</sup> Tardits, C., *Le Royaume Bamum*, Paris : Éditions de l'Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.

<sup>29</sup> Dilley, R., *Islamic and Caste Knowledge Practices Among Haalpulaar'en in Senegal: Between Mosque and*

*Termite Mound*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Geschiere, P., *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Berman, M., 1982

<sup>32</sup> Comaroff, J., *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

<sup>33</sup> Mamdani, M., *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

consuming, and costly.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to the traditional systems that function at the grassroots level in the many communities in Cameroon, the formal courts are primarily located in urban areas and are inaccessible to many individuals living in rural areas.

Western-style court procedures require strict respect to procedural standards guiding pleadings and evidence, in contrast to the adaptable, configurable approach of traditional systems. Additionally, unlike previous systems where the local language or community vernacular is utilised, hearings are held in the official language of the state (English or French) of record, with translators available if needed. As is done in traditional systems at their most basic level, the formal criminal justice systems likewise have a tendency to concentrate more on punishment and retaliation than on repairing and re-establishing social peace between the parties.<sup>35</sup>

The people of the grassfields or grassland of Cameroon in general and the Tikars, Widikum, Tiv, and Chambas people in particular had a complex system of conflict resolution, which involved the use of mediators, arbitration, and reconciliation rituals. However, the introduction of modern justice systems has disrupted this traditional system, leading to tensions and challenges in peacebuilding mechanisms. In this same line, the Fulbe people of the northern part of Cameroon had a system of peacekeeping, which involved the use of cavalry and infantry forces to maintain order and protect citizens, which weakened as a result of the advent of modern peace mechanisms.

## 2. Constant threat to private media

A restricted legal framework in Cameroon limits the country's media landscape. Reporters covering delicate topics run the risk of being questioned by the authorities, being sued, and being placed in extrajudicial custody. The government has targeted journalists reporting the Far North because of the rise in violence brought on by Boko Haram's terrorist activities.

Although Cameroon's print and broadcast media are thriving, the government has denied numerous radio stations final legal license, putting them in danger of closing down permanently. Bringing defamation charges against journalists without informing them and subjecting them to hefty fines or jail sentences without allowing them to defend themselves in court is another recent practice. A *Radio France Internationale* correspondent has been detained for almost two years under a terrorist law that allows for a military court trial.

During the crackdown on protests in Cameroon's English-speaking regions, where the Internet was cut off for many months starting in January 2017, other journalists were imprisoned.<sup>36</sup>

The 1990 statute on Social Communication affirms the "right to know", even if there is no explicit statute pertaining to information freedom. In actuality, though, the administration does not openly release figures or papers to the media or the general people. In 2015, a number of journalists were detained or subjected to penalties for their work under the laws in place; at least two of them were accused of working with Boko Haram. In July, *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) journalist Ahmed Abba, a Nigerian, was taken into custody in Maroua. He was sent to Yaoundé, where he was detained for several months without being charged or having access to legal representation, allegedly due to suspicion that he had ties to Boko Haram, a group he had written about. He was granted access to his lawyer in October, and his trial opened in November. In late August, freelance journalist Simon Ateba was briefly arrested for allegedly spying for Boko Haram after entering the Minawao refugee camp in the Far North Region without authorisation. About 50,000 Nigerian refugees who escaped Boko Haram are housed in the camp.<sup>37</sup>

The state-owned *Cameroon Tribune*, which has a daily circulation of over 20,000 and publishes stories in both French and English, is the country's sole national newspaper. The cost and inconsistent implementation of government restrictions can make it difficult for smaller newspapers to publish regularly. There are hundreds of other newspapers and journals that are published nationwide, frequently with regional concentrations. Although several of the most widely read daily openly criticise the administration, their distribution outside the cities is poor.

In this last section, we have noticed that the introduction of modernism has posed significant tensions and challenges to traditional peacebuilding mechanisms in Cameroon. Cultural disruption, institutional conflict, values and norms, and power dynamics have all contributed to the challenges faced by traditional peacebuilding mechanisms. In this regard, to promote peace and stability in Cameroon, it is essential to recognise the importance of traditional peacebuilding mechanisms and to support their revitalisation. This can involve providing training and capacity-building programmes for traditional peacebuilders, promoting community participation and ownership, and supporting the

<sup>34</sup> David McQuoid-Mason, "Could Traditional Dispute Resolution Mechanisms", p. 598.

<sup>35</sup> P.M., Sone, "Relevance of Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution in Justice Systems in Africa", p. 110.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.cameroonconcordnews.com/anglophone-problem-francophone-diaspora-accusedcrtv-of-hate-reporting/>, retrieved March 22, 2025.

<sup>37</sup> Steven L. Youngblood, "Center for Global Peace Journalism", *The Peace Journalist magazine*. [www.park.edu/peacecenter](http://www.park.edu/peacecenter), 2017, retrieved March 21, 2025.



development of sustainable and culturally relevant peace-building practices. As such, the government, through its decentralised structures, should keep supporting traditional peacebuilding mechanisms. This is by providing the necessary training and capacity-building programmes for traditional peace-builders and supporting the development of sustainable and culturally relevant peacebuilding practices. Also, there is the need to constantly promote community participation and ownership. To be more clear, the state should encourage community participation and ownership in peace-building initiatives and support the development of community-based peace-building mechanisms. However, the state should equally recognise the importance of traditional values and norms. As such, recognising the importance of traditional values and norms in peace-building and supporting the integration of these values and norms into modern peace-building mechanisms will reduce tensions of all nature.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the impact of modernism on peace-building mechanisms in Africa, but with emphasis in Cameroon, exploring how modernisation processes have shaped the country's peace landscape. The study has analysed the evolution of peace-building mechanisms in Cameroon copied from the pre-colonial period to the present day, highlighting the complex relationships between modernisation, peace, and conflict. The study's findings have shown that modernisation processes have had a profound impact on traditional peace-building mechanisms in Cameroon. While modernisation has introduced new institutions, practices, and values that have promoted peace and stability in many parts of the country, it has also undermined traditional peace-building mechanisms and created new conflicts. The study has also highlighted the challenges and limitations of modern peace-building mechanisms in Cameroon. Despite the introduction of formal systems of justice, police forces, and administrative structures, modern peace-building mechanisms have often failed to address the underlying causes of conflict and have neglected traditional peace-building practices.

To promote sustainable peace in Cameroon, this study recommends a balanced approach that combines the strengths of traditional and modern peace-building mechanisms. This approach should recognise the importance of traditional peace-building mechanisms and support their revitalisation while also promoting the use of modern institutions and practices that can support peace-building efforts. In the same regard, civil society organisations should promote dialogue and collaboration between traditional and modern peace-building mechanisms. Not the least, the international community should provide support for peace-building initiatives in Cameroon that prioritise local ownership and participation. It will be lofty to say that future research should be encouraged in the following spheres:

investigating the impact of modernism on peace-building mechanisms in other African countries, examining the role of traditional peace-building mechanisms in promoting sustainable peace in Cameroon and analysing the challenges and opportunities of integrating modern and traditional peace-building mechanisms in Cameroon.

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