

Original Article

Transitional Justice in Cameroon: A Necessity, An Effort, Many Challenges

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Abstract - This article presents transitional justice first as a great necessity for Cameroon in the face of the violent clashes, the internal quarrels over secularism, the inequitable sharing of administrative posts, the unbalanced regional representation in government and the disproportionate access to higher professional schools. Next, it presents the government's efforts to establish this justice to resolve conflicts, establish lasting peace, combat hatred and disarm, and demobilize and reintegrate ex-combatants. Finally, it highlights the challenges relating to the effective establishment and the application of the principles of this justice. Written data, including books, study reports, scientific articles, decrees, orders and newspaper pages, were used for this purpose. Written using the theory of peace and conflict studies which advocates the prevention, transformation and containment of violence, as well as the theory of conflict transformation, which proposes alternative solutions and a new reality that goes beyond the positions of the actors in the conflict, this article aims to argue that the establishment and implementation of the principles of transitional justice in Cameroon would play an important role in the resolution of violent conflicts and the eradication of internal conflicts before they mature.

Keywords - Violence, Confrontation, Government, Resolution, Challenge, Peace.

1. Introduction

For more than a decade, Cameroon has been plagued by a variety of exactions that have resulted in huge losses in human lives. On the one hand, there are abuses linked to the claim for an independent state by Anglophone separatists in the North West and South West regions of the country (Razafindrakoto Mireille Roubaud François, 2018, p. 6) and on the other hand, violence orchestrated by followers of the Islamist sect Boko Haram in the Far North Region. Their motivations are controversial, revolving around retaliation against the imprisonment of certain political elites in North Cameroon, the expression of an opposition aiming at the regaining of power by the Northerners, precarity, unemployment, or even French contestation of the Cameroonian political regime through the agency of armed movements (Pommerolle Marie-Emmanuelle, 2015). Violent clashes between Kotoko pastoralists and Mousgoum farmers over the management of fisheries and pastoral and agricultural resources on the banks of the Logone add to the conflicts mentioned above and increase the number of human casualties (UNHCR, 2021). In this context, exploring conflict resolution mechanisms that should lead to sustainable peace, such as transitional justice, is paramount to mitigating these conflicts. Transitional justice refers to the process of resolving disputes through norms, practices and rituals established by the communities themselves to restore order and lay the foundations for a lasting peace between the victims and their adversaries (Huysse Luc, Ingelaere Bert et Igreja Victor., 2009, pp. 6, 10). The four pillars of

transitional justice are the establishment of the truth, the penal repression of the crimes committed, the reparation of the damage and the reform of institutions to prevent new crises (JEREP, p. 2). In the light of the definition of the pillars of transitional justice, a question arises as to how this justice can be understood in Cameroon as a need, an action and a challenge to eradicate these exactions? In other words, how does transitional justice constitute an essential means for eradicating violent conflicts in Cameroon? What actions have been taken and need to be implemented nationally? This issue will be investigated following the theories of peace and conflict studies (Gatelier Karine, Claske Dijkema et Mouafo Herrick., 2017, pp. 61-62), which aim to prevent, transform and contain violence, as well as the theory of conflict transformation, which proposes alternative methods and a new reality that goes beyond the positions of the protagonists in conflict (Gatelier Karine, Claske Dijkema et Mouafo Herrick., 2017, p. 64).

Based on a method of critical analysis of information from various written sources, it is first important to elucidate the need for the implementation of transitional justice in Cameroon starting from the foundations of this justice, and then to expose the government's actions that are in line with the pillars of this justice as well as the challenges related to the establishment and the effective application of this justice.

Transitional justice is an alternative way of resolving conflicts between two parties that have experienced violent confrontations with an enormous loss of human lives (Huysse



Luc, Ingelaere Bert and Igreja Victor, 2009). Its objective is to bring the adversaries to bury the hatchets through mechanisms in line with traditional African cultures, which advocate, amongst other things, forgiveness, reparation of the damage that caused the conflict, punishment of the party at fault (Buford Warren and Hugo Van Der Merwe, 2004) but also the establishment of a peaceful framework for the prevention of a recurrence of hostilities. The resurgence of confrontations with remote and immediate origins in Cameroon makes this justice and its methods more than a means or a path to explore but a necessity.

2. Transitional Justice: An Absolute Necessity for the Settling of Conflicts in Cameroon

Presenting transitional justice as an absolute necessity in Cameroon means exposing the contemporary conflicts raging in the country and, more importantly, analyzing the roots of these conflicts to confront them with the solutions proposed by the principles of transitional justice. There are two types of conflicts in Cameroon. These include violent conflicts (OPRA, 2018) and cold conflicts expressed through hate speech (DefyHatenow, 2020). Many authors argue that transitional justice is mainly used after violent confrontations to restore order and peace (Akinolo Olojo and Mariam, 2022). The position of these authors, far from being dismissed, deserves to be updated by new insights, such as this one, which argues that transitional justice can play both a preventive and a remedial role and therefore remains necessary both to resolve violent conflicts and to eradicate cold conflicts before they erupt.

2.1. Transitional Justice as a Solution to Violent Conflicts

To resolve violent conflicts, transitional justice focuses on the immediate and remote causes of the conflicts. Once these causes have been identified, transitional justice provides a mechanism for resolving them by considering the identified causes and the damages caused during the clashes (Buford Warren and Hugo Van Der Merwe, 2004). In Cameroon, three main violent conflicts have persisted in recent years.

The first type of violence is that orchestrated by the Islamist sect Boko Haram, which has been operating in northern Cameroon since 2011 and whose first acts of violence date back to March 2014 (International Crisis Group, Report Africa n°241/Africa November 16 2016). The exactions committed by this sect began in Nigeria in 2003 before spreading to Cameroon following the installation of the followers of the sect in border villages of this country, following their terrifying track down by Nigerian forces of order (Pommerrolle Marie-Emmanuelle, 2015, p. 165). The economic exchange between the neighbouring populations has enabled the followers of this sect to seduce young Cameroonians to the point of enlisting a critical number of them to their cause (L'œil du Sahel, No. 607 of June 5 2014). Far from fighting against the Nigerian population, these

young Cameroonians were instead urged to take up arms against their country and ransack their villages before continuing to the hinterland. The economic and socio-political context was favourable to a multiple analysis of the causes of the enrolment of young Cameroonians into the sect. However, the reasons that emerged from all the analyses enabled us to identify a pile of social problems, the resolution of which requires the implementation of transitional justice in Cameroon. For proponents of the conspiracy theory (Pommerrolle Marie-Emmanuelle, 2015, p. 165), the violence of the Islamist sect is an expression of a conspiratorial revolt between the elites of North Cameroon and an armed group that they are funding to express their discontent with the imprisonment of certain political elites of the North, such as Marafa Hamidou Yaya, former Minister of Territorial Administration, and Iya Mohammed, former President of Fecafoot (Pommerrolle Marie-Emmanuelle, 2015, p. 170). For others, the plot of the Elites of Northern Cameroon is aimed at contesting the low representation of the elites of the North in the government and the occupation of ministerial and administrative posts of low status (L'œil du Sahel, n°537 of June 24, 2013, or n°589 of March 31 2014) in contrast to those of high status reserved for the elites of the southern part of the country.

However, some newspapers and media attribute the origin of the violence to interference by France (La météo, February 23 2023) and other powerful foreign countries (Mutations, September 2 2014) in the political life of Cameroon to overthrow the current government. It is in this sense that it has been observed that (Pommerrolle Marie-Emmanuelle, 2015, p. 169):

Numerous clues point to France as the main instigator of this violence: the weapons recovered from the conflict (Israeli weapons, a tank branded "2DB" 22) could have originated from French forces; the unannounced landing in Kano of a Russian plane carrying French helicopters confirms this involvement; in December 2013, the arrests of French battalions on their way to the Central African Republic (stops near Yaoundé, in Ngaoundéré), which were supposedly unplanned, were, in fact, a way of positioning troops.

On the other hand, analyses based on the facts on the ground attribute the adherence of Cameroonian youths to the Boko Haram sect to the socio-economic context of the area marked by poverty, lack of jobs, unemployment, low salaries for hard, arduous and risky physical work (JSPS New n°3, November 2020 p. 12). The proposals made by the Boko Haram followers to the youths to lift them out of poverty have been welcomed by some who feel they are earning more (TDG world Nigeria, April 4 2014). However, alongside youths who joined the armed group for the stated socio-economic reasons, others were forced into the group due to their abduction (Oumar Abami, 2020, p. 8). These are naïve young people who, through carelessness, have been

technically drained by deception due to cold seductions or violent arrests. After a series of crimes that resulted in hundreds of deaths of more than 150 soldiers and 1,670 civilians between 2013 and 2017 alone (Ntuda Ebode Joseph Vincent et al. s, 2017, p. 9), many of the ex-combatants in this sect decided to surrender because of the containment of their action by the national army, the death of some of their gang leaders such as its founder Mohamed Yusuf (Oumar Abami, 2020, p. 3), the arrest of some followers and the meticulous control of their sources of supply.

The second source of violence is that perpetrated by armed separatist groups in the North-West and South-West regions known as Ambazonians (Eboko F, and Awondo, p. 16). It is a violence that was initially cold insofar as it was linked to peaceful claims (OFPRA 2018, p. 9) for a form of state in which Francophones and Anglophones could live together with strict respect for the cultural legacy of the former European powers of France and England (Okereke and Nna-Emeka 2018, 9-12).

The outright rejection of some of these demands by the overwhelming majority of French-speaking parliamentarians and policy-makers led to the eruption of an arduous rebellion by Anglophone secessionists. These Anglophones raised the stakes of their demands, which ranged from an improved return to the federal state with an Anglophone federal state to an independent Anglophone state as stated in these words: "Let us not miss the train of independence this time. We need what we demanded; we don't want any other option again" (The Guardian Post, February 1 2017, 3). The secessionists opted for arms to destroy human lives and state infrastructures to get government decision-makers to support this project.

The remote source of the violence is the deception they claim to have suffered in the process of negotiating the various state status reforms in 1961, 1972 and 1984 (Keutcheu Joseph, 2021, p. 7), representing respectively the establishment of a federal state (already unwelcome by the Anglophones), a unitary state (United Republic of Cameroon) aggravating the discontent of these Anglophones and a united and indivisible state (Republic of Cameroon) carrying a possible dissent at the opportune moment. This dupe which carries economic, political and socio-cultural stakes, resulted in an analysis that irritated Anglophones. On the economic level, it reflects the desire to exploit the economic resources of the Anglophone regions for the development of the Francophone part of the country (Tchinda Kenfo Joseph, 2017, p. 3). Politically, it expresses the strategy of favouring the occupation of strategic positions in the government of the united republic by the francophone majority and removing all powers from the anglophone leaders in the federal state they govern (Tchinda Kenfo Joseph, 2017, p. 4). Sociolinguistically, it is interpreted as a technique for the permanent wiping out of the educational, legal and linguistic systems of Anglophones. Strategic

positions such as those of president of the republic, president of the senate, president of the National Assembly and some high-profile ministerial positions held by Francophones allow Anglophones to justify their marginalization in the government apparatus (Tchinda Kenfo Joseph, 2017, p. 6). Although the majority of this Francophone representation is explained by the higher proportion of Francophone regions and populations (eight out of ten Regions) than Anglophones (two out of ten), some elites in the South West and North West Regions do not intend to accept this dominance, which they believe deserves to be bitterly contested.

The direct cause of the exactions by the Anglophone secessionists is firstly inherent to the demands of Anglophone lawyers expressed through a strike coupled with marches in the streets of the city of Bamenda on October 11 2016, and secondly, to the joint strike by magistrates and teachers to protest the alleged trend of 'francophonisation' of the Anglophone educational and legal systems, in November of the same year (Keutcheu Joseph, 2021, p.4). Finally, taking advantage of this strike aimed at resolving the specific situational problems, the Anglophones reawakened the grudges of the well-known deception, which led to the establishment of a unitary state banning all powers of the Anglophones in their federated states. From then on, an armed group called "Amba boys" settled in the two Anglophone regions of the country to impose, this time, not the return to the federalism that prevailed before 1972 but rather the recognition of an independent state called "Ambazonia", whose citizens were to be Ambazonians as intended by the Portuguese before the First World War. The exactions of this armed group consisted of the destruction of public infrastructures, the dismantling of the residences of governmental elites, the ransacking of public and private material goods, and especially the suppression of human lives through torture and the use of knives or firearms. The economic consequences of these exactions have caused priceless losses for the state insofar as it is called upon not only to invest in caring for the victims and repairing damaged infrastructure but also to bolster national defense in the face of the determination of this armed movement to sow terror until it has won its case. A careful reading of the intertwining of facts and deeds in line with the analysis of the individual equations of the Francophone and Anglophone political actors enables transitional justice to resolve the crux of the problem and to prevent any possibility of a return to conflict, provided that the opposing parties agree to accept the impartiality of such justice.

The third type of violence comes from hostilities between the Soa Arabs and their adversaries, the Kotoko and Mousgoum. It is worth recalling that the Kotoko were originally a mixture of the Sao and Mousgoum. In the name of this interbreeding, Mousgoum and Kotoko support each other to face the Soa Arabs in the event of a confrontation. The causes of the clashes between these two groups (Soa

Arabs versus Kotoko-Mousgoum) are numerous and can be divided into remote causes, close causes and immediate causes.

The remote causes date back to the 1800s. The Kotoko, descendants of the Sao (animist people, developers of the pyramid culture in the Logone and Chari), were the first to settle on the banks of the Logone and Chari rivers (Lange, 1989) since 500 B.C. They occupied fertile, flat, accessible land that was not only suitable for their habitation but also for their economic activities, which were agriculture and fishing. Considered natives because of the anteriority of their ancestors (the Sao), the Kotoko collected from the Muslim Soa Arabs, the main pastoralist people who arrived in their territory in the 18th century, taxes on water points, river crossings, and taxes on livestock and trade (Socpa Antoine, 2002). This suzerainty of the Kotoko over the Arabs had to be reversed following the project of creating an Arab empire initiated by the warrior Rabah in 1893. Unfortunately, the hope for a better future offered to the Arabs through this project, following 7 years of success, was doomed to failure, on the one hand, thanks to the interception of Rabah's attacks by colonial forces and on the other hand, because of the death of the warrior in 1990 (Socpa Antoine, 2002). Since then, these Arabs had remained under Kotoko's domination and were, like all non-natives, considered invaders who should not have access to the voices and chapters of a possible emergence. The arid, infertile, rugged, landlocked, swampy land, but also the land surrounded by the Kokoto villages, is the only land reserved for them (Socpa Antoine, 2002). The clash between the actions undertaken by these Arabs to get out of this situation and those aimed at keeping them there permanently by the Kotoko constitutes the long-term causes, or rather the historical root of the violence.

In the medium term, the causes of exactions are attributable to, among other things, the contestation of the holding of political power at the head of the Sultanate by the Kotoko alone (Hagenbucher, 1973), the illiteracy among the Soa Arabs assigned to the Kotoko. The change in the majority representation in the government, which favours the Soa Arabs in the Era of Renouveau as opposed to the Kotoko in the Era of President Amadou Ahidjo, and the desire of the Arabs to gain political power at the head of the Sultanate, for having been at the origin of the alleged Islamization of the Kotoko, who were formerly animists (Socpa Antoine, 2002). The causes of confrontation in the medium term between these two ethnic groups living in the same area are political, social and cultural. Due to these long- and medium-term causes, violence has occurred between these two ethnic groups. Among other violence, one can list the clashes of Dollé in 1979, Mbeungen in 1998, Goulfé and Maltam in 1990 and Kousseri in January 1992, December 1993 and March 1993 (Socpa Antoine, 2002). This violence resulted in the loss of many human lives. The 1979 Dollé conflict alone, which resulted in 200 deaths simply because of the

repression of the Arabs' demand for a school of their own, is a sufficient illustration (Socpa Antoine, 2002).

In the short-term, fighting between Mousgoum farmers and Soa Arab farmers in 2019 and 2021 was caused by disagreements over the management of fisheries, pastoral and agricultural resources in Missiska, Logone Birni district, Far North region of Cameroon (UNHCR, press release 2021, August 19 2021). Between August 10 and 20, 2021, the violent clashes resulted in 32 deaths, 74 injuries, 19 villages burned, 11,000 displaced to Chad, and 7,300 inside Cameroon (UNHCR press release 2021, August 19, 2021). Roughly speaking, there are three types of violent clashes in Cameroon. These include exactions orchestrated by the Islamist sect Boko Haram, exactions perpetrated by Ambazonians in the South-West and North-West Regions, and inter-ethnic violence opposing the Mousgoum and Kotoko allies to the Soa Arabs on the banks of the logone and Chari rivers. Establishing transitional justice is crucial to resolving the problems that led to the violence and those related to the consequences of the clashes. The root causes and consequences of violence can be solved by implementing the four pillars of transitional justice.

The first pillar is establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The purpose of this pillar is to address human rights violations that occurred during the conflict and to resolve any clashes that may arise during the conflict period (American Friends Service Committee, 2011). The mission assigned to the TRC is to conduct investigations that will lead to a true understanding of the causes and consequences of the violations through thorough, wide-ranging, and unbiased investigations. For more credibility, these investigations should be conducted by civil society organizations with the victims and their witnesses. The results of the investigations must be documented and archived, and recommendations must be made to participate in the reconstruction of socio-economic stability. In Cameroon, establishing a truth commission will make it possible to identify the real causes of the exactions, to locate the sponsors of the terrorist acts, to know the real causes of youth adhesion to different terrorist movements, but also and above all, to evaluate the losses and the human, material and infrastructural damages. The uncertain indictments of certain political elites in the regions affected by the abuses and the complicity of Western countries, which up until now were based on hypotheses that are likely to be convincing, can be confirmed or informed thanks to the enquiries by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to implement the penal prosecution that is so dear to transitional justice.

The second pillar is the criminal prosecution of the perpetrators and accomplices in genocidal abuses to improve peace and security for people and property. Implementing this pillar in Cameroon is very important in a context where certain political elites are suspected of being the main sponsors of terrorist and secessionist groups, as are certain

Western countries that are friends with Cameroon (Pommerolle Marie-Emmanuelle, 2015). Identifying and prosecuting these sponsors can lead to the suppression of terrorist forces on the ground. When fighters are deprived of logistical, financial and food assistance due to the sentencing of their suppliers, their gridlock is announced, and the return of peace is imposed. If the perpetrators and accomplices of the violations are external to a country, the criminal prosecution is done at the level of the International Criminal Court (JEREP, p. 2). Suppose the perpetrators and accomplices are inside the country. In that case, the prosecution can occur either at the level of internationally recognized courts or national courts specialized in crimes resulting from violence. However, for crimes of tolerable gravity, the perpetrators must be sentenced according to the traditional methods of conflict management. These modes often involve evoking evil sanctions under African or monotheistic religions during an oath of non-repetition.

The third pillar, reparation of damages, comes into play when the truth is identified. This pillar obliges the state, humanitarian organizations or criminals to restore the affected populations' social, economic or structural situation and, thus, ease the tensions linked to any further revenge (Mottet Carol, Pout Christian, 2011, p. 21-22). This reparation consists of the release of illegally detained persons, the return of property lost during the abuses to its owners, the monetary compensation of victims under the magnitude of the harm committed, the provision of medical, psychological or legal services, also the presentation of public apologies, the creation of monuments, public sites and days of commemoration in honor of the victims (JEREP, p. 2). The total burial of the hatchets in the Southwest, Northwest, and Far North regions requires reparation for the damage associated with the destruction of homes, the ransacking of plantations, the raiding of livestock, and the loss of human lives, leaving some orphans with no hope for the future (a record of losses if possible). In addition, this reparation can constitute a guarantee of acceptance of ex-combatants into their community of origin, provided that they observe traditional mechanisms for the social reintegration of criminals that advocate forgiveness and the oath of non-repetition as a guarantee for trust.

The fourth pillar is institutional reform of the state (JEREP, p. 2). This pillar calls for a structural, institutional and regulatory revision of the state form to introduce solutions to the problems that cause conflict and measures to address the consequences of violence. Implementing this pillar in Cameroon can lead to the revision of the form of the state from a unitary to a federal state. The return to this form of state can stop the seeds of hatred that have been planted in the minds of young anglophones since the unification of the federated states in 1972, and the fruits of which are the taking up of arms to violently claim this option that was theirs as decided during the condominium. Creating state

conciliation bodies and institutions to resolve conflicts between opposing parties is one of the functions of this pillar (JEREP, p. 2). As for the holding of strategic positions within the government by Francophones in general and Francophones from the southern part of the country (L'œil du Sahel No. 537, June 24, 2013, and No. 589, March 31, 2014), a mechanism for resolving related disputes through transitional justice may include the revision of regulatory provisions. This revision must focus on the introduction of impartial provisions that promote balance and alternation in the various strategic positions of the government (JEREP, p. 2), which, until now, remain the preserve of a category of nationals of the Central, Southern and Littoral regions (L'œil du Sahel No. 537, June 24, 2013, and No. 589 of March 31, 2014). The weapons taken by the followers of the Islamist sect of Boko Haram and the Ambazonians to challenge this dupe can be buried after the formulation and implementation of these regulations without compunction.

Similarly, the institutional reform advocated by transitional justice can provide solutions to the lack of employment, lack of training infrastructure, and under-education, which according to some analyses, are at the origin of the taking up of arms to perpetrate violence (JSPS New No. 3, November 2020 p. 12). The creation by the government of training or wealth production infrastructures in marginalized areas can, at least, curb the desire of young people to receive payment for murderous violence. While it has been demonstrated that the four pillars of transitional justice can provide adequate solutions to the extremist violence orchestrated in recent years in some parts of Cameroon, the fact remains that these pillars play an important role in controlling the cold confrontations between people of different religions in Northern Cameroon.

2.2. Transitional Justice as a Solution to Cold Confrontations

Cold conflicts refer to conflicts based on hatred between people of different religions, regions or social classes living in the same territory or administrative unit. These confrontations are expressed through hate speech in the media and on social networks, through the conquest, preservation and perpetuation of privileges for members of one's group, and through behaviour that irritates one's opponent without expressing physical violence against him.

In Northern Cameroon, several cold conflicts are part of the daily life of two groups of people who differ in their religion. These include, on the one hand, the group of followers of the Islamic religion and, on the other, the group of followers of the Christian religion and those of traditional African religions. In fact, since 1804, when the so-called holy war (jihad) was launched with the aim of Islamising the so-called pagan or Kirdi populations, Muslims in general, and Muslim Fulani in particular, had always behaved in such a way as to express their hegemony over the other populations of Northern Cameroon. On the social level, this

hegemony is expressed by exploiting non-Muslims for agricultural and domestic work in exchange for trivial payments relative to the effort made. On the administrative level, it is expressed by holding the most valuable administrative and municipal posts, for the most part, by Muslims alone. To express this hegemony most irritatingly, the Muslims in some Northern Cameroon towns proceed to block public roads, which they reduce to prayer places every Friday, leaving their mosques built for this purpose (observation of facts in the town of Maroua on Fridays). These behaviours express cold aggression that can lead to opponents' rebellion and lead violent confrontations because of the violation of the principles of living together in a cosmopolitan city. To avoid this, it is necessary to implement the principles of transitional justice as a preventive measure in those cities where conflictogenic secularism is prey to clashes in the light of recent events in the city of Ngaoundéré.

Indeed, in a recording of 2nd September and an official communiqué of September 9 2021, all of which were broadcast on social networks (Denwo Jean François, 2017), Sheikh Mamoud Ali, Imam of the Great Mosque of Ngaoundéré, who is also president of the regional branch of the Cameroonian Association for Inter-religious Dialogue (ACADIR), made provocative remarks about Christians (Ngono Atangana Vanessa, 2021). These remarks consist of the Muslim faithful's call to boycott Mazenod College (a Catholic denominational institution established in the town in 1954) because of the wearing of a cross on the students' uniforms. For the Imam, wearing this cross is a subtle method of evangelization skilfully orchestrated' against Muslim pupils. To avoid being fooled, he advised the Muslim believers to strictly prohibit their children from wearing these crests bearing the cross or, failing that, to remove them from the school (Channon Denwo Jean François, 2021). These provocative remarks, associated with other facts that had remained at half-mast until then, provoked an immediate reaction from the Christians through several actions that fuelled the cold conflicts in the city of Ngaoundéré through games of actions and reactions.

Reacting to the Imam's provocation, the Christian leaders of the town of Ngaoundéré approached the administrative authorities of the town to seek mediation to rectify the remarks before they led to a confrontation between the two religious groups. Fearing the magnitude of the situation, a crowd of Muslims flooded the services of the prefect on the day the Imam was summoned to explain himself. Through their massive presence, these Muslim believers intended to bring their support to their religious leader to challenge any decision that would lead to the repression of the Imam (Ngono Atangana Vanessa, 2021). Could this influential presence of Muslim followers have biased the decisions to be taken against the Imam about the fiery remarks made? If no sanction against the Imam was

pronounced following his summons to the prefecture on September 9 2021, and following the mediating intervention of the Minister of Territorial Administration from 12 to September 14 of the same year, it remains clear that the Minister of Territorial Administration instructed that 'the wearing of the badge is not compulsory for Muslim students' (Channon Denwo Jean François, 2021). Justification for this instruction by the assertion that 'tolerance and living together must be an essential value for the Cameroonians of Ngaoundéré' is not well received by the Christians insofar as this same tolerance is also valid for these Muslims. Otherwise, one would think that 'living together' imposes tolerance on one group and intolerance on the other. This instruction, which proclaims the victory of Muslims over Christians, has resurrected resentments linked to their oppression by Muslims.

In fact, at a time when Muslims were pleased with the decision of the Minister of Territorial Administration, they were surprised by the outburst of some Christian elites who, through letters, counter-attacked the Imam's words, overruled the Minister's decisions, boycotted the ACADIR and announced a particularly tumultuous future between Muslims and Christians in Northern Cameroon in general and in the town of Ngaoundéré in particular. It is in this sense that on Thursday, November 4, 2021, Maigari Alix Elogo, Regional Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon in the Central Synod Region of Ngaoundéré, updated the cold confrontations between Muslims and Christians based not only on the case of the crest but also on the daily facts by which Muslims tend to impose their hegemony in Northern Cameroon. Dissatisfied with the more or less partisan decision of the Minister of Territorial Administration, the bishop, in his open letter addressed to the administrative and religious authorities, declares (Cameroon Magazine, November 2021 publication):

Following the letter written by the Imam of the Grand Mosque of Ngaoundéré on September 9 2021, in which he criticized the wearing of insignia in the form of a cross on the uniform of the Mazenod College of Ngaoundéré. Considering the pressure with fundamentalist connotations that the Protestant College of Ngaoundéré has previously undergone in relation to the image of the cross on the top ..., Considering the numerous Islamist and Islamizing practices now widely practiced in the city of Ngaoundéré, which are contrary to the principle of secularism of the State of Cameroon ... I hereby inform you of my decision concerning the withdrawal of all the pastors of my jurisdiction from ACADIR.

This disturbing move is the expression of the first revenge against the attacks of Muslims in Northern Cameroon. How can we explain that a bishop who is not directly involved in the affair of "wearing the crest at Mazenod College" reacts in the place of those directly

affected? On the one hand, it is because sabotage of the kind was committed against the Protestant College of Ngaoundéré, an establishment placed under the supervision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon (Cameroon magazine, publication of November 10, 2021) and on the other hand, it is to avoid that by jurisprudence, this decision is applied to all the private Christian colleges of the three Northern Cameroon regions. The withdrawal of the pastors from ACADIR, which was to take effect on November 15 2021, discredits confidence in ACADIR and announces the determination of the Christian members of the EELC to fight relentlessly and with the utmost energy the invasion of Christians by Muslims.

In his second speech on November 22 2021, Bishop Maigari Alix Elogo indicated, among other things, that tolerance is only expected from Christians and not from Muslims with whom they live in the same spaces. However, signs advertising Christian and Islamic religions are observed on several outfits, all of which impartially require tolerance or intolerance. Thus, he believes that if, in the name of tolerance, a minister can make it optional for Muslim students enrolled in Christian schools to wear badges bearing the cross, he can still demand the removal of Islamic insignia from the uniforms of civil administrators. With this in mind, he addressed a request to MINAT in which he said (Nonos Frédéric, 2021):

Unless you have a better appreciation and if there is not a subtle plan to create an Islamic state, I hereby respectfully request that the crescent moon on the kepi of Cameroonian civil administrators (governors, prefects and sub-prefects) be removed.

For this bishop, the lunar crescent appearing on the kepi of these representatives of the Head of State promotes Islam to the detriment of other religions and therefore constitutes a danger to the secularism of the country or a basis for a possible religious war (Nonos Frédéric, 2021). And, if in the name of tolerance, Christians have never mentioned this fact, the time of intolerance must favour Muslims as well as Christians, on the one hand, by making the wearing of badges bearing the cross optional and, on the other hand, by completely removing the mark of the lunar crescent indicating the preponderance of Islam. The dissemination on social networks of the attack and the respective counter-attacks of the Imam and the pastor in the town of Ngaoundéré made the cold confrontations more effervescent. While the Muslims intended to extend the decision making it optional for their sons enrolled in private Christian colleges to wear the cross emblem throughout Northern Cameroon, the Christians are developing rigorous strategies to challenge anything that would contribute to the increase of Islamic domination. It is fair to say that the declaration of the Imam of the Ngaoundéré mosque has sounded the alarm about the reawakening of resentments that threaten to make inter-religious conflicts, which until now were cold and hot.

Should urgent preventive measures be sought when ACADIR is becoming fragile?

Transitional justice is a solution to cold inter-religious conflicts in Northern Cameroon. Its ability to resolve hot conflicts can also be applied to cold conflicts. It is because 'what can do the most can also do the least. The reform of institutions advocated by transitional justice can work to put structures in place to prevent inter-religious conflicts like ACADIR and many others (JSPS New No. 3, November 2020, p. 12). Truth and reconciliation commissions can denounce the facts of each attack, blame the perpetrators and call on the protagonists to reconcile before the attacks and counter-attacks lead to violent extremism. The implementation of criminal prosecution of the propagators of hate speech, the initiators of inter-religious clashes and their accomplices can contribute to the maintenance of peace and security among the followers of different religions living in the Northern Cameroon regions (JEREP, p. 2).

Similarly, the reparation of hateful words by their authors through the recognition of the facts, the request for forgiveness, and the taking of oaths of non-recidivism as recommended by transitional justice can consolidate the living together in a secular space where no religion can be harmed (Mottet Carol, Pout Christian, 2011, p. 21-22). All these privileges show that transitional justice is valid for both hot and cold conflicts. Several actions and efforts made by the Cameroonian government in the context of the exactions are worth recalling because of the opportunities they can offer for establishing transitional justice.

3. Efforts and Challenges for the Establishment of Transitional Justice

Several efforts are worth exploiting to establish transitional justice by the Cameroonian government. These efforts are in line with some of the pillars of transitional justice, such as the search for the truth, the reform of state institutions, the reparation of damages related to the abuses, the criminal prosecution of criminals and the social reintegration of ex-combatants, require several challenges that need to be addressed.

3.1. Efforts and Challenges Relating to the Search for the Truth about the Abuses

The search for the truth about the origins and consequences of the abuses has been the subject of several efforts by the Cameroonian government. Due to the unavailability of an officially mandated truth commission to investigate the clashes, the search for the truth has been carried out through dialogue on the one hand and the use of reports produced by civil society on the other. Among the dialogues aimed at finding the truth about the origins and impacts of the exactions, we note the one held between the Prime Minister and the traditional chiefs of the North-West and South-West regions and the one called the Great National Dialogue. During the dialogue held on August 3

2018, between the Minister of Territorial Administration and the traditional chiefs of the Anglophone regions, the truth about the facts was expressed by the Minister as follows (Alexis Hugué, 2018, Radio France Interne):

The terrorists have crossed the threshold of tolerance. They have kidnapped traditional leaders. They raped more than 1,450 young girls aged between 11 and 14. They killed American law enforcement and security forces who were there to protect the people. They destroyed public and private property. They prevented children from going to school. I believe that no one can accept this.

For its part, the Grand Dialogue National brought together more than 600 personalities, including political party leaders, government authorities, intellectual elites, economic operators and some ex-combatants. Its objective is to find the root causes of the exactions and to find efficient and effective solutions to the problems of the conflict (Rousseau Joel, Cameroon tribune, publication du September 30 2020):

Bilingualism, cultural diversity and social cohesion; the education system; the judicial system; the return of refugees and internally displaced persons; the reconstruction and development of regions affected by the conflict; the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants; the role of the diaspora in the crisis and its participation in the development of the country; decentralization and local development.

At the end of this dialogue, several truths were revealed by the representatives of the populations affected by the extremist violence concerning the deep-rooted origins of the violence and its socio-economic impacts. These truths were used by the various commissions set up during the event to seek solutions to the problems posed. The truths identified in the various dialogues are compared with those resulting from the investigations carried out by civil society. The latter carry out daily investigations into the evolution of abuses on the ground and produce periodic reports that they submit to the government's and the population's attention. However, there is a real problem with the credibility of the information produced by civil society and the media because some of them are, according to experts' analysis, won over to the perpetrators' cause.

To this end, the major challenge is the creation of a national truth commission on the various waves of abuse that are taking place in Cameroon. This commission should be placed under the control of the state with members made up not only of civil society leaders but also, above all, of the government authorities. This mix of members would make the truth about the investigations into the ins and outs of the violence more credible.

3.2. Institutional Reform Efforts and Challenges

Several institutional reforms of the state have been made to address some of the problems that have led to the abuses in the Anglophone regions. First and foremost, the demand for an independent state by Anglophones in the South-West and North-West regions has resulted in an independent status for these two regions (Ngando Sandjè Rodrigue, 2020). This status is characterized, among other things, by a legal regime that conforms to the "common law" system, a special education system modelled on the Anglophone sub-system, and a regional assembly made up of a chamber of representatives and a chamber of traditional chiefs (Andzongo Sylvain, 2019). Secondly, the question of equality between the English and French languages, which Anglophones raised, led to the creation of a structure called the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (CNPBM) (Decree N°2017/013 of January 23 2017). The mission of this commission is 'to maintain peace, consolidate the national unity of the country and strengthen the will and daily practice of living together of its populations' (Decree N°2017/013 of January 23 2017). Finally, a Common Law section was established at the National School of Administration and Magistracy as a response to the demands expressed by English speakers. These actions, which are in line with the principles of transitional justice, are commendable efforts by the government to resolve conflicts and establish peace.

However, several challenges must be addressed to reform the republican institutions properly. The first is establishing a permanent body responsible for studying institutional reforms to resolve resurgent conflicts sustainably. The second is to give this body full decision-making autonomy to propose reforms that solve problems even if they do not correspond to the expectations of the governmental philosophy. Finally, the last challenge is establishing a regulatory framework that allows the body to act under the legal text governing its action.

3.3. Efforts and Challenges Relating to the Reparation of Damages, Criminal Prosecution and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants

The Cameroonian government has tried to repair some of the damage caused by the violence. Several affected families have received food, sleeping materials such as mattresses, sheets, mosquito nets and temporary housing from the government. Members of the government distributed these materials to compensate for certain material and infrastructural losses suffered by the affected populations. Even in vain, the perpetrators of the most dreadful violence and their accomplices have never escaped legal proceedings. They are brought before the competent courts to answer for their criminal acts as soon as they are arrested. In 2017, for example, 84 ex-Boko Haram fighters were detained in Mora (Saibou Issa and Machikou, 2019, p. 5). Concerning the combatants who decided to surrender, the

president of the republic reached out to them by promulgating on November 30 2018, a decree creating a National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (CNDDR) of Ex-combatants. For combatants who decided to surrender, the president of the republic reached out to them by promulgating on November 30 2018, a decree creating a National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (CNDDR) of Ex-combatants. With regional offices in Bamenda, Buea and Mora, this committee is responsible for (Decree No. 2018/719 of November 30):

Receiving and disarming ex-combatants of Boko Haram and armed groups in the North-West and South-West Regions, ... taking all appropriate measures for the elimination of these arms, ammunition and explosives, in cooperation with the competent administrations, ... providing multidimensional assistance to ex-combatants within the framework of their preparation for a return to civil life; ... to carry out awareness-raising activities and provide multidimensional assistance to communities of origin in order to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants; to help reintegrate ex-combatants into civil life, in particular by organizing, training, providing tools or means of production and assisting in the creation of income-generating activities.

Thanks to this decree, some ex-Boko Haram fighters could reintegrate into their communities following the oath of non-recidivism that they swore on the Koran before an audience (Saibou Issa and Machikou N., 2019). These actions, which are in line with the principles of transitional justice, cannot be called transitional justice. They constitute efforts by the government towards the establishment of such justice. Several challenges remain to be met to speak of such justice in Cameroon truly. These challenges can be summarised as the establishment of a regulatory framework, the creation of committees of specialized bodies for the implementation of this justice, but also and above all, the improvement of the trust to be placed in ex-combatants who wish to reintegrate into their community of origin, notably through the valuation of oaths that are not only of the Islamic

religion but also and above all those that are in keeping with traditional African religions.

4. Conclusion

A question was raised about how transitional justice is simultaneously a necessity, an effort and a challenge for Cameroon. It was shown that transitional justice is necessary because of its role in the disarmament and peaceful reintegration of former secessionist fighters in the Anglophone regions and former Boko Haram terrorists in Northern Cameroon. It is necessary because of its capacity to facilitate the reconciliation of populations in violent conflicts such as the Mousgoum and Kotoko. Also, it would resolve the internal wars that weaken the living together in a secular framework in North Cameroon, the tribal and regional confrontations animated by letter or verbally by the press and social networks on the subject of the regional balance relating to representation in the government and access to the major schools. Commendable actions taken by the government to counter the problems mentioned are worthy efforts to achieve this justice. These include the promulgation of a decree creating the National Centre for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (CNDDR), the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (CNPBM), decrees sanctioning the propagators of hate speech and the unconditional acceptance of criminals who decide to lay down their arms. All are in line with the principle of institutional reform in transitional justice. However, the effective implementation of this traditional justice requires several challenges, including the establishment of a regulatory and institutional framework, the sensitization of the population on the principles of the functioning of this justice, but also and, above all, taking into account cultural rituals specific to the endogenous populations as regards the oath of non-recidivism taken as a prelude to the reintegration of criminals into their community. Would the government welcome the establishment of this justice system after having adopted the establishment of other structures playing a similar function, although not fulfilling all the characteristics of this justice system?

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