

Colonial Policy of Power Devolution in Southern Cameroons and Ambivalence of British Intentions

Protus Mbeum Tem
Bamenda University of Science and Technology

Abstract

This article examines the efforts made by the British colonial authorities in the devolution of power to indigenes in British Southern Cameroons. With the ousting of the Germans in 1916 and establishment of British rule, the Indirect Rule System was introduced and Native Authorities were created all over the territory and empowered to manage local affairs. After the Second World War, these units were granted more autonomy and authority in the administration of their areas of jurisdiction. They collected taxes, administer justice and provided local services to their people. Though attempts were made at devolving power, the British intentions were ambiguous as the process had some socio-economic undertones. However vague their intentions were, they initiated the indigenes into the skills of modern governance.

Introduction

The move towards decentralisation in general and devolution of power is now a worldwide phenomenon and has preoccupied many governments and peoples of the world especially in Africa since independence (Ndegwa and Levy 2003). The genesis of this process dates back to the colonial period as Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone colonies all experienced some amount or kind of devolution (Gellar 1995; Therkildsen 1993). For instance, the British termed their policy Indirect Rule (IR). These colonial policies made it possible for the creation of agencies or local institutions which were used in administering local communities and also for conveying and implementing government policies (Mamdani 1996; NAB (National Archives Buea), Jb/a (1960)3, No. LGP. 639, 2). This was necessary in the facilitation of the administration of colonial possessions especially in Africa. This explains why the British would not be indifferent and devised the IR policy which became the guiding principle in the day to day administration of their colonial territories in general and Africa in particular.¹

This strategy of governance was introduced into Northern Nigeria in 1900 and subsequently also used in the administration of Southern Cameroons when the Germans were ousted from the territory in 1916. With these developments, Native authorities (NAs) were instituted and chiefs and elders who became the local authorities and colonial administrators were granted some authority over their people and the British colonial authorities ruled through them. Hence, African chiefs and elders thus collected taxes, administered justice and were concerned with the running of the government of their localities. However, independent action and initiation was nil as they relied mostly on the British authorities for the accomplishment of their tasks. With the end of the Second World War and the surge in nationalism around the world, the British were forced to reform the system and in 1949, bigger and more viable authorities were put in place. This saw the merger of NAs into federations or Councils and these new institutions were granted fiscal and political autonomy and the right to initiate development programs for their areas of jurisdiction.

However, action was limited to the control and steering of the colonial authorities who could ban, reject and enforce changes to any move or initiative that was not in consonance with their colonial ambitions. It is worth mentioning that the German annexation of Cameroon in 1884 laid the foundations for the use of local authorities in the colonial administration and attempts were made in the using local leaders for the day to day running of the territory. German Kamerun was divided into administrative units and chiefs were used in the administration of justice, the provision of labour and porters and as tax collectors. This implies that their authority was not completely disregarded but they became auxiliaries of the German administration. With the outbreak of World War I and the eviction of Germans in Cameroon and the division of the territory between the British and the French; the British exported the IR system from Nigeria to Southern Cameroons and this completely wiped out or adjusted the German colonial policies and the organisation of the Kamerun. This policy remained in force until 1961 when the Southern Cameroons reunified with French Cameroon to form the Cameroon Federation.²

Such institutions bequeathed to Southern Cameroonians by the British were not scrapped but carried over to the colonial period. Besides, laws governing the local institutions in the colonial period remained in force until 1974 when the government of Cameroon reorganised them. The importation of these colonial institutions and laws governing them into the post-colonial period with little or insignificant modifications remains a worry as

¹ British territories in Africa included Ghana, Nigeria, Tanganyika, Rhodesia, Kenya, The Gambia and Southern Cameroons among others.

² Southern Cameroon became the State of West Cameroon and former French Cameroon, East Cameroon and each territory maintained the administrative organisations inherited from their colonial masters.

politicians that ushered Southern Cameroons to independence had to use the same institutions and laws (which they castigated) in the early years of independence (1961 – 1974). One would have expected them to institute reforms immediately after independence as many of them chastised the British for using these institutions in stifling development but this was not so. It is because of this incongruity that the paper revisits the British endeavours at devolving power to local authorities with focus on their intentions and realities on the ground. This is to scrutinize whether their intentions were genuine or not in also ascertain the uniqueness of British efforts that prompted continuity in the post-colonial period. In order to successfully carry out these analyses, it is necessary to attempt an explanation of the concept of devolution of power and the British policy of IR before moving into the crux of the matter.

Conceptual Clarifications

Devolution cannot be disassociated from decentralisation as it falls within the wider scope of the former and is concomitant to it (Gregersen et al.; ICJ 2013). Since they are connected it is impossible to understand the concept of devolution without perfect knowledge of decentralisation its forms. That said, decentralisation is a political process through which the central government transfers administrative, political and public resources and responsibilities to lower tiers of government as well as non-governmental bodies and organisations. (Crook and Manor, 1998, Rondinelli et al., 1989; World Bank, 2000a). There are four types of decentralisation and these include; deconcentration whereby administrative, political and fiscal responsibilities are transferred within ministries or governmental departments (Crook and Manor, 1998; Rondinelli et al., 1989; Meenakshisundaram, 1999).

Delegation on its part involves the delegation of specific functions from the central government to lower units but the former remains firmly in control indirectly. The third form of decentralisation is privatisation and it is concerned with the transfer of authority to private enterprises or non governmental organisations with little or no government control (Meenakshisundaram, 1999). Lastly Devolution, which is our focus, is the transfer of power to subnational governments in so far as political, administrative and fiscal responsibilities are concern (Crook and Manor, 1998; Rondinelli et al., 1989). Others like Sayer et al (2002) see it as the transfer of rights and assets from the centre to local governments or communities. Meanwhile, Ferguson and Chandrasekharan describes it as the transfer of specific responsibilities of governance to lower tiers of government.

This appellation has been upheld by the UNDP (1997), which opines that, devolution generally is the transfer of authorities to decentralised units of government. Through this process, units which enjoy some amount of autonomy are created by the central government. In order words, the ICJ (2013:5) orates that, it is "... the process of transferring decision making and implementation, functions, responsibilities and resources to legally constituted, and popularly elected local governments". Hellmut (2007) describes it as devolution of administrative functions from an upper to a lower tier or unit of government. Donahue (1997) posits that devolution has three main factors and these include legitimacy, the decentralisation of resources and authority. It therefore means that, devolution can not be complete if some amount of legitimacy; decentralisation and authority over resources are not visible.

From the above attempted explanation of the concept of devolution, it can be affirmed that devolution can not be disassociated from decentralisation and it is the transfer of fiscal, political and administrative responsibilities, capacities, power and authority from the central government to subnational governments. These powers are legitimised by law with legal instruments spelling out the relationships between local and national governments. The instruments also take cognisance of the functions of each of them in the provision of services. It therefore implies that these institutions have autonomous powers that can be distinguished from those of the central government or higher tiers of government and are characterized by; defined territorial boundaries and their functions and responsibilities are limited within these confinements. Again, they have the power to raise resources and manage them on behalf of their communities; that is, the provision of services to their citizens.

The rational for devolution are wide and varied and it is aimed at accommodating diversities and strengthening local democracies (Onyango, et al. 2012). Another essence is to embrace the different ethnicities that may be inherent in certain polities and make them participate in political decision making which may be difficult to attain in larger political dispensations. It also enhances good governance as its pundits believe that devolution leads to improved public accountability, environmental sustainability and also empowers the poor and vulnerable groups (Anderson & Ostrom, 2008). Hence, it gives citizens at the local level the authority to manage local resources and provide basic necessities to citizens adequately and timely (Roschmann et al 2010, Bardhan 2002 and the World Bank 2002).

Such a claim is supported by the fact that local managers can better adapt these needs to local realities when compared to misdirected and unrealistic programs usually initiated and directed from the centre (Fleiner 2006). It therefore means that devolution breeds efficiency in the management of local resources as the immediate consequences of bad decisions are felt by the people directly. Local managers can thus reverse such bad decisions immediately since bureaucracy; that is usually common in centralised systems of government are

absent. Added to this, it reduces corruption considerably (Aye, 2012) as politicians at the local level are closely followed or monitored by the electorate who can sanction them by easily removing them from power. This is in great contradiction to central authorities where cumbersome constitutional procedures are often bound. Devolving power or granting autonomy to local communities is also seen as the best way of integrating communities composed of people from different ethnic backgrounds, cultures, religions and languages. In other words, it minimises conflict and enhances cohesion and the peaceful coexistence of groups, according to Leiten (2009), Amin and Atkar (2005), Huszka (2008) and Scott (2009).

In spite of the above benefits of devolution, some authors like Scot (2002), Cornell (2002), Ghai (2003) and Fernand de (2002) posit that autonomy intensifies conflicts and encourages political dissent as the granting of self-government to one group will lead to similar demands from others. This favours mobilisation on ethnic lines leading to a negative influence on ethnic peace and cooperation within the polity. Though the devolution of power is an important factor in understanding group relations, as they favour decision making in pluralistic societies, economic inequality and discrimination cannot be left out as shortcomings of the process (Ohn, 1992). Consequently, dissent and conflict may arise when these factors play against inferior groups in societies where linguistic, cultural and ethnic identities overlap (Coller and Ankie, 2000; Forrest, 2004).

Furthermore, major inequalities in economic development may arise if resources are not equally distributed throughout the territory by the central government. It may also lead to the quest for secessionist tendencies as autonomous units may build up proper identities and thus compete with the identity of the national government (Fleiner 2006). Furthermore, its goals may not be achieved due to the absent of human resources which are often insufficient in local government institutions and this may defeat the very essence of effective management. After a proper understanding of the concept and goals of decentralisation, it suffices for us to trail the British attempt at devolving power before assessing its genuineness in Southern Cameroons.

Indirect Policy and Application in Southern Cameroons, 1916-1949

The IR policy introduced by the British favoured the devolving of power to indigenes and the chiefs were made part and parcel of the administration. They lorded over local Councils and functioned as Local authorities. These administrative set ups were called NAs and guided or directed by the IR policy or system. This made use of the African political institutions or authorities that existed before the colonisation of the continent. This was to fill up the gap in its lack of effective authority. However, it was only an administrative theory (Flint, 1966). Though Lugard is credited for this policy, the use of Africans in the colonial administration was first explored by Sir Arthur Gordon in Fiji between 1874 and 1880 (Federke and Viegi, 2010). This was also experimented in some British West African colonies. However, Lugard administration in Northern Nigeria practiced it with a lot of pristine and perfection in the Fulani Emirates of Northern (Miles, 1994). The was also conspicuous in India where the British ruled through Indian Princes and in Uganda the authority of the *Kabaka* would not be not disregarded (Anene and Brown, 1996).

The British therefore envisaged a policy where Africans ruled by their chiefs and elders under British administrators would encourage political and economic development without leading to detribalisation or nationalist politics (Zamani, 2003). Lord Lugard went further to argue that the authority of the chief must first be legitimised by the Governor which according to him:

The de facto rulers who after the British conquest of Northern Nigeria had been reinstated or appointed to the various Emirates and all other de facto chiefs who had been recognised by Government were to be supported in any way and their authority upheld [...] and the duties of a resident to rule through the chiefs and to seek their co-operation and to maintain their prestige (NAB, Ja/a(1917)1, Memo No. 9, 1917, 2).

These recognised African chiefs saw power delegated to them but were not to act as independent rulers. They were the delegates of the Governor whose representative was the resident (Ibid.). A number of reasons necessitated the institution of such a policy.

An administrative set up that was to be manned by British officers would have been impracticable and too expensive to maintain. This therefore necessitated the inclusion of chiefs in the administrative machineries (Flint, 1966). Such arrangements were less costly but more effective. Added to this, this policy suited Lugard's Northern Nigeria very well. He justified the policy when he stated; "... that the political staff available for the administration of so vast a country inhabited by many millions must always be inadequate in the proper sense of the world, and that it was, therefore imperative to utilise and improve on the existing machinery" (NAB, Ja/a(1917)1, Memo No. 9, 2-3. With this, Lugard had no choice but to use the natural rulers if he had to occupy the area effectively. There was even no prospect that he could ever get enough British administrators if the Direct Rule policy was adopted (Anene and Brown, 1996).

The acquisition of more territories necessitated the devolving of power and the preference of chiefs in the administration rather than educated elite. The natural rulers had resented this group. They mounted hostility on them as they regarded them as "low born, up-start, and foreign" (Flint, 1966, 149). More territories meant

moving into the interior and the educated elite were urban and coastal in nature. They no longer represented the people in the new dispensation. Lugard insinuated that it was a fundamental principle of the British colonial policy "... that the interest of a large native population shall not be subject to the will ... of a small minority of educated or Europeanised Natives who had nothing in common with them and whose interests are often opposed to theirs" (Lugard, 1965, cited in Smythe and Smythe, 1971, 121). This resulted in the preference of devolving power to councils and NAs. The objectives of such a policy were two fold.

The British believed that through the chiefs, the local administration will be developed into an efficient organ of modern government (Anene and Brown, (1996). The NAs were to be the rudiment or embryo of LG and through this organisation a post-colonial system would eventually emerge. The British also thought that natural feelings would be raised through the NAs and chiefs and councils were to learn from these institutions the techniques in the running and management of regional affairs. With this experience, products from these Local authorities' areas could be able to serve in the executive and legislature (Ibid). In order to make this dream come true, the British worked hard to maintain the political divisions or natural boundaries they met and this could only be readjusted to fit the present dispensation (Lugard, cited in Miles, 1994). In segmented societies, like was the case in the Southern Cameroons Province, warrant chiefs were appointed to make sure that colonial realities confirm to colonial theory.

The British did not only prefer the chiefs over the educated elite nor only wanted the political areas to maintain their natural boundaries; they also wanted a situation where the powers of NAs would not conflict or overlap with that of British officers. In this regard, they spelt out the functions of the NAs and made sure that the prestige of the natural rulers was not destroyed vis-à-vis their subjects. They wanted a situation whereby:

The prestige and influence of the chiefs can best be upheld by letting the peasantry see that the Government itself treats them as an integral part of the machinery of the administration. That there are no two set of rulers - British - and Native - working either separately or in co-operation, but a single Government in which the Native chiefs have well defined duties and acknowledged status equally with the British officers. Their duties should never conflict and should overlap as little as possible; they should be complementary to each other and the chief must render his proper service to the state It is obviously desirable that the Government should be called upon to intervene between the chiefs and people. If a native chief has lost prestige and influence to such a degree that he has to appeal to government to enforce his orders, he becomes not merely useless but a source of weakness (NAB, Ja/a(1917)1, Memo No. 9, 6.).

In this circumstance, the British thought that the policy will reach its logical end smoothly. However, equality between the British and natural rulers was far fetched. Their duties and obligations were laid down in the 1916 Native Authority Ordinance. The Native courts were a component of the Native Administration (Chiabi, Cited in Njeuma, 1989). Such courts were directed by the 1914 Native Court Ordinance. This went operational in Nigeria in 1914 and was transferred to the Cameroons by the 10th of June 1916. The Native court ordinance safeguarded the chiefs' positions as they were to serve as judges and Native law and customs were enhanced. These native tribunals with the powers of arrest also saw their duties extended to the maintenance of order (NAB, Ja/a(1917)1, Memo No. 9).

Where offences were brought against native law and customs, native courts tried such cases in accordance to native laws and customs. If such also constituted an offence against both criminal and native law, punishment imposed had to be within the limit prescribed by the criminal code or enacted (Annual Volumes of the Laws of Nigeria, 1956). Such courts were set up by the resident and local realities and needs were taken into consideration and approved by the lieutenant Governor (Colonial Office, 1925).

The 1914 Native Court Ordinance stipulated that the chiefs were to enforce Native Law and customs and gave Native tribunals the power to enforce law and order. In this relation, they could arrest, imprison and impose fines on defaulters (Ibid.). The 1916 Ordinance defines the Native Tribunal as "...a judicial council or Native Courts established under the Native Court Ordinance, 1914" (NAB, Ja/a(1916)1, 1916, 2). Section V of the 1916 law went further in line with the 1914 Ordinance as it stated clearly that all NAs were to maintain order in their respective areas of appointments and each had to exercise the powers of this Ordinance which was conferred over all Natives residing or living within such areas (Ibid.).

The NAs could make laws with the approval of the Governor and such laws only had to add to native customary law and were not to be in contradiction to any ordinance or any existing Native Law. They were to be such that could maintain law and order and also destined for the welfare of the people. In advanced communities, it provided for judicial councils where the paramount chief was president and could be vested or delegated with large powers by the Governor. Less advance societies saw the local chief assisted by village heads and he acted as president (NAB, Ja/a(1917)1, Memo No. 9).

The NAs could appoint and dismiss subordinate chiefs and officials. Such moves could only be sanctioned by the Governor. They could appoint Native police to help in the executions of their orders. The British made sure that the independence of the courts were maintained and did everything possible to prevent administrators

taking over the roles of traditional rulers in this direction. For example, Assistant Secretary for Native Affairs, Mr. Grier, in the Eastern Province of the Nigerian Protectorate, had called on the DOs to take over the running of the courts in 1923 in order to bring efficiency in the functioning of these tribunals. This was categorically rejected by the Governor General of Nigeria when he stated that he:

[...] do not consider the proposal that the District Officers should sit as Court members of Native Courts should be approved, but, on the other hand I think political officers, whenever, the opportunity offers, would do well to sit in native courts to observe their members concerning the methods which they should adopt. The work of scrutinizing the decision of the Native Courts appears already to be regularly and carefully performed and it is perhaps hardly necessary to emphasise the great importance which I attach to this part of a District Officer's duty (NAB, Ja/a(1922)1, No. 793/1922. 27).

These courts were graded into four categories, A, B, C, and D. The grade 'A' court had full jurisdiction over civil and criminal matters but dead sentences could only be approved or sanctioned by the Governor. The grade 'B' court had powers over criminal and civil matters where the demands, claims, debts or damages could not exceed fifty pounds and criminal cases where imprisonment could not go beyond two years. In criminal cases where lashing was the punishment, this was limited to twenty four lashes (Ngho, 1990). Grade 'C' courts handled civil matters where claims could not be above ten pounds and criminal cases that could be punished by an imprisonment of six months or in the case of theft of farm produce or livestock for twelve months or in cases that warranted lashing, twenty four lashes was the limit (Colonial Office, 1956). The grade 'D' court had jurisdiction on cases where demand or fines could not go above five pounds, three months imprisonment and twelve lashes.

NAs obligations also extended to the collection of taxes as per the Native Revenue Ordinance (Miles, 1994). This Ordinance recognised the chiefs as principal tax collectors. Part of the money collected was transferred to the divisional or general treasury and the rest went into local projects. The NAs were supervised by the British officials who advised Cameroonian chiefs especially in matters of finance and legal procedure but the chieftaincy institution remained as a legitimate means of governance and served as a link between Africans and the British (Ibid).

By 1939, the NA rule was no longer at pace with changes or developments in the protectorate. The educated elite and returning soldiers from the Second World War were no longer at ease with the system and pressed for reforms. With this, the authorities could no longer remain indifferent to their demands and looked on to the Local authorities' institutions as the best means through which the central government could be extended and the broadening of representation to include all sectors of society. The NA system had failed to satisfy the middle class and there was the need for reform. Hence, a Committee (Gibbon's Committee) was put in place by the Eastern House of Assembly to study the system that was in place and were also called upon to give proposal for a new way forward in 1948.

Enhancing the Devolution of Power 1949 – 1961

In order to prepare for the reforms that would enhance the performance of local authorities or NAs, the territory was reorganised and two Provinces were created in 1949, that is, the Cameroons and Bamenda. In the Bamenda Division, three new administrative units were the outcome, that is, Bamenda, Nkambe and Wum and in the Cameroons Province we had Kumba, Mamfe and Victoria Divisions. These were amalgamations of NAs that were found in the territory and granted autonomy in the management of the socio economic affairs of their areas of jurisdiction.

The newly created Divisions became federations of NAs and were imbued with councils that were to animate development in their respective areas. These were warmly welcomed by the local population as it enabled them to harness their resources for self sustainable development. The British colonial authorities believed that by involving the colonial people more in the administration, development would be facilitated. It is because of this that the colonial secretary talking to the British parliament in 1943 opined that, "I regard the extension of local government as one of the quickest and certainly the surest methods of making certain the extension of central government" (NAB, Jb/a (1967)2, No. CI. 1088, 1) . In 1947, He further argued that:

The stage has been reached when paper plans must be translated into action and it is the townships and villages among the people themselves that much of this action must take place. Without an efficient system of local government, the great mass of the African population will derive only partial benefits from the monies for development by the colonial legislature (Ibid).

An efficient system of administration of the territory was needed if these objectives were to be met. This entailed a government that was participatory in nature for this was deemed the best and wisest means through which the development needs of the people could be provided. It was widely understood that cooperation could only be enhanced if the people were part of the decision making process and local authorities could provide the best incentives.

Furthermore, the end of the Second World War and the increase pressure on the British in the international

scene by the anti-colonial forces and the United Nations' quest for the preparation of all trust territories for immediate independence was a catalyst to this course. Socio-economic advancement and the granting of indigenes more power in decision making was the point of focus.¹ Before the War and the creation of these organisations or institutions, the British colonial authorities were aware of the fact that native administration could no longer meet up with the progress in the territory.

The colonial people called for changes in the entire system especially in local authority personnel where the populace had very little or no confidence in. Members were afraid in exercising real authority for fear that they could not be selected as councillors after completing their terms of office. The situation was not better between 1939 and 1945 as insufficient administrative control was a set back to local authority performance (NAB, Jb/a(1948)2, No. 192). According to the permanent Secretary for LG in West Cameroon in 1967, "If the war had not come in 1939, measures would have been taken then to reform the system" (NAB, Jb/a (1967)2, No. CI.1088), 2). This does not mean that the War and the United Nations Trusteeship Council had no impact but the delay was beneficial as returning soldiers from the war with feelings of discontentment with the regime; stimulated the educated class which had been pressing for the reform. It was for these reasons that local authorities were reformed and given greater authority over local affairs.

For effective administration, the components of these units were based on historical or tribal affinity and this had to do with the origins, socio-political organisations and the customs and traditions of a people (NAB, Ja/a(1957)1, No. LG979. 1957). The composition also took care of migrant groups that inhabited the territory. None Cameroonian interests groups like Nigerian traders and commercial vehicle owners, fishermen, Fulani and Hausa also contributed to the economy of their host councils through taxation and could not be left out.

With this, the reforms organised Local authority units into a two-tier system of administration. There was the Divisional and Subordinate Native Authorities or Village Councils. While the Divisional Council deliberated and legislated for the Division, the Subordinate Councils' authority was limited to the Clan areas. This was the lowest tier and had no legal status but exerted a lot of influence over a lot of purely narrow affairs. Though imbued with legislative and deliberative powers like the latter, their functions were purely consultative and electoral (NAB, Ja/g(1964)3, No. P1458.1964). Elections to the Divisional Council were indirect and came from the Clan or Subordinate Councils (NAB, Ja/a(1957)1, No. LG979). Villages were electoral units to the Clan Councils and special interest groups deemed underprivileged like the Hausa, Fulani and women were granted special representations.

For effective management, the day to day administration was done by paid local authority staffs. Prominent among them was the Secretary/Treasurer who exercised power over all employees (NAB, Ma/a(1949)2, No. 4405 Vol 1, 1949, 8. District Officer (DO) and Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) supervised these institutions. They were answerable to the Residents of the Bamenda and Cameroons Provinces who were under the authority of the Commissioner of the Southern Cameroons. The Commissioner reported to the Governor of the Eastern Region whose immediate boss was the Governor General of the Nigerian Protectorate.

To exercise some amount of autonomy, local authorities had the right to develop and manage their own sources of finance and these were to be applied to the administration, development and welfare of their people (NAB, Ja/a(1957)1, No. LG979, 14). They maintained law and order through the Native Courts and carried out public works. The provision of elementary education, health and sanitation, agriculture and veterinary services was also done by them. The forestry sector fell under their sphere. They could exact labour from their inhabitants for public works such as roads, sanitary purposes and maintenance of communal buildings with the exception of places of worship. Though granted authority in the management of local affairs, the Commissioner of Southern Cameroons, was there to check their excesses and made sure that they worked in line with the wishes and aspirations of the colonial authorities. They could cancel, revoke or suspend any of activity they deemed contravened the law or set down roles.

The Ambivalence of British Intentions

Though the foregoing argument indicates that power was devolved to local authorities, the intentions of the British were not genuine as this policy was to facilitate the exploitative goals of the colonial state. This view has been supported by Hailey (a British colonial Officer) as he tried to justify the issue of differentiation and the dominance of Europeans within the power structure and governance of the colonial when he stated that, "the doctrine of differentiation aims at the evolution of separate institutions appropriate to African conditions and differing both in spirit and in form from those of Europeans" (See Mamdani 1996:7). Mamdani (1997) further posits that "the emphasis on differentiation meant the forging of specifically 'native' institutions through which to rule subjects" (8).

¹ The United States of America, the Soviet Union and the Afro-Asian Block were all against colonialism and called for the decolonisation of all colonised territories. The case of Southern Cameroons was particular because it was a Trust Territory under the United Nations Organisation and Britain was mandated to prepare it for independence under the supervision of the Trusteeship Council. The influence of this Council thus facilitated the introduction of reforms that gave the people more power in the management of their own affairs.

For the accomplishment of this exploitative motive, chiefs acted as local authorities or power was devolve to them not because the British wanted to maintain the status quo they met but for the reduction of the cost of administration. To bring out any meaningful gain from colonialism, effective occupation of the interior meant more goods and services for commerce, more labour and porters and efficient collection of taxes. This could only be ensured by the inclusion of these chiefs and Africans in the power structure of the colonial state. This explained why the powers and authorities of the African traditional institutions were greatly destroyed in a bid to enhance the egoistic tendencies of colonialism.

Though the chiefs seemed to have been vested with much power, their actions were subject to the control of the colonial administrators. Wherever a decision taken by an NA was deemed not necessary, the British administrator in the area simply annulled it. In cases where court or administrative decisions necessitated the payment of fines or damages by a convict, the colonial administrator simply ordered for reimbursement and damages paid to the culprit or victim. In this way, the colonial officials could easily interfere with the day to day activities of the NAs and any contrary view or refusal to abide to the administrator's orders by chiefs or elders was liable. Such acts of insubordination was punishable by a fine of twenty pounds or imprisonment for a period of two months (NAB, Ja/a(1916)1, 21).

Rodney (1972) is so critical of the colonial authorities' attempt to undermine and destroy the authority of chiefs. Though claimed by Lugard that there was to be equality between African authorities and European administrators, as fore discussed, the desired equality was fallacious. Chiefs were just puppets in that set up and were simply administrative agents that were answerable to the British administrators (1972, 272-273). As a result, many of them (chiefs) lost prestige and respect from their subjects and even the councils that were to help them in administrating their territories. If they did well in the enforcement of colonial policies, they were protected and if they acted contrary, they faced the wrath of the administration. This kept the chiefs in ambivalent positions. As if that was not enough, they were forced to antagonise their people as they did everything possible to please the colonial authorities. Cut in this unfortunate web, they struggled to maintain a balance between their people and the colonial administration. If they were considered working to the advantage of the colonialists or in full support of their policies that were not in the interest of indigenes, they were disregarded by their people. If it was perceived that they were in support of their people, they were disciplined by the colonial administrators (Nyamjoh, 2002.4-5).

As agents or managers of local authorities, independent action that is associated with local authorities was far fetched. Any move in that direction was quashed by the colonial administrators as the District Officers, Senior Divisional Officers, the Resident and Commissioner¹ remained superior to the Africans in that order. To further justify the selfish mode of the IR system, one would have expected that the emergence of this system would have brought enormous progress and an added advantage to the urge of the development drive of the colonial regime by bringing the educated elite into the ambit of local government or administration but this was piece meal. The British found it difficult to embrace them into the set up as they were perceived to be stumbling blocks to the socio-economic exploitation of their dominions.

They only came into to the administrative spectacle after the Second World War. Even when the drive for decentralisation intensified immediately after the war, during the transition period from colonialism to independence, (Satio, March 2001:4) and efforts made to thwart the hardship inflicted by the effects of the war and cold war and the fervent call for the decolonisation of Africa, the inclusion of educated elite was not embraced whole heartedly. The chiefs whom the educated elite and even the British considered not desirable due to inefficiency and poor management and exacerbated by illiteracy would not be completely ignored. Though with little or no knowledge in the modern form of governance, they were still considered useful and retained as ex-officio members and still served as natural presidents of Local authorities till 1961 when the territory obtained independence.

Conclusion

From the above analyses, efforts were made by the British colonial in devolving power and making the indigenes part and parcel of the administration. Chiefs were favoured in that process and it was only after the Second World War that educated indigenes were co-opted into the administrative machinery and empowered in the management of local affairs. However, the intentions of the British were not genuine as institutions of local governments were to facilitate the socio economic exploitation of their territories. Though these institutions were used as catalyst and instruments in the exploitation by the colonial state, they still had something to offer to the people as indigenes were initiated into the art of modern governance. Furthermore, they became bases on which the post colonial government had to act as these institutions were carried over to the post colonial state though dominated by the central government, defeating the whole idea of devolution.

¹ They were in charge of administrative Districts, Divisions, Provinces and Regions of the colonial state respectively.

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