



*The African Anthropologist*, Vol 17, Nos. 1&2, 2010, pp. 1 - 39

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(ISSN 1024-0969)

## **African Youth and Globalization: The Experience of the Ethics Club in the Process of Socio-political Integration of the Youth in Cameroon**

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### **Abstract**

This article attempts to illuminate the Ethics Club's activism in relation to one of the pillars of globalization, democratic/good governance and youth integration in Cameroon. The article is guided by the hypothesis that youth mobilization can affect democratic/good governance as an issue of collective efforts and survival in Cameroon in a global age. Based on a constructivist approach, the essence of which is the social representation of the reality that one can improve, rather than speculation. Through interviews, participant observation operational techniques, the article problematizes the global context and the main theme driving the Ethics Club activism. It further examines Ethics Club as framework of youth integration and participation and highlights suggestions that could improve the efficiency of this youth movement and direct government policy towards young people. The article finds that renewing hope in young people in Cameroon, as elsewhere on the African continent, can entail overcoming the vestiges of corruption and consolidating a robust democratic governance as well as ethics in leadership. It also finds that the ruling coalition welcomes the Ethics Club with great enthusiasm and hope that it will help restore its fragile legitimacy. It further finds that Information and Communication Technologies, associated with globalization, are transforming the Cameroonian society at a remarkable speed. The article argues that no matter the form that development can take in any context, the implication of those concerned cannot be undermined. Therefore, young people

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must be given the opportunity to ensure their own survival through a transparent system of decision-making that puts them at the centre.

## Résumé

Cet article tente d'éclairer l'activisme du Club Éthique en relation avec l'un des piliers de la globalisation, à savoir la gouvernance démocratique, et l'intégration des jeunes au Cameroun. L'article est guidé par l'hypothèse selon laquelle la mobilisation de la jeunesse peut influencer la gouvernance démocratique considérée comme une question d'effort et de survie collectifs au Cameroun à l'ère de la mondialisation. Basé sur le constructivisme dont l'essence est la représentation sociale de la réalité que l'on peut améliorer que la spéculation ; les interviews et l'observation participante comme techniques de collecte des données, l'article problématise le contexte global et le principal thème qui irrigue l'activisme du Club Éthique. Il examine, ensuite, le Club Éthique comme cadre d'intégration et de participation des jeunes et fait des suggestions qui peuvent améliorer l'efficacité de ce mouvement de jeunes et orienter les politiques publiques en faveur de la jeunesse. L'article relève que susciter l'espoir aux jeunes camerounais, comme ailleurs sur le continent africain, suppose une croisade contre la corruption, la consolidation de la gouvernance démocratique et un leadership fondé sur l'éthique. L'article a également relevé que la coalition au pouvoir a accueilli avec enthousiasme ce Club dans l'espoir qu'il pourra renforcer sa légitimité et lui permettre de gouverner sereinement. L'étude note aussi que les Technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC), associées à la mondialisation, sont en train de transformer la société camerounaise à une vitesse assez remarquable. L'article soutient que peu importe la forme que le développement peut prendre dans un contexte donné, l'implication de ceux qui sont intéressés ne doit être négligée. En conséquence, on doit donner aux jeunes la possibilité d'assurer leur propre survie à travers un processus décisionnel transparent qui les met au centre.

## Introduction

Now and then in the history of mankind there comes a moment when we have the chance to grasp opportunities which have not been there before and which may not come back again.

*Stefan Zweig*

We are all living in such a time today. The old order has given way and we find ourselves in a very special moment in history, when we can take part in creating a new world order. This new order will be built on two pillars: regional integration and democratic governance.

[...]. In recent years we have witnessed the end of the cold war and the tearing down of the Berlin wall; ... we have experienced the end of Apartheid and have seen Nelson Mandela walk from prison to the presidential palace. We must have hope, for hope is almost as important as life, and without it we would never achieve our goals.

*Thorvald Stoltenberg*

The world is experiencing today its largest ever number of young people in the history of mankind. Half of the 7 billion people living on the earth are under the age of 25. Demographic trends reveal that African countries have an extraordinarily high percentage of their populations between the age of 15 and 25 and are under extreme threat from devastating socio-political and economic health risks, illiteracy and poverty. Projected from the results obtained from the third Population and Housing Census of November 2005 and based on the average demographic growth of 2.6 per cent, Cameroon's population as at January 2010 is estimated at 19.406.100 inhabitants. The census results indicate that the population is constituted essentially by young people: less than 25 (64.32%), 25 - 64 (32.44%) and more than 65 years (3.24%). To tackle the puzzle of youth integration requires, in fact, specific policies and social renewal in developing and developed countries, with the situation being more complex in Africa due to the youthful nature of the continent's population, poor economic conditions, autocratic governance and lack of ethics in leadership. International debate is starting to recognize that youth marginalization is a grave and gathering danger for peace and security. Today, more than ever before, the debate is shifting into the core of good governance agenda. In Cameroon, young people form both the bulk of the population and the majority of those that live below the poverty line and are not yet socially and politically integrated. Cameroon has made progress in some areas of its transition from a one-party authoritarian regime to a more pluralistic, representative democracy; however, the country has also encountered significant setbacks in areas of democratic governance. Existing institutions, including the government's heavy autocratic bureaucracy (Kontchou Kouomegni 1984; Titi Nwel 1999) and security establishment (Diamond and Plattner 1996), are often obstacles to democratic development. Our focal point here is the exploration of the global context, its implications and youth movements in particular, in formulating and implementing good governance projects in Cameroon through the experience of the Ethics Club: in propagating good governance, education for the citizenship and calling for massive participation of young people in the socio-political life of their country. Confronted by the increasingly societal collapse in the face of endemic corruption, moral decadence and the rise of 'feymania', members of this club seek to respond

in their manner to these scourges of society from within the ruling coalition. The central focus of this paper can be summarized directly and clearly, in the simplest terms, as follows:

Can youth mobilization really impact democratic governance as an issue of the collective efforts of the Cameroonian people? In other words, is good governance a remedy to youth exclusion? How dialectical may the relationship between globalization and marginalization or social exclusion be? How does the shift in new information and communication technologies (ICT) associated with globalization affect the opportunities for (un)employment as well as social progress for African youth in general and Cameroonian youth in particular? What is the real sense of the global governance agenda?

Intra- and infra-state dynamics through the mobilization of local, national, generational as well as gender, religious and ethnic identities to support a good governance program is becoming a fact of national survival in Cameroon (Eboussi Boulaga and Zinga 2001). The anti-corruption campaign was thus formerly launched simultaneously by both the state and the civil society (Gatsi 2001). Within this framework and from the perspective of democratization and the establishment of basic freedoms, including those of association and expression, what is needed in this age of globalization is to construct a new type of relationship between the state and the citizens based on participation (Clayton 2002; Ribot 2002). The extraordinary vitality of the Cameroonian youth as with other African youth (Diouf 2001) in the political field, and their spectacular demonstrations in pro-democracy and anti-corruption campaigns is assimilated to the rise of global youth culture (Comaroff 2005). This is often associated with the monumental events of spring 1989 (June) with the Chinese student uprising at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, for which Craig Calhoun offers a vivid and carefully crafted analysis. From students' parliaments to the present youth movements, young people have played a crucial role in the construction of a democratic political community in Cameroon since 1990.

Based on the constructivist approach, the essence of which is the social representations of the reality (Berger and Luckman 1986; Calhoun 2000; Giddens 1979) that one can improve, rather than on speculation (Durkheim 1981) and interviews, participant observation operational techniques, the paper problematizes the global context and the main theme driving the Ethics Club activism (Section 1), and examines the Ethics Club as a framework of youth integration and participation (Section 2). The concluding remarks highlight suggestions that could improve the efficiency of this youth movement and direct government policy towards young people.

## **The Global Context and the Main Theme Behind the Ethics Club Activism**

Globalization is one of the key concepts of our time. It is used by both the right and the left, the North and the South, 'pro' and 'anti', as the cornerstone of their analysis of the world's social, cultural, economic and political global transformations. This section assesses the benefits and the costs of globalization in general, as well as how it is perceived and understood by young people in Cameroon in particular. It also addresses the notions of marginalization, governance and ethical issues that move with this paradigm.

### ***The Globalization Paradigm***

John Urry remarks that over the past decade, across the globe, two of the most powerful organizing processes have been those of 'citizenship' and 'globalization' (Urry 1998). They have surpassed all else before them, reconstituting social and political life in stunningly new ways. In the case of citizenship, movements to demand rights of national citizenship have been enormously powerful in one continent after another. This demand for the rights of the citizen and for the institutions of civil society occurred most strikingly within the former Eastern Europe. 1989 in many ways represents the year of the citizen, being of course two hundred years after the subjects of Paris took to the streets, in 1789, demanding to be considered as full citizens (Murdock, in Urry 1998). And yet, 1989 is also when the discourse of 'globalization' really took off, when exponential growth in the analyses began to suggest that there was a putative global reconstitution of economic, political and cultural relationships. One central feature of that was the sense that people had that they were living in a global village, as the struggles for citizenship themselves were brought instantaneously and 'live' into their homes wherever they were located. The struggles for citizenship, most strikingly in the fall of the Berlin Wall and crushing of the pro-democracy movement in China, both in 1989, were increasingly globalized, instantaneously transmitted through the global media communication systems (Urry op cit.).

The fundamental questions are as follows: What is globalization (Hirst and Thompson 1999) ? Why is it the source of such intense controversy (Held and McGrew 2002) ? Is it creating a more disorderly world or can globalization be tamed? These questions have acquired a new and even greater sense of urgency as the post-September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 has widened the net of suspicion and reduced social trust that has evolved since then, with the increased awareness of generalized surveillance whose system is also globalizing. Globalization is however a new powerful analytical paradigm. It is a contested agenda. To some, it is specific and often technical

term, highlighting the spread of inter-country integration in particular areas – in trade, or perhaps finance, or in the migration of people and generation of new forms of citizenship. John Urry summarizes this aspect of the ‘so-called’ globalization in the following terms:

First, there is the development of new machines and technologies which dramatically shrinks time-space and in part transcends societal control and regulation. These include fibre-optic cables, jet planes, audio-visual transmissions, digital TV, computer networks including the Internet, satellites, credit cards, faxes, electronic point-of-sale terminals, portable phones, electronic stock exchanges, high speed trains and virtual reality [...] These global flows across societal borders makes it less easy for states to mobilize clearly separate and coherent nations in pursuit of societal goals. This can be seen both economically and culturally (Urry 1998:3).

To others, the term ‘Globalization’ is more ideological, imbued with normative content – a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ process, one which can be used to justify particular policies (for example, privatization) (Institute of Development Studies Research Globalization n.d.), or encourage resistance, or lead to what José Bové<sup>1</sup> called the ‘marchandization’ of the world, or defend intellectual property rights. Anti-globalization and anti-capitalist movements from Florence, Barcelona, Geneva and Evian used their gatherings to write their condemnation of the G8 from every conceivable point of view: “They are ‘bloodsuckers’ and ‘criminals’ and ‘to remain silent is to collaborate’”. Someone in Geneva (2003) proudly sprayed ‘Mai G8 = Mai 68’.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the rapid and huge increase in the amount of economic activity taking place across national boundaries has had an enormous impact on the lives of workers and their communities everywhere. To some, the current form of globalization, with the international rules and policies that underpin it, has brought poverty and hardship to millions of workers, social and political exclusion of young people, particularly those in developing and transitional countries. They have seen an erosion of their working conditions, wages and job security in a time of unprecedented wealth and technological capability. There is no doubt that globalization creates social exclusion (Falk 2002). For instance, Thomas Pogge (2002) concludes that:

The poorest 46 per cent of humankind have 1.2 per cent of global income. Their purchasing power per person per day is less than that of \$2.15 in the US in 1993, 826 million of them do not have enough to eat. One-third of all human deaths are from poverty-related causes: 18 million annually, including 12 million children under five. At the

other end, the 15 per cent of humankind in the 'high-income economies' have 80 per cent of global income. Shifting 1 or 2 per cent of our share toward poverty eradication seems morally compelling. Yet the prosperous 1990s have in fact brought a large shift toward greater global inequality, as most of the affluent believe that they have no such responsibility.

However, there is growing recognition that the globalization process is playing an increasingly important role in shaping work patterns. Cheap telecommunications and the spread of computing associated with globalization are creating change in the location of work, within and between countries. The great debate on globalization has been polarized around for or against, or, put another way, enthusiasts versus sceptics. It is now possible and necessary to take a more balanced view, given that the current debate has rather run out of steam. Our own perspective is one which seeks, wherever possible, to separate the normative and the ideological policy conclusions from the underlying exploratory research. Drawing inspirations from Senghor's 'integral humanism' (1964-1990), and definitions by David Held, Anthony McGrew, Anthony Giddens, Craig Calhoun and Dani Nabudere, we see globalization as a multidimensional construct, the process of the integration of national political patterns and economies into the global geopolitical reordering and production systems, as well as the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections between the states and individuals which shape the modern world system. The position adopted by the leadership of the Ethics Club is more pragmatic and its members did not seem too worried about trying to define their stand on globalization. On the other hand, it soon became clear that the majority of young Cameroonians, members and non-members of this Club, stand for this global movement. The result of the survey questionnaire administered during our fieldwork conducted between December 2002 and June 2003 indicate that 61 per cent of the respondents supported globalization, 20 per cent were radically opposed to globalization, while 19 per cent have a mitigated position. The respondents were also largely positive about the use of new information and communication technologies, most especially the Internet and mobile phone. The result also shows that most young people aged 15 to 25 are fascinated by foreign models of sociability and are ready to leave their country for ever, especially through Internet marriage for young girls. Below are some selected significant views expressed by those who are for or against globalization.

In connection to this, one can mention the case of the young girl who committed suicide when she discovered that her picture where she posed naked had been posted on the internet by a 'white fiancé' met, thanks to the Internet.

Africans are living in critical times. And yet, confusion reigns over their objectives, ideals, methods and goals. A confusion that could be fatal – if they miss their chance when it is presented to them they might not get another one.

### *For Globalization*

- It facilitates contact between the various parts of the world. For instance, easier communication will in turn foster development and enforce equal opportunities. This is because, with globalization, we get connected to each other and learn more about other cultures; and in this way, the world becomes a small village.
- It helps to improve our socio-economic policies and also to curb corruption.
- It gives me easy access to the external world and facilitates my transactions. Globalization will help to inform everybody at the same time around the world.
- It helps people from all over the world to meet and share ideas of common interest.
- With globalization, we are becoming world citizens.
- Unity among people.
- I am for it because, with globalization, all countries have no choice but to prepare and embrace it or be left out in the new world order.
- I am for globalization: it has made the world a small village; communication has become so easy, unlike in the past.
- It is a good perspective as regards communication. There are quite easy means of sending and receiving information from abroad.
- A golden opportunity for students and researchers who can compete on an equal opportunities basis.
- Globalization means common initiative, reduction of inequality between tribes, races, states and continents.
- It helps all the nations of the world to develop.
- With globalization, we get connected to each other and learn more about other's cultures. The world becomes a small village.

*Against Globalization*

- Exploitation, unemployment, high crime waves.
- Globalization as a new form of domination of the South by the North politically; Africa will lose its sovereignty.
- Information that is personal has lost its worth and immorality as portrayed by some cultures is copied by those of other cultures, like Africans who have adopted bizarre western habits.
- In this process, certain specifics should be respected according to each state or continent.
- Most countries in the developing world don't have enough finance to sponsor a good communication network.
- This brings about a lot of disunity and disorganization amongst families and society as a whole.
- Globalization will reinforce exploitation, wars, unemployment, and high crime waves.
- Globalization will reinforce the economic crisis in Third World countries, cultural assimilation, and moral depravity.

It goes without saying that Africa cannot stop globalization, just as it could not stop industrialization which had negative consequences for those who were poor, weak or unskilled. One of the challenges of an African Renaissance is the reorganization of African governments and adoption of policies that are people-driven. The old order is giving way and regional integration and democratic governance appear to be some of the pillars on which the new order can be built in this special moment in human history. Craig Calhoun (2004) summarized the situation in the following terms:

Globalization and the coming of post-national and trans-national society are often presented as a matter of necessity. Globalization appears as an inexorable force – perhaps of progress, perhaps simply of a capitalist juggernaut, but in any case irresistible. [...] globalization moves of itself, and governments and citizens have only the option of adapting [...]. Alternatives to globalization, on the other hand, are generally presented in terms of inherited identities and solidarities in need of defence. Usually this means solidarities and cultural identities imagined on the model of nations; sometimes it means religions, civilizations, or other structures of identity presented by their advocates as received rather than created. These are denigrated by proponents of transnational society who

see the national and many other local solidarities as backward or outmoded, impositions of the past on the present.

Thus, like the modernization theory of the 1950s and 1960s, globalization talk is influential and deeply misleading, for assuming coherence instead of probing causes and processes.

To many Cameroonians interviewed during this research, as indicated above, globalization has both a positive and negative face. They recognized that the growth in telecommunications on the one hand gives us access to knowledge and information<sup>3</sup> while, on the other, it leads us to face the reality of inequality<sup>4</sup> on a daily basis. Furthermore, very few Cameroonians are against globalization. Many of them believe that globalization will accelerate unity between people through cross-border processes and long distance networks, and they do not see a major direct link between youth marginalization or exclusion and the current movement towards globalization, which is making the world a 'global village'.<sup>5</sup>

This general trend can also be seen in the declaration of Mr Peter Mafany Musongue, Prime Minister and Head of Government of the Republic of Cameroon (2001):

As for the challenges of globalization, it suffices to say that we Africans should work very hard. We are not lacking in ability and so we should rise up to the challenges of globalization. And this will entail putting all hands on deck; that is, all Cameroonians must give their support: the government, the civil society, the population, in effect, every single Cameroonian must contribute towards this process of accelerating the integration of our country into the global economy.

According to Arjun Appadurai, the global situation is an interactive rather than a one-side dominated one. The struggle against globalization is therefore full of confusion and misunderstandings. The limited states no longer dominate the world system of images, but are only one mode of a complex transitional construction of 'imaginary landscapes'. In his widely cited paper "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", he emphasizes that the invention of tradition and other identity-markers becomes slippery, as the 'search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transitional communication'. He also stresses that there are various alternative fears than that of Americanization: 'It is worth noticing that for the people of Irian Jaya, 'Indianization' may be more worrisome than 'Americanization', as 'Japanization' may be for Koreans, 'Indianization' for Sri Lankans, 'Vietnamization' for Cambodians, and 'Russianization' for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic republics' and reminds us that 'one man's

imagined community is another man's political prison' (Appadurai 1990). Appadurai stresses that globalizing and localizing processes, or 'global homogenization' and heterogenization feed and reinforce each other rather than being mutually exclusive, 'the production of locality' (Appadurai 1995) is becoming a crossbred construction, hybrids of the post-colonies (Appadurai 2001).

The advent of new technologies of information and communication has introduced new forms of trade and professions in Cameroon. The computer came along with the setting up of public secretariats or computing services as a form of business enterprise and changed the nature of work for secretaries. Not only did secretaries abandon the typewriter whose buttons were difficult to punch for computers which need just a gentle touch on the button, but they were also able to be employed in public businesses and not only public offices as before. The introduction of the internet also brought in the novelty of cybercafés where people could go and work on the internet for a specific duration in exchange for payment to the owner of the cybercafé (with a drop from 2,000 F per hour three years ago to between 500 and 300 F CFA today i.e. from approximately \$5.00 USD to less than \$1.00 USD). Above all, cybercafés have also come to serve as a means of massive employment of young Cameroonians, especially young people who operate as monitors in the cybercafés.

Furthermore, the introduction of mobile phones brought in the phenomenon of call boxes. The call box is simply a mobile telephone subscribed to as a less expensive service to the public in exchange for payment. All that is needed to open a call box is a mobile phone, an umbrella, and a small table. A minute's call is 200 or 250 Frs (less than half \$1 USD) depending on the cost of a call in the service one is subscribed to. Call boxes serve as a sort of poverty alleviation measure in that they provide employment to thousands of jobless youths and have created 'internet and mobile phone bourgeoisie' and 'the new riches', people generally under 35 who invested in this business as in the Internet. Statistics show that more than 50,000 temporary jobs have been created in the field of the mobile phone in 2003. Some of the young girls dominating this field are sole proprietors of these businesses while a bulk of others as well as some young men are employed to do the work. Most employers reveal that they choose young girls to manage their 'call boxes' because first and foremost women are presumed to be very accountable and honest. As there is no rose without a thorn, young girls involved in this sector witness many dishonest persons who take advantage of their physical weakness to escape without paying their bills. There have even been

cases where armed bandits harass these young girls and make away with their mobile phone and money, since they are sometimes exposed to the public right into the night (*The Herald*, no date). However, the popularity of call boxes is growing and in some streets in Yaounde, Douala, Bamenda, Bafoussam, and Bertoua, there are about 50 to 100 call box operators within a span of only 10 meters. The contribution that new communication technologies have made to both social and economic development is immense. Businessmen can now monitor market prices and stock more easily across long distances without much displacement. Many young Cameroonians have successfully found jobs abroad and enrolment in foreign universities, as well as scholarships, thanks to the Internet. This can be verified through careful observation and private dialogue with those seeking visas in front of the US, German, British, French and Canada consulates and embassies. Internet marriage has also been growing.

The Head of State, President Paul Biya, in his address to youths on the eve of the 35th National Youth Day,<sup>6</sup> expressed the wish of government to introduce and generalize the learning of computer science in schools nationwide. This wish was closely followed on 30 November 2001 by the launching of a vast program by the presidential couple (Chantal and Paul Biya) to equip more than 30 government high schools across the country with new information and communication technologies. The multimedia centres in General Leclerc High School and Bilingual High School Essos were inaugurated that day. Others, such as the projects which are already underway in Douala, Bafoussam, Bamenda, Bertoua, and Garoua, and other projects which are still to be set up, are expected to serve as pilot structures in their respective localities. These centres already have a relatively good stock of computers. A specialization in computer sciences has also been created for high school students. By this, computer studies will become a fundamental subject in schools and will be classified in the same way as History, Philosophy, Mathematics, French, English, Biology and Physics.

However, the challenges are real for this dream which is becoming true. With computers comes the need for trained staff and the training of trainers. Furthermore, it will be a herculean task to equip all the secondary and higher schools in the country with computers (*Cameroon Tribune*, 2003). Without computers in some schools, this implies that the training will be more theoretical than practical. It also calls for a good measure of investment, and the participation of NGOs, elites and ex-students, as well as international donors. Through the Internet, for example, today

the world is a global village as one can get information on virtually everything on the net. Training in schools and universities will be adapted to the needs of the job market. It may enable school leavers to enter an active societal life with ease.

An objective look at recent years provides impressive evidence of the economic advantages of globalization. Nevertheless, globalization also contains risks. The benefits of economic integration have been primarily extended to the industrialized countries. The globalization of financial markets has been accompanied by the devastating economic crisis in developing countries, resulting in the increasing structural marginalization of Africa.

### ***The Growing Burden and Danger of Marginalization/Exclusion***

For Dani W. Nabudere, 'globalization' has become a new buzzword that nevertheless connotes new qualitative developments in the world economy and international relations in general (Nabudere 2000). Claude Ake defined globalization as the march of capital all over the world in search of profits, a process reflected in the reach and power of multinational corporations (Ake 1995). In this 'march', Ahmad A.H.M. Aly notes that the conditions that enhance trade creation among developed countries are different from those in developing areas. He concludes that:

Developing countries suffer from structural disequilibria and, particularly, the lack of a well-developed manufacturing sector. Invariably, they produce primary commodities, and foreign trade is conducted with developed countries, whereas trade among developing countries is extremely low. Reallocation gains are therefore not expected to accrue from these unbalanced patterns of production and foreign trade. Integration can at best be neutral, and hence useless, when neither country is producing a giving commodity. In this case, the removal of tariffs on trade between trading nations causes no change in the pattern of trade in this commodity; each country will continue to import it from the cheapest possible source outside the group (Aly 1994).

Unfortunately, the main and lasting effect of decolonization was to open up vast new markets and opportunities for increased and more efficient exploitation, comment some observers. Even though exploitation clearly took place on a vast scale under colonial rule, the attempt was not made to integrate people into the capitalist mode of production – to make them into waged workers. 'Extractive industries such as mining and oil production had operated into the Third World for many years previously,

but such enterprises don't necessarily require the generalized imposition of a new set of social relations in order to function' (Do or Die n.d.). The process of turning Third World peasants into proletarians and the marginalization of the youths is in some ways similar to the development of Capitalism.

One can therefore agree with Robert Biel to whom world capitalism can only have one set of winners. His conclusions on this matter are clear:

The conditions for the form of development which entrenches poverty are international. The dependency perspective (which is the radical critique of mainstream development theory) highlights these conditions by introducing a dangerous idea: it is not just that there is one group of countries in the world which happens to be poor. The two are organically linked, that is to say, one part is poor because the other is rich. The relationship is partly historical – for colonialism and the slave trade helped to build up capitalism, and this provided the conditions for later forms of dependency – but the link between development and underdevelopment is also a process that continues today (Biel 2000; see also Boltanski and Chiapello 1999).

As Amin (Samir) pointed out, in what is perhaps the single most important idea of dependency theory, the tendency to pauperization – the acute poverty that is both the basis and product of capital accumulation, and thus of 'growth' – was transplanted to the periphery. For Samir Amin in one of his books, capitalism is going senile. Its ambition is now restricted to maintaining the wealth of the wealthy world, while the poor, condemned to remain out of the loop, are increasingly demonized as the enemy. In this book, he depicts a world in which NATO has taken over the role of the United Nations, in which US hegemony is more or less complete, and in which millions are condemned to die in order to preserve the social order of the US, Europe and Japan (Amin 2003).

Africa is characterized by problems of poverty, underdevelopment, conflict, illiteracy, famine and diseases especially exposed to HIV/AIDS. To work towards improving the conditions of African people is the great challenge of our time. Prime Minister Tony Blair once said: 'The state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world. But if the world as a community focused on it, we could heal it. And if we don't, it will become deeper and angrier' (Blair 2003). Addressing a joint session of the United States Congress (the Senate and the House of Representatives) in July 17, 2003, he added: 'There can be no freedom for Africa without justice, and no justice without declaring war on Africa's poverty, disease and famine with as much vehemence as we removed tyrants and the terrorists'.

Desperate youths, with nothing to do, are attracted by gang life as a form of depraved identity and survival. Among scholars, there is a growing consensus that marginalization is a factor of conflict and discontent (Abdullah 2002; Eyoh 1998a). Such Africanization of marginalization as a human dignity issue intends to stimulate effective poverty alleviation programs (PAPs). This is because the state, civil society through NGOs, and international agencies or donors who have so far taken a paternalistic attitude to PAPs will begin to look beyond giving benevolent hand-outs to the poor, to focus on implementing policies that take the rights and dignity of the people as given. Poverty alleviation policies would then cease to be populist and a campaign strategy to win votes or legitimize failing governments, but properly regarded as a right for the citizens and, more especially, young people. The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna affirmed that: 'Extreme poverty and social exclusion constitute a violation of human dignity'. The leadership and policy makers can successfully manage the economy if they perceive and believe in a people-oriented system. The focus must be on the people in the first place.

Renewing hope for young people in Cameroon, as elsewhere on the African continent, would have to entail overcoming the vestiges of corruption and consolidating a robust democratic governance as well as ethics in leadership.

### ***The Necessity and Limits of Robust Governance and Global Ethics***

From semantic debate to reality, one can agree that globalization offers great opportunities for human advance – but only with stronger governance. Assistance from the donor institutions is becoming a double-edged sword. On the plus side, it has brought a welcome focus on democracy and good governance. The term governance, as generally used, encompasses all aspects of the way a country is governed, including its economic policies and regulatory framework. Corruption is a narrower concept, which is often defined as the abuse of public authority or trust for private benefit. The two concepts are closely linked: an environment characterized by poor governance offers greater incentives and more scope for corruption.

Although moral and civic aspects (the focal point of the Ethics Club activism) should not be neglected, many of the causes of corruption are economic in nature, and so are its consequences – poor governance clearly is detrimental to economic activity and welfare. Because of their economic nature, issues related to governance and corruption often fall directly

within the 'mandate and expertise' of the Bretton Woods Institutions: the World Bank and the IMF. The IMF was urged in 1996 by its Board of Governors to 'promote good governance in all its aspects, including by insuring the rule of law, improving the efficiency and the accountability of the public sector, and tackling corruption, as essential elements within which economies can prosper'.<sup>7</sup> Since then, the IMF's role in promoting good governance has been expanded considerably, while still being limited to economic aspects of governance that could have a significant macroeconomic impact. Governance and corruption are mentioned explicitly in over two-thirds of the letters of intent by giving country authorities when seeking financial support from the IMF and World Bank. Since 1997, Cameroon's government under the usual 'Instruction of the Head of State' started mapping out measures culminating in the adoption of the good governance agenda in 2000, the implementation of which is still an issue of concern.

African governments are increasingly subjected to, and colonized by, discourses of governance to the extent that is now becoming almost hegemonic, and all action or behaviour is read in terms of the implementation or transgression of good governance principles. The extreme intervention of the Bretton Woods Institutions, notably the IMF, has been considered by many as another attempt which, like the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), will keep many African countries in the periphery; and the main aim of the global governance as to discipline African governments whose misbehaviour may disturb the present world order. In this view, far from integrating Africa in the global economy or 'taming power politics or establishing the international rule of law, it is simply another mechanism through which the struggle for power and national advantage is expressed' (Held and McGrew 2002). As Held and McGrew have correctly observed:

International governance is a contingent rather than an institutionalized feature of world order: it only exists, and continues to exist, because the most powerful states perceive it as being in their national interests. International institutions are, therefore, principally devoid of independent power, and function largely as instruments for the advancement of the interest of the most dominant states or coalitions of states. This is evident in the limits to their power that exist not only formally, as in weighted voting systems and institutionalized vetoes embedded in the operations of many IGOs, but also more informally in so far as it is widely understood that collective rules or policies (even where these are in the global interest) cannot be imposed or enforced on the most powerful states. On a whole range of global issues, from the eradication of poverty to

humanitarian intervention and global warning, the formal and informal 'veto' power of dominant states constructs the effective limits to concerted global action. International governance, in key respects, is the contemporary equivalent of old-style imperialism in so far as it represents a distinctive political mechanism which entrenches a system of global domination of the weak by the strong (Held and McGrew *ibid*; see also Callinicos et al. 1994 and Gowan 2001).

Sceptics to global governance argue that it will maintain US/Western hegemony, sustain Western Security community, and defend and promote an open liberal world order, while deepening the gap between the North and the South and maintaining global disorder, poverty and inequality which are at historic levels today. For the globalists, global governance will produce transformations through complex global interdependence, agencies of transnational civil society, and globalization of political activity. Globalization of governance has contributed to expanding political and civil freedoms in many countries bleeding under the pressure of autocratic regimes.

The central characteristic of global governance is a redrawing of the boundaries between public authority and 'private power'. This may lead to the integration of African countries into the world economy and solve the problem of marginalization of the marginalized, that is, the youth.

However, the new 'paradigm' of governance in international literature underpins the challenge facing the new democratic experiments in Africa. In the words of Richard Joseph:

The erosion of public institutions, as a result of corruption, autocratic rule and the political manipulation of ethnicity and religion, has not abated. Without a fundamental, indeed revolutionary, transformation of governance in Africa, in both private and public sectors and at local, provincial and national levels, the woes of the continent will deepen. [...] Entrenched political corruption has become one element of a broader phenomenon that can be called 'catastrophic governance'. I define catastrophic governance as endemic practices that steadily undermine a country's capacity to increase the supply of public goods. It is catastrophic governance that is mainly responsible for Africa's failure to realize its immense development potential, aided and abetted by external opportunists. [...] Unless the chains of catastrophic governance are broken, Africa's productivity will slip further behind that of the rest of the world. [...] The revolutionary transformation of governance in Africa must be directed from within the continent, within Africa's communities, schools, businesses and research institutes. It must also involve the active participation of Africa's many sons and daughters who have honed their skills in overseas institutions (Joseph 2003).

The Ethics Club appears to be a partner in this historic endeavour, in the case of Cameroon, through which Africa will decide to make or to mar, according to Bernard Nsokika Fonlon.<sup>8</sup> For John W. Forje (2002), the key to poverty reduction is good governance. It is necessary for research-related activities to flourish and contribute in finding the appropriate solutions to the problems plaguing the nation. And the key to good governance is accountability, transparency, rule of law, and social justice. The poor must be empowered to voice their need. They must be included so as to ensure a sense of belonging. Participatory approaches can be used to enable poor people, mostly young people, to express their priorities and exercise selectivity. This will speed their inclusion in society and make the country more effective, and society more democratic. It implies government's obligation to respect the interests of those affected by its decisions, programs and interventions through mechanisms of answerability and enforceability (Consodine 2002).

We can agree with Held and McGrew (2002) that the main implications and guiding ethical principles or core values of globalization are: global social justice, cosmopolitan social democracy, universal human rights, human security, rule of law and transnational solidarity. One can also think about:

- Ethics in knowledge production and dissemination (intellectual honesty);
- Ethics in agro and biomedical sciences (debate on issues of genetically-modified crops and transgenic animals);
- Ethics in business (the end of speculation and artificial inflation);
- Ethics in the presentation of evidence in both national and international affairs;
- Ethics and new technologies;
- Above all, ethics in leadership positions, reconciliation and justice as an ethical and political challenge.

The source of the new ideas, attitudes and practices may be the partnership between the state and citizens, the real civil society organizations. Young people have a major role to play in this process.

### **The Ethics Club as a Framework of Youth Integration and Participation**

Integration and participation are crucial to democratic governance. They have become essential ingredients and prerequisites of good governance. Development as a process of improving people's lives means that they should be included in the process. This section introduces the Ethics Club in its historical context. It analyses the club's organization, vision and agenda, as well as its impact.

### ***Historical Background***

The peripheral role of young people in Cameroon is a patent reality, as their marginalization in all aspects of life is amply manifested. This situation reflects the gerontocratic and patriarchal nature and essence of the state in Cameroon, the gerontocratic political dominance. As a result, young people have not effectively influenced policies in the process of the socio-political development of their country. Also, the hegemonic project of the ruling elite has been the major obstacle to youth integration in Cameroon. Jean François Bayart defines the hegemonic project as:

A system of coherent social hierarchy which rests on a process of reciprocal assimilation and fusion of the former dominant groups and of new elites born from colonization and decolonization. The contemporary lines of inequality and domination thus seem to register, in the direct extension of the pre-colonial social structures, the dominated of yesterday constitute the mass of the dominated of today (Bayart 1985).

Bayart also establishes the distinction between senior and junior citizens (*ainés* and *cadets sociaux*). A sentiment of disappointment has gradually replaced that of hope, as it has dawned on young people that qualifications, competence and merit are the preserve of a certain social category: the old. Tentative youth emancipation or de-marginalization re-emerged in the early 1990s, following Cameroonian students' opposition to the neo-colonial project of France in 1958 and the autocratic regime of President Ahmadou Ahidjo in the early years of independence (the early 1960s).

All over Cameroon during the early 1990s, one could hear the voices of change. The population was hungry for democratic governance and leaders who offer more than empty slogans, who can put people first, especially the youth, and fight for what Cameroonians deserve: a high standard of education, good jobs, infrastructure and quality health care.

Since the initial outburst of student resistance in France, Soweto and Beijing, the education as well as citizenship and democracy struggles has been a central component of the struggle for national liberation all over the world. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, a number of student organizations were formed in Cameroon. The democratization process was marked in this country by numerous strike actions on the campus of the then university of Yaounde during the period 1990-1992, with sporadic action up to 1997. The demands for democratic reforms provided space for students to organize and voice their multiple grievances about the poor living and study conditions on campus as well as the process of decentralization and the 'institutional renewal' of the University of Cameroon, which blocked academic excellence. According to Piet Konings,

the unprecedented degree of violence that accompanied the protracted strikes may be attributed not only to the persistent refusal of university authorities and the regime to enter into a meaningful form of dialogue with students, but also to the internal divisions among the students along party and ethno-regional lines (Konings 2002; Sindjoun 1994). The major lines of division were between two groups: the 'stranger' students organized in the 'Students Parliament' and closely allied to the radical opposition: the group found a mouthpiece in the struggle for freedoms, calls for civil disobedience, general strikes, the demise of the state and the convening of a Sovereign National Conference which would have introduced new states structures afresh. On the other hand, the 'autochthonous' Beti students organized the 'committee for self-defence' and were closely allied to the regime in power (Nyamnjoh 2002; Eyoh 1998; Mbembe 1997; Monga 1997). However, the meteoric rise and subsequent disintegration of a vigorous Cameroonian youth movement (the Students Parliament) may be associated with the changing terrain in which young people table their grievances as well as its domestication by the opposition. The rival movement may be associated with the ruling elite hegemonic project by manipulating desperate students into compliance and complicity with mediocrity and alienation (Nyamnjoh 2002).

To many young Cameroonians, the excitement at change and democracy that came with clamours for liberalization in the early 1990s has given way to 'disenchantment and cynicism with the callous disregard of the ballot by the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement' (Nyamnjoh *ibid*). Meanwhile, in this context of widespread poverty, corruption with scandals about embezzled money, political clientelism and youth marginalization, many young Cameroonians as members of the Ethics Club still believe that there are opportunities for upward social mobility for young people through good governance and ethics in leadership.

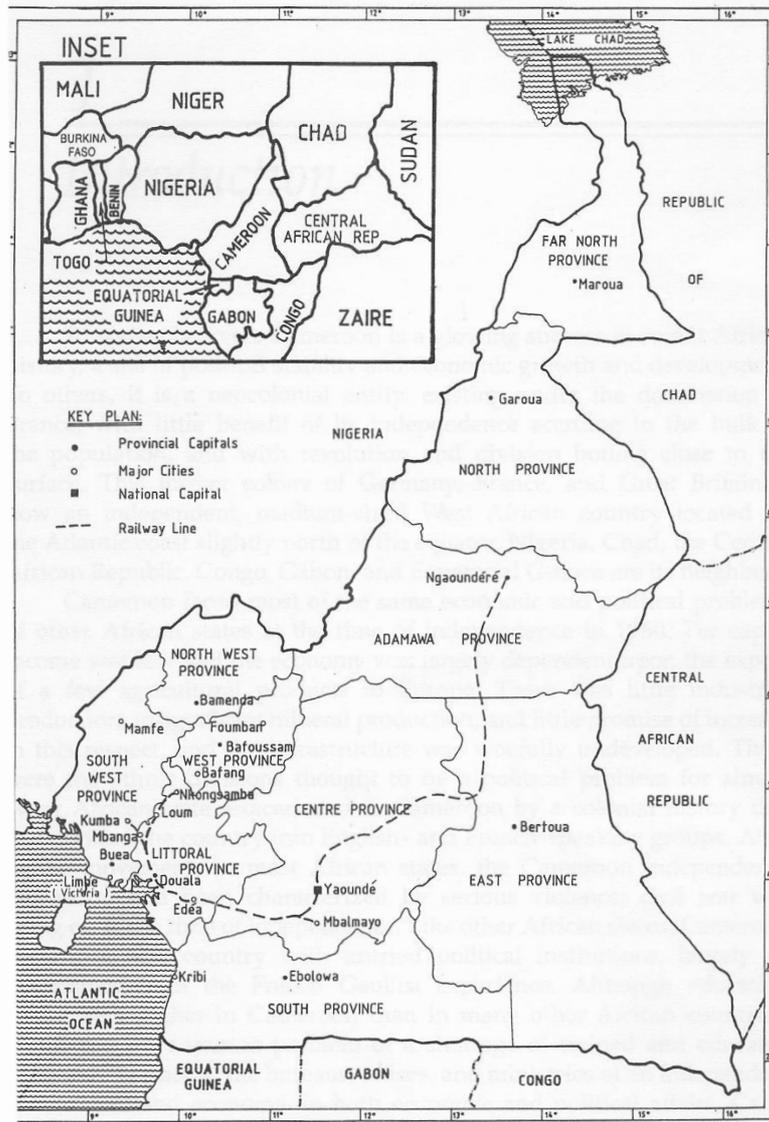
In the North as well as in the South, many youth movements emerged as young people's responses to autocratic leadership, corruption, political clientelism and violation of their citizenship rights. This article argues that what happened in France, Soweto and Beijing or during the student's parliament meeting of May 1991 (when the authorities sent troops to disperse the students, resulting in turmoil) may have happened during the launching of the Ethics Club in 1999 at the Advance School of Mass Communication (ASMAC) in Yaounde. This is because talking of ethics and good governance in an environment or a society where corruption (Ayissi 2003), moral decadence and the politics of the belly (Bayart 1992) were deep rooted, and becoming an institution as patterns of government

may be considered by many officials and some common citizens as a conspiracy from the West. In France, authorities used the excuse of a rumour that the right wing was going to attack the students meeting to criminalize the protesters and justify the police intervention. In Soweto, authorities considered children's claims for better education as manipulation by black elites that should be destroyed, even through bloodshed. In Beijing, the authority used the excuse of capitalist subversion to send troops and tanks to neutralize the demonstrators. In Cameroon, drawing inspiration from the above experiences, the authorities preferred to monitor through infiltration, then closely control the Ethics Club's first gathering, and later domesticate the movement.

In two consecutive years (1998, 1999) Cameroon was rated the most corrupt country on the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, a German-based International NGO. Since then, the government has taken the political commitment, before the population and international funding bodies, to fight what is now called the scourge of corruption or a cankerworm in society. Churches and civil society organizations promptly joined this enterprise which was more of a crusade or which at least finally sped up the political will to eradicate corruption or, short of that, to reduce it to less devastating proportions. Corruption is one of the foremost problems in Cameroon and it is receiving much greater attention today. It has become a central issue in popular uprisings and election campaigns. In the past five years, international aid organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development, 'La Coopération Française', and the United Nations Development Program have organized seminars and launched programs concerned with corruption and what to do in order to curb it. At the national level, civil organizations such as the local branch of Transparency International, headed by Barrister Akere Muna, former chairman of the Cameroon Bar Association, with Cardinal Christian Tumi among the college of advisers, the former Minister Garga Haman Hadji's 'Bonne Conscience', Dr Moïse Albert Djambe's SOS Dialogue for Peace in Africa, the research group GERDDES-Cameroon, and the churches as well as the Ethics Club headed by Charles Ateba Eyene, are very active in the fight against corruption, this scourge that strangles civic rectitude and warps public morals.

Although the Ethics Club started its activities in 1999, its national coordinator insists that his decision to set up this youth movement did not wait for Cameroon to hit the record books in terms of corruption which is a real governance issue, nor did he wait for the Organization for

Republic of Cameroon  
(inset shows Cameroon in relation to neighbouring states)



Source: Mark W. DeLancey, Cameroon Dependence and Independence.

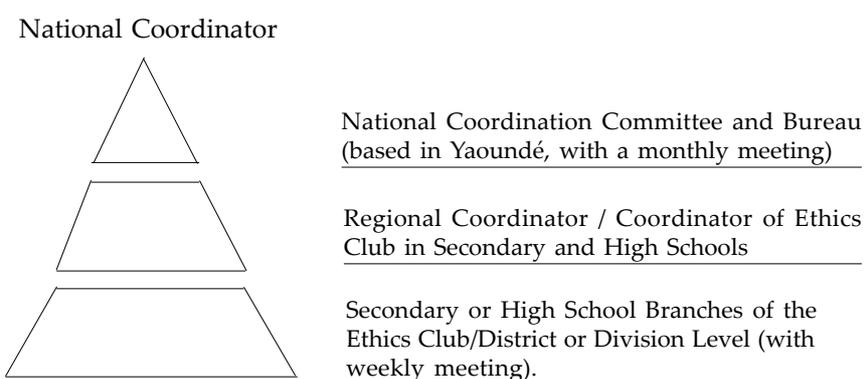
Economic Co-operation and Development's emphasis on basic social provisioning and the NGO substitution for government provisioning, nor the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s determination to take African youth out of its present poor situation.

### ***Organization, Visions and Agenda of the Club***

With its pyramidal structure, the Ethics Club is struggling to play a significant role in the process of youth's integration and participation.

#### *Organization*

The club organization is in the form of a pyramid:



Membership is voluntary. Members of each Bureau are elected or co-opted. Members guilty of unethical behaviour are suspended for a period of time from the activities of the club or excluded definitely from the group. Membership may also be rewarding as the club has successfully contributed to the election of some of its members in some municipal councils.

#### *Vision*

The Ethics Club is of the opinion<sup>9</sup> that citizenship education gives young people the knowledge, skills and understanding to play an effective role in society at local, national and international levels. It helps them to become informed and responsible citizens who are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Citizenship education encourages pupils to play a helpful part in the life of their schools, communities and the wider world. It also teaches them about their economy and democratic institutions, and encourages tolerance and respect for different national, religious

and ethnic identities. Citizenship education develops young people's and common citizens' ability to understand about moral and ethical values, and put them into practice; it provides opportunities to reflect on issues, and to take part in discussions.

It goes without saying that time is running out for leaders who pretend to act on behalf of the many but who refuse to involve the many in their deliberations (Clayton 2002). This is the challenge of the new public involvement in the decision-making process in Cameroon. As the spread of information through education has been enhanced by new technologies, more people feel capable of speaking out about decisions that will affect their lives and, consequently, they have been demanding a say in those decisions.

Since its foundation, the Ethics Club has been struggling for transparency, accountability and ethical behaviour. Since the unethical behaviour due to ignorance and lack of civic education has been the main reason for the backwardness of the country, the work was started by founding several clubs in secondary and high schools and distributing many booklets, first in Yaounde and later in other cities like Ebolowa, Bertoua and Douala. The campaign was widened by organizing seminars and discussion meetings that involved young people, government officials, politicians and civil servants. So far the number of its activists, members and sympathizers exceeds five hundred. The movement strongly supports the idea that the problem of socio-political integration of the youth in Cameroon can be solved through good governance. It also maintains that a democracy which mismanages public institutions and refuses to take care of the general interest, including those of the youths, cannot succeed; and youth marginalization is a threat to national unity and cohesion.

Finally, the Ethics Club's vision is one of a common future, a future in good governance values so that young people emerge as competitive and effective players in national politics and the economy, with freedom, social justice and security for all Cameroonians. This shared vision reflects the Club agenda.

### *Agenda*

The Ethics Club's general agenda is set out in its constitution as well as in its seminar's reports and booklets, and consists of the policies and strategies of the Club (Ateba Eyene 1999). The Ethics Club promotes the moral, cultural, spiritual, social and political developments of young people. This implies helping the youths to have: a critical appreciation of issues of rights and obligation in society; understanding of the nature and role of the different groups to which they belong, and promoting respect for diversity

and difference; awareness and understanding of meaning and purpose in life and of different values needed to become responsible and effective members of society; and massive participation of young people in local, regional and national politics. The Club's key skills are: sensitisation/communication, discussing and sharing information and ideas about social, political issues of the community; working with others in formulating policies and taking responsible action in the community; and problem solving in drawing awareness to certain issues.

Thus identified, the combating of corruption is the overarching priority in its integration agenda, the importance of good governance for socio-political integration of the youths, and responsible behaviour among young people.

Broadly speaking, the policies of the Club are to:

- Defend democratic governance, peace, security and stability;
- Empower young people in the process of nation building;
- Participate actively in the fight against corruption<sup>10</sup> and unethical behaviour through workshops on citizenship and national conscience;
- Develop youth through civic engagement, socialization, responsible life skills and networks;
- Fight fraud in the education milieu as well as in the public service;
- Encourage meritorious students through the institution of a prize for the best student paper presented at the beginning of each academic year in some secondary and high schools. The winning paper is posted on the school board and may also be eligible for submission to the school journal where it will be considered for publication;
- Organize the funeral of some senior citizens for their remarkable contribution in shaping moral standards and hard work. The recent manifestation was during the funeral of Jean Baptiste Obama (died on 17 April 2003), who was also known as the 'African philosopher', in May 2003. The deceased contributed greatly to the preservation of the Reunification Monument and the teaching of Cameroon's history.
- Assist in the fight against impunity in the education milieu as well as in the public service.

Whether its activities are based on altruism, a real desire to contribute to youth integration and participation, or a simple opportunity to receive more aid from their national and international mentors by a group of people whose survival depends upon the preservation of the current regime, its impact remains to be seen.

### ***The Club's Impact: Achievements and Setbacks***

This section analyses the impact of this non-institutional channel for youth participation, based on some new forms of socialization in the face of the challenges facing Cameroon and the seductions of globalization.

#### *Achievements*

The achievements of this Club, which enjoys the sponsorship of UNESCO and other undisclosed national and foreign mentors, include, as previously mentioned, a series of activities amongst which are:

- The organization of seminars on the fight against corruption, the virtues of good governance, citizenship and national conscience (all these topics were discussed during one of the club's seminars in Mfou/Mefou Afamba, Center Province on 16 March 2003 on the general theme: 'Youth, Citizenship and National Conscience'. Previously, the club had organized a workshop on the causes and remedies of the uprising insecurity in Yaounde as well as in the entire country. Urban unemployed university graduates and school drop-outs were easily mobilized to protest against their chronic unemployment and the high cost of living. In attempting to survive at the margins by joining armed gangs and engaging in banditry and other forms of anti-social behaviour, they created insecurity for everybody (elsewhere as in Sierra Leone, Liberia and recently in Ivory Cost, this marginalized youth joined rebel armies to fight incumbent regimes). The Cameroon Government got the message and this was manifested in the massive recruiting of young people in the whole security-military complex in a process, however, full of irregularities and problems (*The Post* n.d.).
- The club also organized a seminar in Bertoua to draw the attention of the public to the resurgence of the phenomenon of trance (sudden fear, loss of control and agitation) in the school milieu (December 2002). This workshop was highly appreciated by people we met during our fieldwork in this region.
- The club's condemnation of the plundering of the National Museum, former French High Commissioner's Residence and former Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, has resulted in court action against the authors of such criminal activities, as a crime against the preservation of the national cultural patrimony.

- Its achievements also include a sensitization campaign, using booklets. In addition, the Ethics Club leaders took part in the elaboration of the National Good Governance Programme (NGGP). Among the measures prescribed by the Prime Minister, Head of Government and Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Fight against Corruption (*Cameroon Tribune*, 2003) are:
  - Introducing lessons on ethics, good governance and the fight against corruption into the school curricula.
  - Strengthening the means of action of certain anti-corruption units, notably through the publication of a news bulletin by the anti-corruption observatory<sup>11</sup> (each ministry has its own anti-corruption units where efficiency and effectiveness remains an issue of concern).
  - Systematically publishing final sanctions taken against government workers and users of public services.
- Furthermore, members of this grouping also focus public attention on corruption in government and the overall incompetence of some public officials.
- With no intention to directly link other government's initiatives to the influence of Ethics Club, one can nevertheless observe that:
- Generally, in respect of getting the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Funds closer to the people and gaining the confidence of international donors, the representation of civil society has been guaranteed. This has also prompted the creation of many NGOs by some unscrupulous individuals.
- The National Election Observatory (NEO), an independent structure set up by Law N° 2000/016 of 19 December 2000 promulgated by the President of the Republic, aiming at guaranteeing greater transparency in the electoral process (*Practical Guide on Municipal Elections in Cameroon 2001*), reserves room for civil society.
- President Paul Biya remarks that we are moving from an international society where states played the preponderant role towards a 'world society' where individuals, associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in short civil society, play a more and more important role (Biya 2001).

- Fabien Eboussi Boulaga and Valentin Siméon Zinga of GERDDES<sup>12</sup> mentioned that churches and religions are not being left behind in this crusade against corruption. Through sermons and homilies, pastors are trying to move their flock into their parishes. Churches are both populous and organized groups, and are able to have a more sustained and far-reaching impact in the social, educational and moral fields than any other organizations. A meeting was organized in Bamenda from 27 to 30 April 2001, under the auspices of the National Catholic Education Secretary, with a view to launching an anti-corruption campaign in Catholic schools in Cameroon. This National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon's project aimed at seeing, in concrete and explicit terms, how the specificity of Catholic education – whose aim is the education of the whole man and of all men – can be used as an instrument to fight corruption. Previously, the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon published in September 2000 the "Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of Cameroon to Christians and All Men of Goodwill on Corruption". As other actors of civil society, the bishops maintained that: 'Not to speak out strongly against corruption would be a blameworthy silence. Not to combat it forcefully would be an unacceptable dereliction of duty. And not to act in earnest to eradicate this plaque would be a betrayal of our people' (Bishops of Cameroon 2000). In fact, the bishops want to 'educate citizens to develop a sharper awareness of this evil so that they can fight it better'. This means 'fostering a greater awareness of the rights and obligations of citizens everywhere, in order to tackle corruption and its consequences more effectively nationwide'. According to Fabien Eboussi Boulaga (2001), the pastoral letter is both an analysis of corruption and an appeal to all, and it ends with a 'prayer against bribery and corruption in Cameroon', intended to be read every Sunday at the close of each mass.
- Finally, the National Governance Programme has been described as a benchmark framework set up by the Head of State, with a view to ensuring the balanced, sustainable and equitable development of Cameroon, through lasting and workable partnerships between the state and other players of the economic and social system, which are the private sector and civil society.

It will certainly be unjust to take stock of achievements of the Ethics Club without taking into consideration its limitations, beginning with its very own future.

*What young people expect from the Ethics Club in terms of governance*

- Transparency, and the agenda should be set through a bottom-up initiative.
- The Club should not be for personal interest and the process of decision-making should involve its entire membership.
- I hope its campaign may bring some change.
- Corruption is dangerous to society as HIV/AIDS is dangerous to the human body. Stimulating the spirit of hard work and honesty among young people is a good idea.

*What young people expect from the Ethics Club in terms of the socio-political integration of the youth*

- We should admit that the Ethics Club has failed in the achievement of its objectives. I think that the Ethics Club has been politicized.
- I think there is not a veritable Ethics Club that can really secure the socio-political integration of the youth in Cameroon.
- The Club should respect its agenda.
- I have nothing to expect from this Club since the fight against corruption is almost a lost cause.
- I wonder if the socio-political integration of the youths is even on the government's agenda in Cameroon.

**Setbacks**

Although it has not had enough time or resources to make a name, this aspect of the stock-taking is important for the analyses, because the Ethics Club seems to be suffering from congenital diseases common to youth movements in Cameroon.

- The club was engineered within the high sounding and paternalistic proclamation of the centralized government practices in Cameroon to play a peripheral echo of the marginalized youths. This posed a problem for the club's autonomy and neutrality. In the fight against corruption, one of the aspects of the NGGP agenda is that it cannot be more than an agitation of ideas, that is, almost nothing in the present circumstances, as long as they cannot help to bring about a just and equitable society, as the results of our questionnaire and discussion indicated.

- The club has been accused of being manipulated by factions of the ruling coalition to settle scores and to destabilize others. An instance cited is the Ethics Club's President, who is also a member of CPDM (youth wing). Also, the running of the national bureau of the youth wing of the ruling party (CPDM) was vigorously condemned by the members of the Bureau and other ordinary members of the youth wing of the party. To some, it was nothing less than manipulation. This can also be seen in the relations between the Ethics Club and President Biya Youth (PRESBY), which are not good at all. For many members of the youth wing of the ruling party who we met, the Ethics Club is a group of opportunists in search of what to be grabbed, whereas the essence of ethics in general is neutrality, a good moral record and not just young people in business or agitation.
- The Founder and National Coordinator of the Ethics Club, Charles Ateba Eyene, who has also been a member of the anti-corruption unit of the Ministry of Youth and Sports since 2001, is working at the Division of International Cooperation as assistant in charge of studies at the Ministry of Culture. He is also one of the presenters for CPDM of the program 'Direct Expression of Political Parties Represented at the National Assembly',<sup>13</sup> and has been accused of mobilizing young people to achieve nothing else but personal political ambition. His co-option policy, whose aim is personalizing what was not personalized at the beginning and use of funds, is a matter of silent criticism within the Club. His lofty idea of writing a conversation book with a quasi-retired army general and former first Army Chief of Staff (Ateba Eyene 2002) received divergent interpretations. To some people, it is nothing less than instrumentalization of the leader of the Ethics Club by the General who is seeking more recognition for the services rendered to the nation. To some others, the leader of this club is using the present nationwide dedication ceremonies with the General in the major cities (Yaounde, Ebolowa and Douala) to implant his organization where it is not yet effective, and to mobilize its members where it is already a reality.
- In the field of the campaign leading to the adoption of responsible behaviour among young people, the club is facing competition from other youth movements more accepted and supported by both young men and women, such as 100% Youths, Between Us Youths and UNESCO Club in many secondary and high schools.

This is reflected in some characteristics of the Ethics Club:

- 80 to 90 per cent of its members are also members or sympathizers of the ruling party;
- 60 to 70 per cent of its members are male;
- Although the group is opened to all the tribes in the country, 70 to 80 per cent of its members are from the Equatorial Bantu or Beti ethnic group based in the Centre, South and East Provinces which are the stronghold of the leading ruling coalition party.

Many young people interviewed really doubt the neutrality and autonomy of this group as well as the real motivations of its leader.

The present Cameroonian government under Biya, like the previous one under Ahidjo, has argued that the benefits of the economic progress of the country are to be spread among all its citizens, not limited to a few in places of power and authority, and that equality of opportunity is to be extended to all the population, regardless of location, age or ethnic origin. In spite of the rhetoric, and even though one may point to timid improvements in education, health care and social security services – all of which benefit the common citizen – it is also true that social inequality as measured by the same types of indicators has increased greatly in Cameroon over the past ten years, compromising the idea of social justice.

According to Mark W. DeLancey, some Cameroonians have received far more benefits from the country's resources than others. In a social sense, those in the bureaucracy and upper power echelons of the ruling party are gaining much more than others. Although it is difficult to document such statements, a brief trip in Cameroon provides visual evidence to support such assertions (DeLancey 1989). The children of government ministers and other top ranking officials are still going to preparatory schools and universities in Europe and North America, while others remain in Cameroon under a collapsing education system. It evokes pity that teachers, duly trained by the government, only get absorbed and fully take up services one or two years after graduation. Students, half-nurtured by such professionally and financially retarded teachers, also recruited through a process full of irregularities, will produce no miraculous results when they become office holders tomorrow, especially when their certificates and transcripts also take one to two years to be ready, letting job opportunities sail by (*Insight*, April 2003), or when parents corrupt teachers (Oumaroudjam Yaya 2003).

Although Cameroon dropped from first position in 1998 and 1999 to eighth in 2003 and thirteenth in 2008 on the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International, corruption remained matter of concern in this country. The national political debate is currently centered on the effective implementation of Article 66 of the January 18, 1996 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon. According to this article, the principal officers of the government, including the Head of State, are expected to declare their assets at the time they assume office. Many actors as opposition figures, political activists, leaders of civic organizations and members of diplomatic corps and NGO have been quite vocal over the need to get Article 66 of the constitution operational. In fact, the desired objective of this constitutional provision is the protection of the national wealth against predators. The adoption of "application text" and the full implementation of such a provision will certainly give a decisive impetus to the anti-corruption campaign waged by the government and code-named by the press: "Operation Sparrow Hawk" (*Opération Epervier*).

In addition, several youth projects created in order to fight against social exclusion, such as the National Employment Fund (NEF), Integrative Program in Support of Stakeholders in the Informal Sector (PIAASI), Youth Socio-economic Integration Project (YSIP) and the Support Program for Rural and Urban Youths (PAJER-U), have so far timid impact on employment due to corruption and the inertia of some government services. The participation of the youth in development implies personal civic commitment. This commitment also has a moral and patriotic dimensions based on national solidarity and devotion to the general interest. These virtues should be nurtured in the different youth associations or movements whose aim is to steer young people away from deviant behaviors that are now commonplace in modern society, notably corruption that has done so much damage to the Cameroonian nation. Therefore, stimulating the spirit of hard work and honesty among young people (tomorrow's elite) is laudable, since corruption is dangerous to the society as HIV/AIDS is dangerous to human body. With the present high rate of unemployment and technological advances in electronics and telecommunication, many young people are tempted to get involved in various ways of getting rich fast, no matter the means, as some government officials. This study argues that a certain degree of corruption and inertia should be associated to a crime against humanity or a terrorist act.

## Conclusion

Africa is not winning the battle to control its development agenda because the struggle has been construed too narrowly as one over economic and political power. But it is much more than that. It is also a struggle of ideas and knowledge ... Scientists are a major part of the problem. To begin with, we ourselves have no faith in the power of scientific knowledge or in our ability to use it to solve problems. If we did, we would talk less about how our governments constrain science and concentrate on using the power of our knowledge to change them so they can value science, support it and exploit its potential. It is not very useful to lament incessantly the persistence of traditional and popular attitudes which are detrimental to the production and utilization of scientific knowledge. Why not problematize this scientifically and devise a means for changing these attitudes? Without articulating how to proceed and why, our march to development cannot really begin. Can we (scientists) live with this tragic betrayal of our mission?

Claude Ake

From the data gathered during this research, we can make the following suggestions:

- The Ethics Club should establish links and partnerships with other youth movements operating in the same field (youth integration, citizenship and responsible youth life skills and the generation of new forms of sociability among young people) such as 100 percent Youth, Between Us Youths, and UNESCO Club.
- The Ethics Club should avoid being a catch-all organization. Its target should remain young people, their problems and proposed solutions.
- Since decisions concerning the future of ordinary citizens made at high levels without consulting civil society could not be implemented because they did not have the support of the community, we suggest that civil society needs to be involved more than ever before in the decision-making process and even at the stage of drafting laws.
- Government should accelerate the preparation of a databank on the Cameroonian civil society organizations.

- Corruption continues to impoverish Cameroon and is contributing directly to poverty and youth exclusion as well as the breakdown of the fabric of society. Strategies of poverty alleviation, therefore, should continue to address the issue of inclusive governance as well as the issue of increased democratic participation of young Cameroonians in the social, economic and political affairs of their communities. In this regard, alongside the 'Children Parliament' instituted in June 1998 in memory of Soweto's children massacred in 1976 (which has a daily annual session each 16 June during which junior parliamentarians pose questions to ministers on the running of the state affairs, and also table young people's grievances), government should establish municipal youth councils and promote national and global networking among them. Selected youths would comprise a body that sits at the table with local decision-makers in order to express their view and that of their peers on the issues of the local agenda and local government policies. Such views should be incorporated in municipal planning processes. Furthermore, the linking and exchange of local youth councils should be promoted at national, regional and global levels.
- During our fieldwork, a member of the 'Ethics Society Club' (a village group of some old men) refreshed our memory of this worthy graffiti quotation: 'To call in question the society you live in, you must first be capable of calling yourself in question'. The Ethics Club leadership has to follow this advice or join the club of the manager of anger (Monga 1996) and traumas. The Ethics Club without ethics will be a barrack for young people serving the structures instead of the structures serving them, or the Ethics Club will become a mere 'fans club'.
- Finally, the state should continue to play its traditional role as coordinator of the national development, with more transparency and efficiency, and the emphasis should be on education, health, infrastructure and security. It should also have in mind that no matter the form that development can take; the implication of those concerned cannot be undermined. Therefore, young people must be given the possibility to ensure their own survival through a system of decision-making that puts them at the centre.

## Notes

1. José Bové is a veteran activist and promoter of anti-globalization who poses as a French farmer. His most recent caper involved the destruction of a field trial of biotechnologically-improved rice and genetically-modified crops at a test laboratory near Montpellier, in Southern France. He had previously been found guilty of the demolition of a half-built McDonalds restaurant in Milan. On 22 November 2001 scientists and farmers, from the North and the South, joined hands in a day of action defending democracy and independent science and jobs.
2. Globalise resistance – opposing the growth of corporate power [www.resist.org.uk](http://www.resist.org.uk). The global years of action against globalization: Zapatista uprising in 1996, Seattle in 1999, Washington DC in 2000, Quebec and Prague in 2001, and Geneva and Evian in 2003.
3. Taking into consideration the advantages of the knowledge-based economy, a National Agency for Information and Communication Technology (NAICT) has been created by a presidential decree N° 2002/092 of 8 April 2002. The Agency's main mission is to promote and follow up government action in the field of information and telecommunication technologies as well as to promote easy access to new technologies for all citizens. It is also charged with assuring the respect of ethics, morals and privacy in the use of new technologies (*Cameroon Tribune*, N° 7572/3861 10 April 2002, pp. 10 – 11. Previous to the creation of NAICT, the Head of State Mr. Paul Biya and First Lady Mrs Chantal Biya inaugurated Internet Centers in two High Schools in Yaounde (Lycee Leclerc and Lycee Bilingue d'Essos).
4. Such as where a refugee child in Sierra Leone sees that the cost of a life in his village is worth less than a cost of life in Kosovo.
5. In some Cameroonian villages, people or villagers know each other.
6. National Youth day in Cameroon symbolizes the reunification of the two Cameroons. In fact, in 1961 French and English-speaking Cameroonians agreed in Foumban to (re)unite and reform one big strong and modern nation. The Foumban accords provided for a bilingual, bicultural federation in which English and French speaking would develop and prosper in harmony and mutual trust. This day was instituted on 11 February 1966.
7. Good governance is important for countries at all stages of development. [www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org).
8. Dr Bernard Nsokika Fonlon is now a legend, Nso history society publication N° 3, Kumbo Town, 1988, p. 107.
9. Opinion expressed by the Institute for Global Ethics UK Trust.
10. Paula Dobriansky remarks that governance also means the absence of corruption. Corruption damages economic development and reform, impedes the ability of developing countries to attract foreign developing investment, hinders the growth of democratic institutions,

and concentrates power in the hands of a few (in 'Principles of good governance', *Afrique Etats-Unis*, N° 2, April 2003, p. 7).

11. A former Secretary General at the Presidency, Minister of Post and Telecommunications and Director general of National Social Insurance Fund are under custody for corruption charges. Some corrupt transport officials were sanctioned by the Minister of transport.
12. GERDDES, Groupe d'Etudes et de Recherche en Démocratie Développement Economique et Social/Studies and Research Group on Democracy, Economic and Social Development).
13. On Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV): television every Thursday from 21:30 pm (elapse time: 1 hour); radio: every Friday from 8:30 pm (elapse time 2 hours).

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