

## Journalism in Cameroon: A Brief History and Phases

### Kamerun'da Gazetecilik: Kısa Bir Tarih ve Aşamalar

Male Aichetou MAKWEN<sup>1</sup> 

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#### ABSTRACT

Since the liberalization of public life in Cameroon in 1990, aesthetics, technique and ethics have best characterized the evolution of journalism, highlighting the key phases that have characterized its history, namely the era of journalism without journalists. In this period, journalism was practiced by other professional groups for entertainment purposes, mixed with political struggle and religious humanism. It then moves on to the next stage, where it asserts its freedom from other social activities overshadowed by journalism, then sets its own scope and standards. This research aims to monitor the different phases of journalism in Cameroon, public and private media in Cameroon, a country where freedom of the press and human rights are affirmed as priority, and how the regional press is covered in their countries and regions. Therefore, we ask ourselves whether there is really respect for freedom of speech in Cameroon for both the public and private media.

**Keywords:** Professionalism, Freedom of Expression, Morals, Ethics, Regional Press, Private Press, Public Press

<sup>1</sup> Selçuk University, Journalism, Graduate Student, aichamale@yahoo.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-2098-935X

## ÖZ

1990'da Kamerun'da kamusal hayatın liberalleşmesiyle estetik, teknik ve etik, gazeteciliğin evrimini en iyi şekilde karakterize etmiştir ve bu dönem gazetecilerin olmadığı bir gazetecilik dönemi olarak nitelendirilebilir. Bu dönemde gazetecilik, diğer meslek grupları tarafından eğlence amaçlı, siyasi mücadele ve dini hümanizmle karıştırılarak uygulanmıştır. Sonrasında Kamerun'da gazetecilik gölgesinde kaldığı diğer sosyal faaliyetlerden bağımsızlığını ilan etmiş ve bir sonraki aşamaya geçerek kendi kapsamını ve standartlarını belirlemiştir. Bu araştırma, basın özgürlüğünün ve insan haklarının öncelikli olarak kabul edildiği Kamerun'da kamu ve özel medyanın farklı aşamalarını, yerel basının bölgelerde ve ülke genelinde nasıl yer aldığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmada Kamerun'da hem kamu hem de özel medya için ifade özgürlüğüne gerçekten saygı duyulup duyulmadığı sorusuna yanıt aranmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Profesyonellik, İfade Özgürlüğü, Ahlak, Etik, Bölgesel Basın, Özel Basın, Kamu Basını

## Introduction

Journalism is a profession with main tool as freedom of expression. With the system of democracy applied today in majority of countries, people can let know their own opinions. Yet in Cameroon, this right seems to be violated. Indeed, the country is ranked 134th out of 180 in the "Reporters without Borders" (rsf.org/fr) according to the world press freedom index in 2020.

Under German protectorate (1884-1916), there is no Cameroonian press. The Germans ensured full control of the press by maintaining the publishing and printing of newspapers in Germany, even those in local languages. When the British arrived in 1916, the German rules were abandoned to join the less restrictive rules governing the Nigerian press. At the same time under the French administration, there is a Cameroonian press. This situation is subject to a policy of discrimination. Imports of newspaper-making equipment and local newspapers are heavily taxed in order to promote the circulation of the metropolitan press. Before the First World War, the only publications existing in Cameroon were administrative newspapers, written and published by the colonial administration, and confessional newspapers, working for the evangelization of black people. The first local periodicals appeared in 1920 and quickly took a unionist turn, which was immediately censored.

Following the Brazzaville conference in 1944, a highly politicized opinion press emerged which began to address the issue of independence. Among these newspapers, we can cite L'Union, L'Écho du Cameroun, Ma patrie le Kamerun, or La Voix du Cameroun, published by the political party Union of the Populations of Cameroon (UPC), the nationalist party militant for immediate independence and without conditions. The success of these newspapers is accompanied by sanctions against them. This is how La Voix du Cameroun was particularly targeted by the censorship apparatus, with numerous lawsuits against it until it was finally banned in 1955, when the UPC went underground. In the English-speaking area, freedom of the press was severely restricted during this same period.

## 1. A Brief History

In Cameroon, the European missionaries produced the first newspapers in the early 1900's with no aim to inform the people but to persuade them to agree with their point of view. These newspapers were presented to the population in their native languages with objective to teach them their norms and values. This was a way to introduce a "modern civilization" to the local tribes and encourage the inhabitants to respect and serve their colonial dominance. At this time, there were no journalists of profession, evangelists, local columnists or authorities were the ones writing the articles.

The first “opposition” press produced by Cameroonians to challenge the European power gave birth in Cameroon during the French colonial period in 1920’s. These press had as main role to be the means of expression, a weapon for the colonized ones and to play a role in the integration of the dominated African masses (Ndongo & Valentin, s. 30). Yet, the press at this time faced difficulties like;

1. The presence of lack of adequate means of production and distribution. This was confirmed with the small number of Africans handling printing press.
2. In addition, the level of illiteracy of the population and finally the political arouse among Cameroonians, gave rise to anger and fear on the part of the colonists and brought seizures and censorships to the press.

These sanctions hindered the capability of the press to consolidate a mass hearing. For example, “The Truth” from Mbale is a paper written and printed by Cameroonians in France in the past. This paper was purpose to reveal the “hidden truth” to the people. The colonial authorities were not influence by this paper and shut it down after three affairs in 1929.

The colonial rule permitted a nationalist essence between 1945 to 1959. A discharge of political propaganda started and from the 71 newspapers already existing at that period, at least 40 of them were attached directly to one of the 91 political parties in the country (Ekoudi & François Marie, s. 17). These papers did not attempt to hide their political prejudices and opinion, and those writing were not journalist, but those with love of letters like editors, lawyers, teachers etc. These writers used their ability to put actions down with words for propaganda favoring the political believes and flourishing their actions.

The opposition press in Cameroon lost impact in the territory after the country gained independence in 1960. Public papers started appearing, particularly “La Presse du Cameroun”, the press with the highest impact on the people. Both Cameroon parts, the British and French colony combined in this period, yet the French government style was imposed to continue ruling in the country after been emerged. This generated tensions between the people as the West part had been familiar to the Anglophone tradition, they were then suddenly faced by sanctions and censorship from the Francophone part of Cameroon.

Ahmadou Ahidjo (the first Cameroonian president elected in 1947) started tensing his power on all opposition especially the press domain in 1962. Divers journalists were arrested, legal changes weren’t implemented and the law of silence irrigated the nation’s previous eagerness for newspapers. With this, Ahidjo in 1966 delivered a new press law that was not welcomed by everyone especially by those against his governing. They saw the law as suspicious, not favoring the opposition. It is important to know that Cameroon uses similar text law to France that is “Liberty of the press is guaranteed throughout the territory of the Federal Republic of Cameroon” but then added, “This liberty is exercised within the limits of the provisions of the present law”.

In article 11 of the law, editors are required to give two copies of their papers to both the office of the Minister of Territorial Administration (MINAT) and the local prefect four hours before publication. In this way, MINAT has the power to suspend a publication if they find it misleading or if it is considered to be against the morality of the people. In addition, without authorization from MINAT, a paper could not be published. The violation of this law was sanction with different types of punishments like imprisonment, seizure of printed copies or closure of press houses. With this strictness, journalist putted a name on this law as the “penal code of the press”.

This law was hopefully made to bring back unity and legitimate justification considering the differences faced by different tribes, religions or languages that divided the country. However, another function of the law is told to have served keep the opposition quiet on Ahidjo's new sole political party UNC administration, created four months before the law statement was released. In an inter of five years, papers published in the country dropped from 30 to 9 and no new papers appeared till the government inverted a publishing house in 1974 known as " Société de Presse et d'Editions du Cameroun" (SOPECAM) and the public newspaper "Cameroon Tribune". Cameroon Tribune witnessed favors from the government, fully covered government activities and national events and almost had a total pattern in kiosks for distribution of their papers.

In the 1970's, journalism witnessed a low point. Papers appeared and disappeared with no reasonable reason and majorities of papers in this period oriented to sports than politics in order to save themselves from sanctions. Ahidjo was replaced by President Paul Biya in 1982 and the refreshing period followed with lot of promises like renewing interest in politics and the press. People though asked themselves if really this acts were whether a way to free the press. Paul Biya's democratization program known as the "New Deal" until some points really made the field practicable for journalists. Many unconventional papers made their appearance and were seen by those supporting Biya's politics as a new democratic period. Nevertheless, the 1966 press law was still a reference even though it lost in strictness, writers were still discouraged to cross the line and write down their opinions.

*"For a couple of years after November 1982 the press was "free" as long as it criticizes Ahidjo and his government. As soon as the same press attempted a more critical look at the present government and situation, the return was firm, leading to a large number of arrests and detentions of media practitioners than the numbers realized by Ahidjo's government (Nyamnjoh & Francis Beng, 1990)."*

Cameroon Tribune with all this then announced itself as the main press body for the second ruling power of the country, which is known as Cameroonian People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) under President Paul Biya. A democratization period started by President Biya at that time was faced to different interpretations from political opponents. Some of them claim that Biya was forced to accelerate his "New Deal" program by the public pressure, which seemed to have lost path after the coup d'état attempt in 1984. Others confirmed the intentions of Biya to be sincerely interested in a further level of liberalization but running towards the traditionalist side of his regime CPDM. Meanwhile during this period, Biya's government confirmed to control the situation and affirmed everything was proceeding exactly as planned by the regime towards democracy for the country.

The country's National Assembly of that time under the supervision of Biya released new laws in December 1990 concerning rights and liberties of the people. The most important law from a political aspect was the return of multi-Party political system in the country. In addition, the law for social communication, still in practice as of May 1991, had both positive and negative effects on the press. While reconfirming the fact that freedom of communication is a central pillar for democracy in the country, the National Assembly also added, *"this freedom of expression, more than any other, can be a great danger for democracy if it is over exercised"* (Tchieneham & Jean-Vincent).

Under the influence of this law, the publication of a paper could proceed without need of authorization. For this, you just needed a notification of the paper from the authorities in command. In this way, the law favors more state information, a situation that was restricted by the former regime. The total or partial censorship system was kept in use by the authorities from MINAT yet tighten to any publication judged dangerous for the people's safety and peace. For the decision to be taken on

the sort of a publication, the censor could be appealed to a judge with a month to make a decision and pronounce the verdict.

## 2. Phases of the Press in Cameroon

The history of journalism in Cameroon reveals, in the background, a development strongly marked by the socio-political context and the issues inherent in the profession. Indeed, at each phase of political revolution especially for countries under colonial forces in time, adapted journalism. The 1990s however inaugurated another era, which of the implosion of authoritarian political systems, swept away by the democratic gust. Citizens' demands leave behind the settler-invader and his "civilizational" values and now aim for the liberation of speech and political action long sacrificed at the altar of national cohesion. Political option ideologies and embodied by the single party, perceived as the only way of salvation for a nation in the making, as the centrifugal forces backed by the problem of multi-ethnicity in the world seem difficult to master and often giving rise to eruptions of violence.

The socio-historical transformation of the press in Cameroon was mostly marked through three phases of its evolution. A period of journalism without journalists. Followed by the period of journalism without newspapers where the profession feels the need to professionalize and gain autonomy, and the current era of newspapers without journalists, when these are subject to practices at the antipodes of the rules ethics and professional conduct governing activity. At each of these stages, the press undergoes profound changes linked to a conjunction of political and structural factors such as the professionalization, empowerment and legitimation of the profession and obeys internal logics that shape it (Lemieux, 2000, s. 25). In this perspective, MATHIEN's assertion is all the more relevant:

*"The genesis of professional journalism did not happen in a day, but spread over several generations under different conditions depending on the country and following specific procedures for each of them (Mathien, 2003, s. 122)."*

The permanence of the quest for professionalism constitutes an essential characteristic of the press, illustrating a certain recursion in its evolution. Those practicing have lost legitimacy and professional codes acquired during the second phase, which nevertheless saw the profession assert, its technical nature and its autonomy. This search for professionalism proceeds by a linear trajectory following "aesthetic, technic and ethic" which, in its chronological inscription, proceeds by a succession of periods when journalism is in major the fact of non-professional applicants. Then follows a phase where professionals emerge and the profession, already organized and autonomous, certainly obeys rules, but lacks appropriate supports, information being confined to the sole service of a power rejecting forms of expression that does not conform to the official ideological line. Finally, the current period, or although it has regained total freedom, with in particular the unlimited creation of press organs and the presence of professionals justifying recognized expertise, the press has rather lost its credibility; and voices are raised to call for the cleaning up of the profession and a return to morality (Ruellan, 1997, s. 16-19).

## 3. The Public and Private Media in Cameroon

### 3.1. The Public Media in Cameroon

In Cameroon, as in many economically developing nations, the regime in power have almost total control in all the different sectors. With this, it is obvious for the government to as well control the press. After independence, different restrictions and sanctions created hugely affected the information sector, which the state intervened to fill. The Cameroonian government next to its

different sectors also created the information industry and saw the possibility to inform its citizens “correctly” as said by the president Paul Biya:

*We intend to declare our thoughts that a knowledgeable native is well informed of the truth of his environment, turn his consciousness to the different national changes, his choices, viewpoints and efficiently the ability of a native to complete the duties of his nation (Bamenda, March 1985).*

Unfortunately reign in power of these countries are mostly seen to control the press process, not with aim of protecting the interest of their nations but rather to protect their personal causes and reputation. We then understand from this point of view that these regimes acknowledge the huge menaces freedom of expression can arise for both the togetherness of its nation and to its reputation. The concept of control on the press implemented by President Ahidjo was a direct linear copied from how the colonial believed regime had to apply in order to have a total control on their natives and the information sector. Cameroon Tribune was not the only newspaper after its creation by the government in 1974, yet the harsh censorship on other newspapers intercepted the public from having access to contrasting information.

Cameroon Tribune is the main public writing press in the country facing direct rivalry from other writing press in the country. Cameroon Tribune is known to ignore at times the existence of other private papers and condemn others irresponsibility without mentioning specific articles or names while commenting. Cameroon Tribune appears per day in French and twice in a week in English with its printing base in Yaoundé. This paper is known for its sided publications supporting the regime opinions and plan of action. It is then sure to see the president pictures and enticing titles the next day of his public statements, acts or interviews. This paper can as well be reviewed for days, weeks or even months in other to always remind the effect of the event especially when it was benefic for the people. Generally, Cameroon Tribute’s both normal and special editions are printed in favor of the regime.

*“In 1990, Paul Biya frequently refused offers for multi-party politics, confirming it had no interest in Cameroon. Cameroon Tribune reported this act and praised Biya’s decision. Yet, the multiparty politics system still appeared in December. With this, Cameroon Tribune was forced to reverse its position and congratulate the taken move confirming it as a great one towards democracy.”*

Lately, Cameroon Tribune has shown growth and changes that seem to let go an awareness of wider range of information. This situation has been accepted and respected by the regime. With this, the people then wonder if it is a strategy is a result of pressure from opponent papers or if it is part of Biya’s liberalization scheme.

In 1985 was the period Cameroon met with the Television. This mass communication form attracted the natives. At that time, there was only a government channel with limited broadcast hours in both English and French. Viewers then watched the programs and discussed their thoughts at the end. Yet the public television resisted to give airtime to those with different political points of view creating a huge powerful medium at the disposal of the ruling regime. The press monopoly system in Cameroon is seen challenged in four ways;

1. The appearance of several foreign press branches sponsored by France like Radio France Internationale, Afrique No.1 and BBC. These radios serve westbound news report mostly contradicting CRTV reports. Cameroonians especially opponent natives often turn to their reports for uncensored debriefs of events happening in the country.



2. The appearance of foreign magazines and newspapers in the country. One of the most influential magazines is seen as “Jeune Afrique Economie”. This magazine is based in Paris and is known for its sharp critics towards the Cameroonian government. Yet its high purchase cost limits its accessibility.
3. The well-organized information system enlarged over years, the hand-to-hand passing of magazine and of course, the high rumor level in the country is in its own is a whole industry.
4. Lastly, the private press regularly erodes the credibility and reputation of the regime despite censorship. However, the risks taken by them is still not enough to remedy their own reliability towards the people.

Radio is known as one of the most important mass communication structures in Cameroon due to its affordability and sureness. This source of information is very important especially for the rural population with limited resources. Regional radios broadcast in native languages like Ewondo, Ffulde, Bamoun etc. meanwhile national radio transmit using both the colonial languages. The possession of private television and radio stations was legalized in December 1990 by the “Rights and Freedoms” law. However, this purchase remained a challenge to be reached by the citizens. The state-run Société camerounaise de radio et de télévision (CRTV) continued having the ownership of transmit in Cameroon since 1991.

Cameroon Tribune of today shows difficulties covering private events due to its fidelity to the government in power. In their coverings, CPDM covers almost the totality of the first page and still dominate the magazine with more articles. However, Cameroon Tribune is showing signs of acceptance towards opposition. In their redaction, we see publication not related to the regime with little or no edition Also, the television news also show an openness to freedom of speech, with this, debates conducted by opponent and where opinions are openly shared could be seen.

### 3.2. The Private Media in Cameroon

Since the liberalization of public life in Cameroon in 1990, relations between the private press and the government have been stormy, often tense and always marked by mutual mistrust. Hundreds of trials have already been held and journalists imprisoned. These figures earned by the regime in place often have gain concern of the press freedom organizations in particular and human rights in general. The repression of the media scene in Cameroon, which in 1996 had 1,300 titles declared to the Territorial Administration, is variable (Phillippart, 2000). It ranges from the legal framework, which allows abuses of all kinds, to death threats made against journalists, including imprisonment, bullying and harassment of all kinds. It mobilizes a plurality of agents and has given rise to specific functions. This domination of the media by the political field has harmful effects. In addition to the violence it generates and to which it has recourse, it contributes significantly to deconstruct and less formal the journalistic sector. This contribution analyzes the means used by the Cameroonian government to suppress “private journalism”, that is, any press that goes against the ruling power.

In the aftermath of independence and throughout the period of the single party (1960-1962 to 1990), social communication and freedom of expression were controlled by the authorities. Any independent press was strictly prohibited. By claiming to liberalize public life in 1990 under the street and Paris pressure, which now intended to condition official development assistance to democratic openness, the Cameroonian regime surreptitiously reintroduced provisions in the new so-called social communication laws that had caused terror under the one party. The law n° 90/052 declared on December 19, 1990 amended on January 4, 1996, organizes social communication in Cameroon.

Since 1990, article 113 of the penal code provides that “anyone who issues or propagates news misleading when this news is seen as a treat to negatively affects or harm the current regime or the people coherence”. The resemblance between the texts is striking to say the least; both revolve around undermining the respect due to public authorities, public order, national cohesion or unity, a concept that neither defines. These texts are modeled from the French law of July 29, 1881 (article 69) on freedom of expression. In both cases, by taking over this law on its own, the Cameroonian State has killed its founding spirit, which posits as an inalienable principle "the free communication of opinions and thoughts" (Nyamnjoh Beng, 1996) .

The laws of the pre-1990 period was intended to stifle any desire of freedom of speech. After 1990, self-censorship was encouraged. Detention (sometimes even preventive), sentences to large fines and payment of large damages are common practices. The inflation of press trials was due to the establishment of “reading cells” in the courts. The results have been catastrophic. For example, the daily Mutations, founded in 1996, already totals more than ten lawsuits that is, more than one lawsuit per year alone. In 1998, this newspaper applied to the judge for interim measures to request the cancellation of the ban that the Ministry of Territorial Administration had taken against them. The newspaper won the case, a rare occurrence in Cameroon where, since 1990, journalists have regularly referred cases to the courts without the latter even deigning to call some of the cases brought to their attention (Tchindji, December 1990).

The laws on which the courts rely to imprison and tax journalists exist above all to repress writing that is not deemed favorable to the regime in place. Relying on these provisions, the magistrates put many press organs in difficulty. A journalist and the newspaper for which he writes can be prosecuted for biased comments, removal of administrative documents, destruction of documents, etc., often without tangible proof. All this being left to the discretion of the public prosecutor, the exercise of the profession of journalist becomes problematic, to say the least.

In addition to judicial repression, journalists and newspapers have long had to face the “steamroller” of the Cameroonian bureaucratic apparatus. Until 1996, before going to the printers, each publisher had to submit all of what he intended to publish for reading by an official of the Territorial Administration. The latter decided what deserved to be edited or not. It was then common to open a newspaper to find blank or crossed out pages, which often had the opposite effect to the one intended by the authorities. These censored pages tended, rightly or wrongly, to convince readers that the newspapers thus reduced to silence were reliable. On the other hand, the Minister of Territorial Administration has not always ordered seizures. With the law of January 4, 1996, anyone who feels defamed or insulted can request and obtain the seizure of a newspaper. Since its illegal creation on November 17, 1979, *Le Messenger* (the most active private press) has experienced over 527 seizures and censorships of its writings “*La Nouvelle Expression*” (Atenga, 2004).

Arrests and brutality are legion in Cameroon. For many journalists, this violence is an integral part of their daily lives and shows that, since 1990, actors in the journalistic field have been privileged targets, both for the police and for individuals seeking justice. Since the media emerged as important cogs in the process of liberalizing public life, journalists have become key players in this story still being written. They have acquired a relative power which puts them in the center of the stage. When their work is appreciated, they are celebrated and rewarded; when it is deemed prejudicial to the interests that both defend, and depending on the nature of the harm, individuals, groups or institutions do not hesitate to retaliate against them.

Alongside physical abuse often inflicted as a sign of state control demonstrating its power, its “power to kill” imprisonment is one of the most common techniques for repressing journalists (octobre



1982). Those to whom this fate is reserved undergo unproportioned sanctions to the “crime” they are supposed to have committed. They are treated not as civilians who have broken the law, but as political offenders. Paddy Mbawa, publication director at the Cameroon Post (Bernault, 1999), is the journalist who has spent the longest continuous time in prison (twelve months). Yet Pius Njawé remains the most famous journalist-prisoner, in particular for having stayed ten months in New-Bell prison in Douala for spreading false news: in December 1997, He wrote a paper affirming a fact in which the President Biya had endured a heart attack while attending a Cameroonian football match during the final cup.

In Cameroonian prisons, there are “districts” reserved for personalities, even those who have been guilty of embezzlement of public funds or similar crimes. They often receive consideration and other preferential treatment in order to “soften” their confinement. Imprisoned journalists, for their part, obviously do not benefit from this type of treatment (Bernault, 1999). The internment of journalists is indeed the emanation and the putting into practice of a power relationship (Njawé, 1998, s. 15). Disciplinary apparatuses such as prison, and the way in which coercion is used in a country are, as we know, revealing the nature of the regime in place. The more the legitimacy of a power is real, solid, the more it can do without coercion. In addition, the situation of imprisoned journalists in Cameroon says a lot about the state that locks them up.

### 3.3. Regional Media in Cameroon

Regional media is an old reality for different countries (Martin, 2002). This model of production and dissemination of information was consolidated from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> in one of its colonial power, France. It asserted itself in its contemporary form at the end of the 1930s. In Cameroon, the pioneering media had above all a local or regional ambition (Sah, 1975). We can cite by way of illustration: Newspaper of the villages of Nyong and Sanaga, The news of Mungo, The bamiléké, The future of Adamaoua, The Kwifo, Mulee Nguea, etc. None of these newspapers created before independence in 1960 no longer appears today. The model has evolved depending, among other things, on technological developments and the strategies of national and multinational media. The offensive of large groups has given the impression that local or regional media could disappear. However, beyond the explosion of the written press in Cameroon since the beginning of the 1990s (Boh, 1998), more than 300 radio stations and a hundred television channels whose activities are limited to part of the territory only were administratively declared between 2000 and 2017. We thus observe in this country, despite the competition, a certain boom in regional media, which arouses curiosity.

The studies that have been devoted to regional media in Cameroon firstly show that regional media report on the life of the territories to which they are devoted according to a worldview that simplifies social relations by favoring community cohesion (Loïc, 2008, s. 148-149). These media generally perform five main functions. That is informative, integrative, unifying, identity and citizen wellbeing (Michel, Debeaurain, & Hélène and Diaz, 2001, s. 287-289). They are generally “consensual” even if some display their neutrality and a critical sense in relation to the established powers. Some reflections expose their shortcomings as to how they take care of the needs of their audiences; this has contributed in particular to the acceleration of some communication by local and regional authorities. Some studies emphasize the importance of local and regional media for the development of the territories of which they participate in the construction (Isabelle, 1993).

We can a priori think that the current growth of regional media in Cameroon is a consequence of the effective liberalization of the audiovisual sector in the year 2000 (Michel T. E., 2001), and especially of the implementation, as early as 2008, of decentralization (Alawadi, 2018) that they accompany. If this explanation can be received, it seems insufficient in a context where there is fierce

competition between the media as well as an unprecedented deployment of new technologies that give all products a chance to express themselves by making it possible to connect the local to the global more (Anderson, 2007). Hence the need to prolong the reflection by questioning the specific positioning of these media. Taking inspiration from a marketing conceptualization that Dussart and Cloutier (1992), for example, question, positioning, here, refers both to the place that a publication wishes to occupy in a competitive environment and to the perception that social actors have of it to justify membership in this publication and, therefore, its existence (Dussart & Michel Cloutier, 1992). This positioning can be studied by grasping several aspects of the existence of regional media. Above all, they are products of the imagination, the success of which depends above all on the strength of the concept, that is, on a vision corresponding to what an audience wants. That is why we choose to analyze the positioning of regional media based on their editorial lines.

The editorial line is a set of ideal considerations that form the basis for the existence and functioning of a media outlet. The choice of subjects and their treatment, as well as possibly the way of making them available for public consumption, espouse norms and principles contained in these considerations. These are expressed based on a way of seeing based on certain values and, in the case of regional media, a particular way of considering the past, present and future situation of a territory and, consequently, of the social groups attached to it. Some speak of it in terms of an “editorial line” that they conceive as “the vision of the world and of current events to which a whole team of journalists adheres and which they want to share with their audience” (Fra & Ngangue Eyoun , 2018, s. 22). To be published, a media content is thus judged according to its degree of conformity with the editorial line, which defines, in its practical dimension, "the priorities and fields of interest of editorial content. The editorial line thus affirms the personality of a media specifies its offer in a market and validates the role it is called to play.

In some countries, it has become customary to analyze the editorial lines of the media by classifying them on the left, center or right, according to a classic structuring of the political field. This classification inspired by Marxist and capitalist ideologies seems inoperative with regard to regional media. It is even less so in African contexts where one would have “imposed” on the peoples a democracy “ignorant” of the particular modalities of organization of societies under colonial domination (Rignault, 2012, s. 59-71). The non-realization of these classical benchmarks complicates the analysis of the editorial lines of the media considered here. Therefore, this contribution proposes to unravel this complexity by answering the question of according to what logic the editorial lines of regional media in Cameroon are designed to position them and guarantee their existence. We apprehend logics here as underlying structures of meaning that permanently orient the understanding of an object.

The understanding of the regional media landscape in Cameroon is primarily based on that of the notion of “region” and the phrase “regional media”. It is thus useful to proceed to their terminological clearing before proposing an overview of regional media in the Cameroonian territory. According to the works of some geographers like (Keerle, 2004), the region can be considered according to criteria of biophysical homogeneity, cultural continuity and economic coherence, political-administrative interest, etc. These criteria are applied here to Cameroon. Cameroon is located in both the central and western part of Africa with a population of 27,730,780 inhabitants spread over 472,710 Km<sup>2</sup> according to the World Bank. Administratively, the Constitution of January 18, 1996 organizes the country into ten Regions. The Adamawa, the East, the Extreme North, the Center, the Littoral, the North, the Northwest, the West, the South and the Southwest. Each (administrative) Region comprises several Departments, which, in turn, group administrative districts, each administrative district corresponding in principle to a community. We could also, thanks to the

linguistic heritage inherited from colonial rule, talk about the Anglophone region (former Southern Cameroon under mandate and then under English tutelage) and the Francophone region (former eastern Cameroon under mandate and then under French tutelage). It is from this heritage that the expressions "Francophone press" and "Anglophone press" come from. The contours of a region in Cameroon therefore depend essentially on the interest that guides the delimitations.

Inspired by the works of (Ballarini, 2008), regional media can be perceived as any mass information medium like written newspaper, radio, television, online news site, etc. These mediums produces and disseminates in a given region and if necessary in a particular language content that, reflecting concerns specific to it, are likely to have an influence on life in the territorial space considered. With the evolution of production and dissemination technologies, (Noyer & Raoul Bruno, 2011, s. 5) propose to retain as a fundamental criterion for the identification of a regional media the publication of content from a point of view:

*Anchored territorially, argued in the light of regional or local issues and interests, where information - its selection as well as its processing and its dissemination - is often the object of a pre-framing in which interest in its natural form is dominant. What distinguishes these media is the image they project of a region according to the issues that mobilize them. Therefore, they put into perspective facts that occur in their region of interest and make them perceive in a special way the facts that occur elsewhere.*

State-owned media assert their presence in the regions through dismemberments. The Press and Publishing Company of Cameroon, publisher of Cameroon Tribune, Cameroon Business Today, Nyanga, The Week-end, etc., has headquarters in each capital of the Region. None of these publications, however, has a regional edition. Just recently, the "national bilingual daily French/English", Cameroon tribune, offers "Regional" pages inside its editions. The television component of the country national station "Cameroon Radio Television CRTV", for its part, has in the regions only the units incorporated in the regional sound broadcasting stations. It offers newspaper editions on the daily news of the Regions as well as some special programs dedicated to the regions. Unlike the press and television, the CRTV Radio side has, in addition to the "National Post" located in Yaoundé (capital of the country), ten "regional stations" as well as "local FM" stations. They relay some programs of the Poste-national, mainly the major editions of newspapers and some magazines including Cameroon Calling, Sports and Rhythms. However, the main part of their program schedules still consists of a regional menu.

*"These regional stations have their headquarters in the regional capitals: For CRTV Adamaoua, the headquarter is in Ngaoundéré. That of CRTV East, is in Bertoua, CRTV Extreme North is in Maroua, CRTV Center is in Yaoundé, CRTV Littoral in Douala, CRTV North in Garoua, CRTV North-West is in Bamenda, CRTV West is in Bafoussam, CRTV South is in Ebolowa and that of CRTV South-West is in Buea region. There is as regional radio stations FM 94 in Yaoundé, FM 105 Suellaba in Douala, Mount Cameroon FM in Buea, Poala FM in Bafoussam, Kousseri FM in Kousseri, Yagoua FM in Yagoua, Kribi FM in Kribi, etc."*

The liberalization of the audiovisual sector in Cameroon was enshrined in the 1990 law on social communication, but it was only on April 3, 2000 that the decree implementing this law was published. After the effective liberalization of the audiovisual sector from April 2000, there has been a frantic creation of radio stations in all regions of the country. By way of illustration, we can cite the four Regions that are often considered to be the least well-off in terms of media: the East, Adamawa, the North and the Far North. According to data collected from the regional Communications

delegations in March 2016, the East had 16 private radio stations; Adamawa 8; North 9 and Far North 9. These are only the declared stations. In the opinion of the regional delegates, some issue intermittently and without reporting to the authorities. Private television, as far as it is concerned, also asserts a presence in the Regions. Compared to the 90s when it did not exist, regional television is experiencing significant penetration. In 2013, according to the ministry of communication of Cameroon, the Adamawa region had 1 private television channel, the North-West 5, the West 4, the South 1, the South-West 2 and the North 2 ([www.mincom.gov.cm](http://www.mincom.gov.cm)). Today, there is an increase in numbers with no precise record.

In addition to the public network, there are many private initiatives in the print and audiovisual media that meet the criteria for identifying regional media. In print media, the initiatives are plethoric if we rely on the statistics that can be collected from the decentralized services of the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Thus, in the Western Region, for example, there are 28 print media outlets, including 7 in the Mifi Department, 8 in the Ndé, 5 in the Haut-Nkam, 3 in the Noun and 2 in the Bamboutos (Augustine, 2017).

### Conclusion

As in majority parts of the world, the ruling power has a massive influence on the press of the country. The end of political extremity and the adoption of laws on freedoms in the 1990s inaugurated a new era for the press in Cameroon, which regained all its freedom of tone and its dynamism, the authorities taking the option of leaving the journalist facing their conscience and the judgment of their peers. However, very quickly the press fell back into its lacks, opening the door to all excesses and vindicating the supporters of the thesis that journalism cannot be conceived without control. Thus, paradoxically, the loosening of controls, which favored the abundance of titles, corresponds rather to a loss of quality, prestige and credibility of the press. Failing to respect the rules that govern their profession, journalists commit devastating excesses and criticisms multiply in the face of the dangers of an irresponsible press. The profession in Cameroon is entering a new crisis: precariousness, divisions, absence of fellowship, recurring legal and administrative sanctions are the common lot of it.

The demand for a return to morality in the profession is becoming more and more pressing, the excesses to regained freedom is obviously causing a security withdrawal not necessarily to the advantage of the press. The image of journalists, once admired, is rapidly deteriorating in Cameroon and the aesthetic, technical and ethical triptych is indeed the thread of the analysis for the revolution of the press marked by the permanence of the quest for professionalism.

At the same time, this situation emerges from the above developments that regional media are an ancient reality in Cameroon, of course, but that their development has undergone an unprecedented evolution in recent years. Thanks to the liberalization of the audiovisual sector in the year 2000, the implementation of decentralization and taking advantage of new technologies, this category of media is now "saturating" the Cameroonian media landscape. Regional media in the country discourse displayed, through their proper names and the indications that accompany them, illustrates well the idea that they believe and defend. For most of them, their main aim is to promote their regions and by making the territory present in the denomination; the media updates its existence and challenges, in particular, those who feel concerned by its situation. In view of the evidence obtained from the field, defending and illustrating the regional interest is as same as calling the regional, national and even international audience attention to their region. This press type in the country is therefore there to maintain the link between the natives of the region in such a way that everyone is sensitive to the need to contribute to the development of the said region and to take care of the cord that binds it to its origin. It is to establish, in its editorial approach, a relationship between

the current situation of the region and its future. In this way, generally the journalists or even the population of the region feel more motivated in the addition to the trust they have already while feeling closer to the reporting made generally in their local languages.

As a whole, we can say after this work that the hypothesis formulated at the beginning, namely whether there was freedom of speech for both the private and public journalism in Cameroon is seen with a huge control of the government on how and what to produce follow with different sanctions for those not coping. This none shocking situation can be traced in different other countries in the world and we then ask ourselves what will be the future of this profession, is journalism condemned to a perpetual dissymmetry in power for its different sectors and journalists?

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