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# Human Resource Management (Hrm) and Cameroon Civilisation: Case of Customs Administration (CCA)

*Dr. Aloumedjo Zam Thierry Farrel*

## ABSTRACT

The aim of our study is to identify and apprehend deeply the concept of civilization in Cameroon in order to determine the link in between civilization and human resource in Cameroon public Service. This will enable to understand how civilization and phenomena such as tribalism, nepotism, favouritism are linked. It will also be question to explore nepotism and favouritism as causes of ineffective system of accountability and ineffective HRM management in the Cameroon Customs. At the end of our scrutiny we shall formulate possible recommendations concerning the link between civilization and HRM in the CCA. Our study presents three main interest respectively an academic interest, a professional interest and finally a socio-political interest. Our study falling in the domains of ethnography and management, three main methods were employed which are participant observation, interviews, and archival research in order to collect reliable data for our research. The study confirms that in specific sensitive public service such as customs, tribalism and hate speech seem to be rising and it kills competence. Corruption practices, nepotism and favoritism, as well as tribalism, have grown to levels previously unknown.

**Keywords:** civilisation; performance; nepotism; sociometry; culture.

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# Human Resource Management (Hrm) and Cameroon Civilisation: Case of Customs Administration (CCA)

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of our study is to identify and apprehend deeply the concept of civilization in Cameroon in order to determine the link in between civilization and human resource in Cameroon public Service. This will enable to understand how civilization and phenomena such as tribalism, nepotism, favouritism are linked. It will also be question to explore nepotism and favouritism as causes of ineffective system of accountability and ineffective HRM management in the Cameroon Customs. At the end of our scrutiny we shall formulate possible recommendations concerning the link between civilization and HRM in the CCA. Our study presents three main interest respectively an academic interest, a professional interest and finally a socio-political interest. Our study falling in the domains of ethnography and management, three main methods were employed which are participant observation, interviews, and archival research in order to collect reliable data for our research. The study confirms that in specific sensitive public service such as customs, tribalism and hate speech seem to be rising and it kills competence. Corruption practices, nepotism and favoritism, as well as tribalism, have grown to levels previously unknown. It is therefore recommended among others to multiply and effectively implement recommandations from studies on Cameroonian culture with regards to political, administrative and socio economic impact ; carry out an analysis of cultural identities in the CCA : this implies a chart on the ethnical representations in the said administration in order to identify demographic and strategic data for HRM policy and put in place a cultural HRM policy to efficiently use the various civilizational resources . Also, it would be relevant valueing the strengths of different cultures to put in place mechanisms to tackle the identified weaknesses. The innovation here is that it proposes a cultural map and ethnical analysis of an organization in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each culture so as to put it at the service of the general interest.*

**Keywords:** civilisations ; performance ; nepotism ; sociometry ; culture.

*"Creating and managing a diverse workforce is a process, not a destination." — R. Roosevelt Thomas,  
"Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly" — Martin Luther King, Jr.*

## I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 General presentation of the study

Archeology, first inhabitants, migrations, explorations, slavery, colonisation, independance, rituals, kingdoms, secret society, symbols, powers, dominions, ancestors worshipping, ethnies, ethnologies, primary languages, sculpture, scarving, paintings, music, dances, architectures, fighting arts and visions of the world have influenced the formation of traditionnal communities and their structuration, the way they are ruled and managed, let it be in the productive or non productive sector.

In the modern era, HRM refers to strategic and coherent approach to the effective and efficient management of human capital in a company or organization (Becker, 1994). It appears from studies in sociometry (Moreno, 1951) and in ethnography (Malinowski, B., 1929) that *social interactions and behaviours that occur within communities or organisations can scientifically measure the level of social relationships in groups* can sometimes determine the management policies.

The rich cultural diversity has earned Cameroon the nickname “Africa in miniature.” Cameroon has a rich and diverse culture made up of a mix of about 250 indigenous populations and just as many languages and customs. To that effect, the Head of State emphasized in his message on the 10th of September 2019 on the importance of unity as guaranteed by the Constitution. He clearly stated that the future of our compatriots in the North-West and South-West Regions devastated by secessional velleities lies within our Republic i.e. Cameroon will remain one and indivisible. This implies the need for a performant workplace diversity involving all individuals and organizations.

The Cameroon Customs administrations (CCA) is worth studying considering the case of the aborted appointments of the general director (DGD) in 2020 on the alleged ground of tribalism or sectarianism due to the high number of appointees i.e. around 50% coming from the grassfieds from which he originates. Tcheumaga (2021)<sup>1</sup> states that tribalism is this gangrene that has undermined the African continent in general and Cameroon in particular. People are appointed to strategic positions because of their social and cultural background not because of their competence. This situation is a serious cause for alarm in a developing country where majority are living under harsh conditions and are in dare need of a performant public service to regulate and ensure well being regardless of origins and cultural background.

The importance of this preoccupation justifies our study entitled « Human Resource Management (HRM) and Cameroon civilisation : case of Cameroon Customs Administration (CCA). Our work is divided into 13 parts i.e Contextual background, historical background of the country, problem rationale, research interests and objective, research methods, brief review of Cameroon’s civilisations, realities of tribalism in Cameroon, the link between ethnographic implications and HRM, organisational diagnosis of CCA, limitations observed, recommandations, research innovation then conclusions.

## 1.2 *Contextual background*

Cameroon is marked by a particular socio-demographic, socio-cultural, socio-political, socio-economic and socio-administrative realities.

### 1.2.1. *Brief Socio-demographic overview*

According to DeLancey, Mark W.; DeLancey, Mark Dike (2000) as well as various national census made, the socio demography<sup>2</sup> of Cameroon is characterized by a complex structuration. In fact out of a population<sup>1</sup> around 30 millions inhabitants in 2024, the country comprises an estimated 250 distinct ethnic groups, which may be formed into five large regional-cultural divisions:

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<sup>1</sup> Ethnic bias has been a fateful political weapon in parts of Africa. In many cases, this bias has led to genocide. Tribalism is, therefore, this gangrene that has undermined the African continent in general and Cameroon in particular since the official end of the colonial period. The risk of having a genocide is very high in Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup> According to the 2022 revision of the World Population Prospects the total population was 27,198,628 in 2021, compared to only 4 466 000 in 1950.

- western highlanders (Semi-Bantu or grassfielders), including the Bamileke, Bamum (or Bamoun), and many smaller Tikar groups in the Northwest (est. 38% of total population);
- coastal tropical forest peoples, including the Bassa, Duala (or Douala), and many smaller groups in the Southwest (12%);
- southern tropical forest peoples, including the Beti-Pahuin, Bulu (a subgroup of Beti-Pahuin), Fang (subgroup of Beti-Pahuin), Maka, Njem, and Baka pygmies (18%);
- predominantly Islamic peoples of the northern semi-arid regions (the Sahel) and central highlands, including the Fulani (French: Peul or Peuhl; Fula: Fulbe) (14%); and
- the "Kirdi", non-Islamic or recently Islamic peoples of the northern desert and central highlands (18%).

There are 24 major African language groups in Cameroon; additionally, English and French are official languages. Cameroonian Pidgin English is also widely spoken. Majority of the population around 60% is under 18 years old. Eight out of the ten regions of Cameroon are primarily francophone, representing 83% of the country's population, and two are anglophone, representing 17%. The official percentage of French and English speakers by the Presidency of Cameroon is estimated to be 70% and 30% respectively.

#### 1.2.2 Brief Socio-cultural overview

The websites entitled *Discover Cameroon culture*<sup>3</sup> gives us a brief and sufficient details about the cultural background of the country. We can read from the said site that Cameroon has 250-300 distinct groups, and an estimated 300+ languages. Cameroon has a diverse population comprising approximately 250 ethnic groups that then form 5 regional/cultural groups. About 40% of the population follows some form of indigenous beliefs, 40% adhere to a form of Christianity, and 20% are Muslim. The North of the country is primarily Muslim while the South tends to have more Christians.

The various cultural groups as stated earlier are the western highlanders (also called grassfielders), which include the Bamileke, Bamoun, and many smaller groups in the northwest; coastal tropical forest people, which include the Bassa, Douala, and many smaller groups in the southwest; southern tropical forest people, which include the Beti, Beulu, Fang, and Pygmies; Muslims of the northern semi-arid regions and central highlands, which include the Fulani; and the Kirdi, non-Muslims peoples of the northern desert and central highlands.

#### 1.2.3. Brief Socio-political overview

According to the World Bank Report ( 2024), Cameroon Having enjoyed several decades of stability, has in recent years been grappling with attacks by Boko Haram in the Far North and a secessionist insurgency in the Anglophone regions. Since September 2017, this situation has displaced more than one million internally and around 470.000 refugees have sought shelter in Cameroon. Following the resurgence of the crisis in the Central African Republic since January 2021, over 6,000 Central Africans refugees fled to Cameroon's East region which was already hosting over 60 % of Central African refugees. According to UNHCR January 2024 figures, Cameroon is hosting over 478.680 refugees, primarily from the Central African Republic (73%) and Nigeria (26%).

#### 1.2.4. Brief Socio-economic overview

Following reports from the World Bank and the African Development Bank, Cameroon is a lower-middle-income country with a population of over 27.9 million (2022). Located along the Atlantic

<sup>3</sup> <https://discover-cameroon.com/en/culture-languages-religions/>

Ocean, it shares its borders with the Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Nigeria. Two of its border regions with Nigeria (northwest and southwest) are Anglophone, while the rest of the country is Francophone. Cameroon is endowed with rich natural resources, including oil and gas, mineral ores, and high-value species of timber, and agricultural products, such as coffee, cotton, cocoa, maize, and cassava. Poverty was estimated at 37.5% in 2014, down slightly from 39.9% in 2007. The economy of Cameroon was one of the most prosperous in Africa for a quarter of a century after independence. The drop in commodity prices for its principal exports – petroleum, cocoa, coffee, and cotton – in the mid-1980s, combined with an overvalued currency and economic mismanagement, led to a decade-long recession.

### *1.2.5. Socio-administrative realities*

According to Warai (2021) administrative practices have for sometimes seen the proliferation of unconventional practices in the management of administrative services which are causes of under-development in Cameroon. Among such informal practices we can list nefarious ones such as tribalism, favoritism and nepotism, corruption. As well as negatives ones including poor infrastructure, burdensome bureaucracy and questionable governance in general (2024 Doing business report).

According to Jeff Smith (2019), state corruption, nepotism and favoritism, as well as tribalism, have grown to levels previously unknown. And within this toxic environment, excellence and merit are no longer a consideration, thus perpetuating the mediocrity that now prevails in our public sector. Tribalism, nepotism and political servility had reached alarming proportions igniting a feeling of rejection. Corruption is manifested in Cameroon in several ways including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, tribalism, fraud, theft, patron client.

Concerning administration in itself, we can with disarray but still with some reserves read an alarming report from the International Trade Administration meant for international US businesses the following : « Cameroon ranked 142nd out of 179 countries in Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index. While significant economic opportunities exist, inefficiencies are a drag on growth. GDP grew by 3.5% in 2022, which roughly matched aggregate growth for Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the World Bank. Despite seemingly low salaries, Cameroon's vast civil service is one of the most expensive in Sub-Saharan Africa after accounting for non-wage compensation. Delays in project completion and financially struggling state-owned enterprises add to the problem. Almost all business transactions require senior-level government approval, making for a cumbersome process susceptible to political influence and corruption.

### *1.3. Brief historical background of Cameroon*

The historical facts of Cameroon are as follow :

- Tribes lived in Cameroon's highlands more than 1,500 years ago and began spreading south as they cleared forests for new farms.
- Cameroon's colonial name comes from the cameros, or prawns, that 15th-century explorers found in the Wouri River.
- 1520 - Portuguese set up sugar plantations and begin slave trade in Cameroon.
- 1600s - Dutch take over slave trade from Portuguese.
- From 1884, Cameroon was a German colony, German Kamerun, with its borders drawn through negotiations between the Germans, British, and French.
- After the First World War, the League of Nations mandated France to administer most of the territory, with the United Kingdom administering a small portion in the west.
- 1884 - Cameroon becomes the German colony of Kamerun.

- 1911 - Under the Treaty of Fez - signed to settle the Agadir Crisis Franco-German conflict over Morocco - France cedes territories to the east and south to Cameroon.
- 1916 - British and French troops force Germans to leave Cameroon.
- 1919 - London Declaration divides Cameroon into French (80%) and British administrative zones (20%). The British zone is divided into Northern and Southern Cameroons.
- Independence: 1960 - French Cameroon granted independence and becomes the Republic of Cameroon with Ahidjo as president. Ahmadou Ahidjo was Cameroon's first post-independence leader.
- 1961 - Britain's Cameroons colonies divide between Cameroon and Nigeria after a referendum. A large-scale insurrection mars the country's first years of independence until it is put down in 1963 with the help of French forces.

#### 1.4. Problem rationale

Tribalism, nepotism, corruption and other vices are often observed in our country whether in business or public service among which customs administration is usually concerned. Unfortunately those who are concerned hardly think they are guilty of any wrongdoing because they believe they are protecting each other through tribe or regional ties. National cohesion is thereby put to the test of reality in our public administration. Politics in Cameroon is intertwined with administration and the former is based on principles of regionalism not always performance which is least considered in positioning. Nepotism and favouritism as well as ineffective system of accountability are very often the order of the day influencing the decision making process. Tribalism and hate speech seem to be rising in Cameroon and it kills competence. State corruption, nepotism and favoritism, as well as tribalism, have grown to levels previously unknown.

The President of the Republic recognized this preoccupation and stated that Cameroon really needs true national Unity, it should not be the victim of tribalism, nepotism, carelessness and corruption. Therefore the problem in our study is the negative effects of nepotism and favouritism in the Customs administration, with regard to the human resource management policy. Therefore we can ask ourselves the following questions :

- What is Cameroon civilization all about ?
- Is there a link in between civilization and human resource in Cameroon public Service ?
- How can civilization and phenomena such as tribalism, nepotism, favouritism be linked ?
- Can we consider nepotism and favouritism as causes of ineffective system of accountability and ineffective HRM management in the Cameroon Customs ?
- How are these phenomena identified as causes of poor performance in public service in general and Customs administration in particular ?
- Why is it necessary to eradicate these phenomena through an effective HRM management ?
- What are the possible recommendations ?

#### 1.5. Research interests and objectives

Our study presents three main interest respectively an academic interest, a professional interest and a socio-political interest.

The academic interest of our research lies in the fact that the present study is considered crucial in learning and developing skills concerning concepts, variables , theories and principles on management, ethnography , Sociology and sociometry with specific focus on the case study of Cameroon public service in general and Customs administration in particular.

The professional or managerial interest of our analysis is based on the fact that civilizations' side effects such as nepotism or favouritism are issues to be faced by managers in general and public managers in particular. Moreover in this study we are motivated by the prospect of discovering new knowledge or developing innovative solutions in the HRM of the CCA.

The socio political interest of our research underlies on the fact that the results of this research is as a result socially constructed, and emerging as potential solutions to social and political issues and possible guidelines ideologies.

As far as the objectives of our research are concerned they are as follows :

- Identify and apprehend deeply the concept of civilization in Cameroon.
- Determine the link in between civilization and human resource in Cameroon public Service.
- Understand how civilization and phenomenon such as tribalism, nepotism, favouritism are linked.
- Explore nepotism and favouritism as causes of ineffective system of accountability and ineffective HRM management in the Cameroon Customs.
- Formulate possible recommendations concerning the link between civilization and HRM in the CCA.

#### *1.6. Research methods*

Our study falling in the domains of ethnography and management, three main methods were employed which are participant observation, interviews, and archival research. This will enable us to collect reliable data for our research.

As far as participant observation is concerned, it should be stressed out that the researcher is a senior customs officer in activity for a considerable number of times. So as a complete participant observer he could immerse himself in the Customs administration social setting and group enabling him to observe behaviours, interactions and practices of the participants in the particular social context.

Concerning interviews, Qualitative interviews organized by open-ended questions were asked to 03 major top managers of the Customs administration in charge of human resource issues who required confidentiality, our aim was to seek in-depth explanations of traditions, experiences and perceptions concerning the link tradition, nepotism, tribalism and HRM of the CCA.

With regard to archival methodology, we studied historical documents about civilizations especially that of Cameroon, that is, documents created at some point in the relatively distant past, providing us access that we might not otherwise have to the organizations, individuals, and events of that earlier time.

#### *1.7. Brief review of Cameroon's civilisations*

- The country's name is derived from Rio dos Camarões ("River of Prawns"), the name given to the Wouri River estuary by Portuguese explorers of the 15th and 16th centuries.
- Cameroon is a secular state with a diversity of religions, whose followers coexist peacefully together. Christianity and Islam are the two most widespread religions, around 70% Christians; 20.9% Muslims; 5.6% animists and 3.2% free thinkers.
- With its cultural diversity, Cameroon is a "plural exception" represented around four main cultural areas: the Sudano-Sahelians, the Sawa, the Fang-Beti-Bulu, the Grassfields.
- Cameroon has more than 240 tribes which are found in three main ethnic groups; Bantus, Semi-Bantus and Sudanese. The most notable tribes are: Bantus: Beti, Bassa, Bakundu, Maka, Douala, Pygmies.

- Cameroon is often qualified as Africa in miniature because of its rich cultural and geographical diversity. In spite of this diversity, the country has been demarcated into cultural zones (Spheres).
- The Grass field sphere (zone), comprising of North West Regions and the West Regions.
- The Fang-Beti Cultural Sphere, comprising the Centre, South and East Regions.
- The Sawa cultural Zone (Sphere), comprising the Littoral and the South West Regions.
- The Sudano-Sahelian Cultural Zone, comprising Adamawa, North and Far North Regions.

### *1.8. Cameroon's cultural zones and inferences for HRM analysis*

The country Cameroon is also divided into four major cultural areas: the Fang-Béti zone, the Sudano-Sahelian zone, the coastal zone and the Grassland. Each of these cultures is endowed with an exceptional particularity.

*The Grass field sphere (zone), comprising of North West Regions and the West Regions*

The Western Grassfields, referred to administratively as the North West Province, covers 17,910km<sup>2</sup> of the western portion of the grassfields of Cameroon. All Grassfields peoples (and indeed most Cameroonian peoples) believe in the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Supreme Being, whose name changes depending on the language spoken. Grassfields people believe in the cult of ancestors, the dead are never truly dead, they are just the realm of the invisible. There is an emphasis on the veneration of material belongings, tombs or skulls in some cases is very much ordinary. It is during the funeral that the deceased's skull is exhumed and given a house and so becomes a venerable ancestor and saint figure.

According to Dongmo (1981), In the Grassfields, the demographic expansion, and the limited amount of land to share or inherit created different waves of migration, within and later outside of Cameroon. This phenomenon started in the beginning of the 20th century when primarily young men left their homes to meet the emerging workforce demands in urban centers like Yaoundé, Limbé (then Victoria), Buea and Douala.

For Grassfields people, elitism achieved through personal success has always been encouraged and rewarded by titles of notability. Thus, migration came to represent a possibility of upward mobility. The people of this area are recognized by their economic dynamism. Being a very mobile and dynamic community, the Bamileke exploited the new corridor to systematically move to the Bamenda Grasslands in former British Southern.

The dynamism of grasslands population especially in economy is world wide recognized, a study by the US Agency for international development revealed that Cameroon is one of Africa's most ethnically and linguistically diverse countries. The Bamileke of Cameroon are one of the most enterprising ethnic groups in Africa. Their success in private-sector activities is traced in this study to (1) their traditional culture, which places a premium on the development of economically relevant personal skills; (2) external variables, such as the effect of land pressures, population density, and urban migration; and (3) the economic functions of traditional institutions.

*The implications of the grassfields cultural traits as far as HRM is concerned is that*

- There is a sense of strong group solidarity of the Bamileke and other grasslands people;
- individual achievement is highly valued;

- members of the group are expected to exercise individual initiative in the pursuit of economic goals ; Individual acquisition of economic resources including private property, money, and other remuneration is stressed ;
- unlike the situation in many traditional African cultures, the social status of an individual in this ethnic group is not rigidly fixed;
- Individuals male or female can improve their condition in life and are expected to do so ; Commercial and business success is one of the most highly valued routes to prestige and status ;
- grasslands women are equal to men in the economic sense, they are also expected to achieve economic and commercial success and there are few traditional limits ;
- the spirit of innovation, the grasslands people have consistently responded to a changing economic environment due to their creativity and sense of adaptation ;
- the spirit of Competition, the traditional values stresses individual competition and overt displays of 'getting ahead. Individual are expected to compete and to surpass each other's accomplishment.

*The Fang-Beti Cultural Sphere, comprising the Centre, South and East Regions :*

- The Fang-Beti cultural area covers the Centre, East and South Regions that make up the equatorial forest region bordered on the north by the savannah. It is inhabited mostly by sedentary Bantu farmers and a few Ubanguian groups.
- The traditions of these peoples reveal an ancient occupation of the area by nomadic hunters and gatherers who currently make up three groups: the Bakas in the East, the Bakolas in the South and the Bedzans in the Centre, a transition zone between the forest and the Savannah.
- It is essentially constituted of egalitarian exogamous communities.
- Economy: Farming, hunting, fishing, commerce.
- Within traditional Fang society, the social distribution of responsibilities for children is based on both male domination and overall maternal power. This configuration of links by descent is the basis for parenthood within this society (Ndong, 2022).
- The origins of the Fang-Beti is unclear. Their traditions are based on myths, tales and legends.
- Their stories are handed down through their artistry and their music. They are also famous for the many festivals and cultural events organized annually with the dance, theatre, music and art.

*The implications of the fang-beti cultural traits as far as HRM is concerned is that :*

- They have a patrilineal kinship social structure.
- The villages have been traditionally linked through lineage.
- They are exogamous, particularly on the father's side.
- Polygamy was accepted in the culture of the Fang people.
- The independence of villages from each other is notable, and they are famed for their knowledge of animals, plants and herbs in the Equatorial forests they live in.
- They are traditionally farmers and hunters, but became major cocoa farmers during the colonial era.
- Among the southern Fang there is little political organization, whereas in the north some Beti groups have clan chiefs.
- Society is strongly patrilineal, with resources and power passed down among male descendants. Young bachelors still live with father's village, but once of age, expected to marry outside of village and create new hut with bride in close proximity to father's.

*The Sawa cultural Zone (Sphere), comprising the Littoral and the South West Regions:*

- The major groups that constitute the Sawa cultural zone are the Doula, Bassa, Bakoko, Mbo (in the Littoral Region).

- The Sawa are fishermen, and some of their important cultural festivals are the “Ngondo” or the feast of the “Batangas” and FESTAC in Limbe etc.
- The coastal domain, home to the Sawa peoples (the water peoples), forms part of the larger Bantu group. Predominantly found in the Littoral region and other African territories, the Sawa societies share a rich historical lineage deeply entrenched in ancestral values.
- They are organised into communities scattered across large metropolises and small hamlets.

*The implications of the Sawa cultural traits as far as HRM is concerned is that:*

- The Duala leadership in 1884 placed the tribe under German rule.
- Most converted to Protestantism and were schooled along German lines.
- Colonial officials and businessmen preferred them as inexpensive clerks to German government offices and firms in Africa.
- They have historically played a highly influential role in Cameroon due to their long contact with Europeans, high rate of education, and wealth gained over centuries as slave traders and landowners.
- They are among the wealthiest and most educated peoples of Cameroon owing to their extensive trade with the outside world since the 16th century.
- They are attached to modernism, quality living and their independence.
- Some authors state that just like the Ocean they are powerful but serene, beautiful but dangerous.
- People who live on the coast typically have more of a relaxed, laid-back attitude due to the convenience of beaches and easy access to waters.

*The Sudano-Sahelian Cultural Zone, comprising Adamawa, North and Far North Regions*

- They are mainly found in the northern part of the country.
- These societies are highly structured into lamidats, sultanates and chiefdoms.
- Sudano sahelian people are usually nomadic culturally implying a high sense of freedom, adventurers
- They have a strong mercantile focus along coasts and rivers as well as nomads and raiders in the interior.
- They are highly diplomatic since access to water is very difficult so they tend to have an interactive mind which influences culture, trade and diplomacy.
- Considering their geographical realities, bureaucracy and centralization seem to be at the order of the day.

*The implications of the Sudano-Sahelian<sup>4</sup> cultural traits as far as HRM is concerned is that*

- The Sudanese are generally stoic people and private about their emotions. There is a dominant cultural norm that expects individuals to hide when they are in pain or struggling. Resilience, self-restraint and physical courage are admired.
- The notion of honour is central. People's awareness of their personal honour tends to guide behaviour and interactions in almost all circumstances. Personal honour is deeply intertwined with family reputation.

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<sup>4</sup> Mwaniki, 2018; Minority Rights Group International, 20182 Sikainga et al, 20183 Minority Rights Group International, 20184 Sikainga et al, 20185 Sharkey, 20086 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 20047 UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, 2017 8 US Department of State, 20179 Human Rights Watch, 200810 Al Jazeera, 201311 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 201612 International Criminal Court, 201813 UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, 201714 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 201615 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 201616 UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, 2017 17 CIA World Factbook, 201818 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2016

- Respectability and character are also reflected in the way people dress, the language they use, the hospitality they show their friends, the respect they give the elderly and their general demeanour.
- Humility is also a very important value. Individuals tend to be very modest about their accomplishments. Indeed, successes are expected to make people become more humble.
- Generosity and hospitality are core virtues, linked to people's honour. Dignity is found in being helpful, generous and charitable to others with everything (money, food, time, personal connections, etc.). People are often able to rely on the hospitality of strangers as an obligation to show hospitality.

### *1.9 Realities of tribalism in Cameroon*

Tribalism refers to a cultural term, a way of thinking or behaving in which people are more loyal to their tribes than to their countries or social groups. It is a serious issue in the sense that tribalism is considered a recipe for economic stagnation; a threat to social cohesion, and a major driver of unwarranted suspicion and fear, especially among the most vulnerable in society.

According to Asongu & Tedika (2017), countries with high-tribal populations generally enjoy bad governance in terms of government ineffectiveness. Government ineffectiveness and tribalism are found to mutually reinforce each other in a robust relationship. Clark et al. (2019) believe that tribal bias is a natural and nearly ineradicable feature of human cognition and that no group not even one's own is immune.

L Vail (1991) states that despite a quarter century of "nation building," most African states are still driven by ethnic particularism commonly known as "tribalism." The stubborn persistence of tribal ideologies is therefore a reality in most African countries. Tribalism is mostly observed among dominant ethnic groups (Lonsdale, 2011). Warai (2021) illustrated the use of informality in the Cameroon's public administration and also demonstrated with concrete facts its manifestation in our various administrative services.

Factors such as nepotism, corruption, and favoritism hinder the effectiveness of public administration processes. TS Ezeudu & ZY Ibrahim (2023) found out that with similar cultural contexts such as Ghana, Cameroon, Benin, Togo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, we can observe that patronage, nepotism, and tribalism in public administration is a real issue, as public officials seek to favor their closed ones with strategic positions by using the power vested into them by the State.

The study conducted by Lukamba & Molokwane (2017) shows that the English-speaking countries (Ghana and Nigeria) are better advanced in terms of public sector reform when compared to the two French-speaking states (Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). However, administrative problems remain in all the cases. Chief among these are corruption, nepotism and tribalism. Such issues have also had a negative impact on the development of public administration within these countries. Cases of tribalism in the appointment of staff is common in Cameroon public service such as denounced in social network and in the press in services such as the Secretary of State in charge of the prison administration, the ministry of defense, ANOR and the Customs administration ring a bell.

Concerning the Customs administration, tribalism is manifested through a discriminatory behavior or attitudes towards out-groups, based on in-group loyalty. Tribalism is also hallmark in the said administration, particularly as far as employees and some managers view their organisation as divisible and compartmentalised. They thus see their immediate co-workers and their part of the organisation as special, alienating people from other tribes within the same organisation whom they

paradoxically rely on to get things done. This helps in guaranteeing the interests of the tribalistic managers in securing financial and strategic gains.

### *1.10 The link between ethnographic implications and HRM*

According to Mahadevan (2020) ethnography is understood as a multi-paradigmatic mindset involving five interrelated strands, all of which have the potential to contribute to International Human Resource Management studies such as structural-functionalism ethnography ; interpretive ethnography ; critical ethnography ; postmodern ethnography and postcolonial ethnography.

Structural-functionalism emphasized the formal ordering of parts and their functional interrelations as contributing to the maintenance needs of a structured social system. structural-functionalism ethnography enables deep comparison and can thus contribute, for instance, to meeting the structural and institutional integration challenges of International Human Resource Management.

According to Smart (1998), Interpretive ethnography is a methodology for studying the ways in which a social group constructs and lives its particular, indigenous version of reality. It is useful to shed light onto the hidden realities of International Human Resource Management and can thus help, for example, to acknowledge the diversity of employee and stakeholder experiences.

Critical, postmodern, and postcolonial ethnography is useful to HRM managers in the sense that they reveal the power-inequalities associated with diverse frameworks, practices, and work experiences in a global context. They can thus help overcome the inherent power-inequalities utilize previously marginalized knowledge for the development of Human Resource Management.

Furthermore, by observing and engaging with employees in their work environments, ethnologists help HR teams create spaces that encourage knowledge sharing, enhance teamwork, and foster a sense of belonging. Market research, branding and marketing, workplace diversity and inclusion, and ethical and sustainable practices are also the fruits of ethnography<sup>5</sup> as far as management in general is concerned and HRM in particular. Also it plays a significant role in product management by leveraging cultural concepts for success. By understanding local contexts, applying holistic perspectives, and utilizing research methods, businesses can develop products better suited to their target market. It also helps people understand that even small differences can carry a big impact. The focus on cultural relativism i.e the idea that different cultures have their own unique values, beliefs, and practices that should be respected and understood on their own terms is relevant for an organization strategy.

### *1.11 Case study of CCA*

As a tax administration, Cameroonian Customs contributes to the mobilization of budgetary revenues. Revenues mobilized by customs services amount on average to 33% of the State's non-oil revenues. Customs thus plays an essential role in achieving the economic balance of the State. The Customs Administration participates in the creation of a legal and regulatory environment favorable to the development of economic activities. As such, it is responsible for protecting the national economic space.

The surveillance missions concern the protection of people and property. These missions take place more particularly at land, sea and air entry points. The protection of goods and people and the requirements of public order give customs particular responsibilities with regard to aviation security

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<sup>5</sup> The main advantage of ethnography is that it gives the researcher direct access to the culture and practices of a group. It is a useful approach for learning first-hand about the behavior and interactions of people within a particular context

and the fight against illicit trafficking and organized crime. As a paramilitary body, the customs administration may be called upon, in certain circumstances, to assist in the defense of territorial integrity and passport control at borders. Due to its presence at the borders, customs is required to carry out assistance missions for the benefit of other administrations. It thus provides support to various state services.

The Customs Administration is structured into central and devolved services. A 2018 report by Cameroon's National Anti-corruption Commission (CONAC) ranked Cameroon Customs as the most corrupt agency in the country between 2010 and 2015. CONAC found that customs officials were most corrupt in the Littoral, Far-North, South-West and Centre regions. South-West and Far-North form national boundaries with Nigeria and Chad. Porous borders such as these are among the most prone to criminal activities, and ineffective or corrupt customs services further fuel transnational organised crime (TOC).

The said « CONAC »<sup>6</sup> report stipulates that in the Far-North region, criminal activities include the smuggling of stolen vehicles originating from Central African countries such as Gabon and the Republic of Congo. Stolen vehicles are destined for resale in West African markets such as Nigeria and Togo. The Far-North is also known for trafficking and smuggling activities linked to the militant Islamist Boko Haram insurgency. Notably, it is also a gateway for smuggling tramadol – an opioid pain medication that is used as a recreational drug. Tramadol is trafficked from West Africa to countries in Central Africa, particularly Gabon and the Republic of Congo. The South-West region, which shares sea and land borders with Nigeria, has been identified as a conduit for the trafficking cannabis and small arms. A senior customs official, told ENACT that artisanal fishing is often used as a cover for other forms of TOC in the region. Fishing boats transport illicit arms and counterfeit goods, for example.

There is therefore a lot of inner fights in between customs officials concerning strategic positions giving access to material advantages. This situation led to the creation of social groups struggling to get on top to of « lucrative positions ». This is explained by many factors, such as the absence of social security, poverty, approximative career planning for agents, the subjective character of appointment and the uncertainty of the future, etc. In Djeuwo<sup>7</sup> (2009)'s paper, it is clearly stated that customs modernization can be handicapped or compromised by people recruited on other criteria than performance and merit such as the case of nepotism and tribalism. Personnel recruited on questionable bases cannot lead to the modernization of customs. In most African countries, however, coinage is increasingly becoming one of the methods of access to major customs training schools.

One illustration of the dangerous impact of nepotism or tribalism in the management of human resource in the CCA can be illustrated by the case of appointment to strategic positions which seemed not to obey to objective criteria at a certain era. For instance and as revealed by the newspaper Ecomatin , In the space of three days, including two non-working days, the Director General of Cameroonian Customs, successively proceeded on Friday June 7, 2019 to the appointment of 215 executives in 42 positions of the customs administration, then canceled on Monday, June 10, 2019, the entire previous memo.

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<sup>6</sup> The National Anti-corruption Commission of Cameroon was created by a Presidential decree on March 11, 2006. It is a public independent body, placed under the authority of the President of the Republic and has as principal mission to contribute to the fight against corruption.

<sup>7</sup> La corruption dans le management des ressources humaines de l'administration douanière, Marcellin Djeuwo, Dans Afrique contemporaine 2009/2 (n° 230), pages 55 à 67

This situation is said to have been caused by the predominance of appointment of agents originating from the western regions of the country to whom belongs the Director General of Customs and to the detriment of other regions. In the biggest unit of the country in terms of revenue collection, we can observe that half of the senior staff appointed at that time were from that region while the nation comprises 10 regions and the rule established is the respect of regional balance and meritocracy.

### 1.12 *Organisational diagnosis of CCA*

The SWOT approach (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) is one of the main bases of the diagnostic procedures. This involves taking a look at the internal and external environment of the organization in order to draw up a picture of the strengths and weaknesses on the one hand and the opportunities as well as the threats on the other hand.

TYPES OF STRATEGIES	STRONGHOLDS	WEAKNESSES
Deduced strategy (External environment)	<u>Opportunities</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of ICT</li> <li>• External partners such as OMD, OMC, major schools, training centers, external expertise</li> <li>• Notable support for government policies</li> </ul>	<u>Threat</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget requirements</li> <li>• Economic crises</li> <li>• International and national security conflicts</li> <li>• Incomplete international legal framework</li> </ul>
Built strategy (Internal environment)	<u>Strengths</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modern IT architecture</li> <li>• Existence of a modern training center</li> <li>• Qualified staff</li> <li>• Consistent regulations</li> <li>• Strong organizational culture</li> </ul>	<u>Weaknesses</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximate skills management</li> <li>• Insufficient monitoring and evaluation of professional training</li> <li>• Ineffective skills development plan</li> <li>• Absence of a real knowledge management policy</li> <li>• GPEC non-existent</li> <li>• Systematic overlapping of administrative skills and attributions</li> <li>• Career plan to put in place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate HRM, etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### 1.13 *Limitations observed*

In addition to the above mentioned shortcomings and difficulties faced i.e approximate skills management, insufficient monitoring and evaluation of professional training, ineffective skills development plan, absence of a real knowledge management policy, non existing effective anticipatory HRM policy, systematic overlapping of administrative skills and attributions, career plan to put in place and inadequate HRM, budget constraints, economic crises, international and national security conflicts and incomplete international legal framework. We can still observe some challenges concerning the cultural management of the CCA namely nepotism.

According to Carter (2018), nepotism negatively impact promotion decisions and leads to unqualified individuals getting hired or promoted. It affects the overall performance and productivity of the

organization. It has also created a sense of unfairness among other employees who feel overlooked despite their qualifications. Nepotism can also have a direct impact on a company's performance and bottom line. Placing individuals in positions they are not qualified for can lead to poor decision-making, mismanagement of resources, and increased inefficiency. Ultimately, this can result in decreased performance and missed opportunities for growth (Jaskiewicz, 2013).

In addition, nepotism can reduce employee morale by making employees feel the deck is stacked against them. Employees may wonder why they should try their hardest if being the boss' relative is the main criterion for a promotion. Their belief in the company's mission fades. Moreover, Poor leadership in general and of cultural specificities in particular hurt the organization's reputation, lead to destructive decision-making, and spark turnover contagion (Ragauskas, 2020).

Furthermore, there are other challenges due to the cultural dimensions and civilizations policy of the CCA. In the sense that a small group holding power likely to indulge into nepotism, tribalism and its implications. In fact, organizational culture can have disadvantages such as resistance to change and innovation, and the potential for negative environmental impact. A conservative organizational culture may oppose innovation and major management changes, hindering progress and adaptation. An organizational culture that does not align with logics and rationality, sustainability goals can hinder an organization's performance on and capacity to innovate. These disadvantages highlight the importance of managing and aligning organizational culture with desired outcomes and values (Scispace, 2024).

According to Deng (1997) history has stripped Africa's people of the dignity of building their nations on their own indigenous values, institutions, and heritage. The modern African state is the product of Europe, not Africa. There is somehow a lost of ancestral identities cultures, and aspirations for self-determination. Ilorah (2009) believe that ethnic bias and favouritism have aggravated the fragmentation of Africa's diverse ethnic groups and have been linked to the continent's poor state of development.

He argues that the leadership in many African countries, with their ethnic diversities, is characterised by ethnic bias and favouritism, and citizens are thus treated unequally in many respects, particularly when it comes to national resource allocation and political representation. This breeds resentment and creates conditions for an ultimate rejection of the state by the frustrated and politically conscious masses. It is also tantamount to corruption, weakening the ability of the state to function efficiently, and is therefore anti-developmental. socio-economic crises in many African countries are aggravated by practices of ethnic bias and favouritism that have consistently violated the principle of the impersonality of economic agents, caused resentment among the marginalised ethnic groups, fuelled conflicts and retarded development on the continent. Knight (2011) emphasizes on the fact that ethnicity can combine with other factors of instability such as poverty, diseases, corruption, poor governance and weak institutions.

#### 1.14 *Recommendations*

- a) *Multiply and effectively implement recommendations from studies on Cameroonian culture with regards to political, administrative and socio economic impact.*
- b) *Carry out an analysis of cultural identities in the CCA: this implies a chart on the ethnical representations in the said administration in order to identify demographic and strategic data for HRM policy.*
- c) *Put in place a cultural HRM policy to efficiently use the various civilizational resources : this implies valueing the strengths of different cultures for the State's advantage and putting in place mechanisms to tackle the identified weaknesses. For instance making use of the cultural strength of grassfields people in businesses by exchanging experiences.*

Nº	Type of civilizations	Strong holds	weakpoints	HRM and added value of civilizations' implications for the CCA
1	The Grass field sphere (zone), comprising of North West Regions and the West Regions	There is a sense of strong <u>group solidarity</u> of the Bamileke and other grasslands people and <u>individual achievement</u> is highly valued	There seems to be an emphasis on the veneration of material belongings and a high sense of nepotism	The grassfield people are dynamic and innovative which is a plus for the administration. However giving them possibility to handle human resource in general and mobility in particular might lead to conflicts due to their temptation to favour their closed ones.
2	The Fang-Beti cultural area covers the Centre, East and South Regions	They are essentially constituted of egalitarian exogamous communities.	There seems not to be a sense of collaboration and team spirit. Moreover they are said to be wasteful and extravagant.	Known for qualities such a generosity, prodigality and liberality, these qualities are helpful in HRM and organizational management. However care should be taken to avoid inefficient or wasteful use of resources.
3	The Sawa cultural Zone (Sphere), comprising the Littoral and the South West Regions	They are among the wealthiest and most educated peoples of Cameroon owing to their extensive trade with the outside world since the 16th century. They are attached to modernism, quality living and their independence.	People who live on the coast typically have more of a relaxed, laid-back attitude due to the convenience of beaches and easy access to waters.	Some authors state that just like the Ocean they are powerful but serene, beautiful but dangerous. This implies that they are usually good managers open to innovation, quality ergonomics, good working conditions and modernism but their tendency to relaxation can be a threat in case of pressure and difficult challenges to be faced.
4	The Sudano-Sahelian Cultural Zone, comprising Adamawa, North and Far North Regions	The Sudanese are generally stoic people and private about their emotions. The notion of honour is central.	Sudano sahelian people are usually nomadic culturally implying a high sense of freedom, adventurers. This can make them hard to be controlled and managed.	These people are respectable, humble, generous and courageous, this is a personnel that stands difficulties and stress and can work under any conditions as far as their honour is intact.

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- d) Organize cultural activities and promote change among different civilizations to break barriers and suspicions :
- e) Orientate geographical and cultural groups towards personal development and general interests :
- f) Update policy concerning regional balance regulations considering the present realities, contexts and needs.

## II. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND POSSIBLE INNOVATION

From the abovementioned, it appears that the customs administration faces a lot of challenges concerning nepotism especially as far as HRM and staff mobility is concerned. This situation is also observed in many other public administrations and state owned companies. In those organizations some managers tend to advantage staff from the same cultural background. In Some african countries this situation led to everlasting historical damages that has transformed negatively the cultural diversity and stability in some geographical areas.

The originality of this work is that it proposes a cultural map and ethnical analysis of an organization in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each culture so as to put it at the service of the general interest. Thus seems to be a novelty for, not existing in many public services such the customs department. This will be done with the aim of modifying and redefining HRM policy and to guarantee success according to the saying that « *United we stand but divided we fall* ».

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