

Demographic Trends of Cameroon:

Ethnicity-derived Value as the Fundamental of Social Processes

[Name withheld]

English Writing Adv Mid II

Literature Review

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I. Introduction

Although called “Africa in miniature” for its highly diversified ethnic groups, Cameroon has the highest literacy rates on the Africa continent, is ruled by a democratic institution, and has developed a market-based economy, which all project a seemingly prospering future that stands out from the stereotype of poverty and backwardness of Africa (Central Intelligence Agency).

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However, the country also suffers from chronic problems of high fertility, a high migration rate, an aging population, and political instability. To figure out potential solutions for Cameroon’s tepid development, scholarly articles tend to identify demographic issues, such as a high fertility rate, as the root of social problems and try to examine the causes of these demographic issues to explain certain social phenomenon.

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This literature review aims to summarize the cause-and-effect relationships that have been examined by scholars for different social processes, and synthesize these relationships to pin down the fundamental factor underlying the various difficult positions of Cameroon. The paper argues that it is ethnicity-derived values that fundamentally shapes the causations between demographic variables and other social factors. To explicate how the backdrop of various demographic and social problems all distill into ethnicity-derived values, the paper will focus on five variables: fertility rate, child malnutrition level, migration, population aging, and the secession crisis. The paper will first review scholarly works’ examination over the causations of these social and demographic variables. It goes on to discuss the mechanisms of how ethnicity-based values work on these targeted variables and examines the similarities and differences among each of the mechanisms. The paper finishes by synthesizing the discussed cause-and-effect mechanisms to provide recommendations for Cameroon’s social development in the future.

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II. Summaries & Evaluations

Jennifer Johnson-Hanks challenges one of the most resilient findings in social science that women's fertility rate is inversely related to the education they have received. Her article argues that this negative correlation is merely a manifestation of the nuanced political, economic, and cultural institutions that determine whether Cameroonian women are getting access to education, or, if they do get the access, whether they are going to be effectively influenced by the education. Specifically, Johnson-Hanks maintains that those families mostly likely to send girls to schools are those most tolerant of low fertility, late marriage, and pre-martial-marital childbearing, which are typical modern westernized values and expectations (Johnson-Hanks, 2003). This could be interpreted in the way that education as a process of mental transformation does not play that significant a role as scholars believe, because those girls who receive education tend to already have these modernized views (Johnson-Hanks, 2003). The study is most successful in defining gender issues as social processes composite of a set of variables; nevertheless, it does not provide any pragmatic solutions to break through these chained processes in order to transform the Cameroon society by liberalizing its women.

In a similar fashion, Jacques Emina argues that although Cameroon's child malnutrition seems to be correlated with their born status as legitimate or out-of-wedlock, this correlation actually has its roots in the mothers' socio-economic standings. Emina suggests that as opposed to the conventional demographic knowledge that children born out-of-wedlock suffer more from malnutrition, such children in Cameroon actually have a lower risk of health problems. According to Emina, this result can be explained by two reasons. First, although out-of-wedlock childbearing is still among the most upsetting things in the Cameroon society, the phenomenon is also common in all ethnic groups, especially among the most educated women living in the

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urban areas. In this regard, the factor of modernity actually compensates for the stigmatization effect on ~~the~~ children born out-of-wedlock to urban women, making born legitimacy not a principal factor of child malnutrition. Second, without dividing women into different ethnicity groups, children born out-of-wedlock do have a higher malnutrition record due to the cultural stigmatization effect; however, since children born in these “traditional” groups also have a higher mortality rate than the children borne by educated women, the overall health ~~condition~~ of children in the less modernized groups manifests to be roughly the same, if not inferior, ~~than-to~~ that of children born in more modernized groups. Emina’s study has merits as he separates the social exclusion effects and other socio-economic effects (e.g. mother’s education level, modernity, access to health facilities, etc.) on children’s malnutrition problem.

On the topic of ethnicity-derived value, Annett Fleischer argues that kinship, which emphasizes family and obligations, plays a systemic role in Cameroonians’ migration motivations and decisions. According to Fleischer, the view that African migration happens mainly for economic reasons is not complete; rather, social, cultural, and historical aspects should also be considered for understanding migration incentives. This rationale is reflected in his investigation outcome that young Cameroonians, regardless of gender, are treated as investment projects by their extended families, who expect economic returns as these migrants can gain better education and possibly employment in the advanced economies. As the family system is considered of central value to Cameroonians, such migration projects are planned by the sponsors with absolute authority and full-scale details, involving the entire family to arrange (Fleischer, 2007). Fleischer’s study in migration motivation delineates the migration pattern with a more nuanced causation mechanism. The study is vivid for incorporating primary interviews, and it is qualitatively important in signifying the value of Cameroon’s family system on the

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migration issue. However, more quantitative models with supporting data should be included to analyze if the kinship value is derived from economic concerns.

Because of the high value ~~the-that~~ Cameroonian society ~~puts~~ on family, caring for the elderly ~~group~~ has conventionally been the responsibility of their family members since the social institutional framework is underdeveloped. Ethel Nangia argues that the challenge encountered by caring for the aged can be attributed to the burgeoning neo-liberalism in the 1980s, which ~~laid~~ a fundamental belief in Cameroon that social welfare is an “invalid area of productive activity and therefore accorded less value in national development planning and resource allocation” (Nangia, 2016, p.66). According to Nangia, the socio-economic and cultural contexts are critical in understanding the importance of caring ~~for~~ the elderly in Cameroon. That is, the elderly population still largely concentrates in rural areas while ~~a~~ large number of young people ~~is-have migrating-migrated~~ to urban area, which has reduced family support for the elderly. The key problem, as Nangia stresses, is the lack of resources and the dysfunction of the institutional framework due to governmental corruption and malfunction. Nangia thus proposes alternatives to promote ~~elderly caring~~~~elder-care~~ programs that primarily involve decentralizing ~~of~~ the current system, increasing evaluation and implementation mechanisms, and promoting partnerships. Above all, Nangia’s study stresses the importance of ~~the allocation of~~ governmental resources ~~allocation~~ to the aging population. However, ~~he mentions~~~~having mentioned~~ the role of the neo-liberalism value that degrades social welfare in the beginning of the discussion, ~~but he then~~ fails to ~~explicate~~ how the value will affect the institutional framework’s effectiveness as he proposes.

Samuel Kelodjoue discusses the demographic, economic, and social challenges of the aging population in Cameroon. The discussion stresses that the country’s structural adjustment programs have worsened the welfare of the elderly and suggests that policymakers drive

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attention back to Cameroon's family-support system. This is especially urgent as the once-essential functioning of family solidarity between generations is deteriorating due to ~~the~~ irreversible urbanization and modernization (Kelodjoue, 2014). Kelodjoue defines the male elderly group as the head of Cameroon families with spiritual and economic powers. Meanwhile, Kelodjoue concludes from empirical data that the aging population, both male and female, still largely remains in activity in informal sectors after retirement, bearing the responsibility of fostering the family's children. Such spiritual and social contributions made by the aging population, as Kelodjoue argues, are deteriorated ~~for~~by the modernization and urbanization process that weakens family ties. Kelodjoue maintains that this shaking ground for the family-support system, combined with the lack of institutional protection of the elderly, would invite social instability and harm the aging population. He therefore advocates a balanced system backed by both the state government and the conventional family structure to sustain social stability and increase economic prosperity. Kelodjoue's argument is important in pinpointing the change of value under urbanization and modernization as a cause of the lack of elderly care in ~~the~~ Cameroon society, which offers another approach ~~to seek solution~~in seeking solutions other than the economic welfare provided by the government.

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In examining Cameroon's political coexistence of different ethnic groups, Vubo stresses the identity dimension as central to the national political crisis regarding ethno-regional claims of independence. Vubo draws from historical protests to identify that it was a combination of political marginalization and modernization that propelled a new ethnic identity of "Sawa" to form among the local people and legitimize a cultural movement for collective political claims. In addition, Vubo argues that separatist movements are usually not completely self-motivated for stronger political claims but also pressured by other ethnic groups' increased powers relative to

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one's self. Vubo thus concludes that ~~the~~ Cameroon as a federal state, in order to maintain political and social stability, has to build a democracy that not only respects ~~not only~~ the minorities but also diversities, which means continually balancing the divisiveness crisis that has arisen from ethnic groups' self-recognitions and competitions. By pinpointing that ethnicity value can easily be manipulated by local people to initiate ~~a~~ political turmoil, Vubo's article signifies the difficulty of balancing ethnicity-based conflicts to sustain political stability.

III. Comparison and Contrast: How Ethnicity Plays its Role in Social Processes

Johnson-Hanks underlies ethnicity-derived value as the fundamental cause that determines what kind of path a woman can live, including whether she is going to be educated, as well as how she values marriage as part of herself as a human being. The fertility rate, which includes both premarital and marital child-bearing, is therefore an effective variable that manifests the outcome resulted from these intertwined values and the social practice (e.g. education) derived from these values. By signifying the cultural and ideological aspects within the cause-and-effect mechanism, Johnson-Hanks' analysis of women's reproductive activities manages to stress the structural factors. That is, women's fertility rate serves as an epitome of the set of predetermined political, cultural, and ideological institutions in a given ethnicity group. A woman's fate is almost already determined before education can play a transformative role. That is, those who already have modernized values towards marriage and child-bearing do not really need education to reinforce that; while those who are from the ethnic value that treats women as attachments of men can hardly change their choices even if they can access education, which in most cases they cannot.

Johnson-Hanks' finding is actually echoed by the statistical analysis of the cause-and-effect relationship between children's born legitimacy and their malnutrition condition in

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Emina's study. According to Emina, children born out-of-wedlock are still marginalized in all ethnic groups of Cameroon, but most of these "marginalized" children have educated mothers and live in urbanized area with modernized values, which compensate for the negative effect that social marginalization has on these children. In fact, if one looks at the malnutrition of the children born out-of-wedlock and those born legitimately, the former group actually manifest to enjoy a better health-condition. This result proves the fundamental role of women's education and their socio-economic standings derived from education in raising off-spring. It echoes with Johnson-Hank's conclusion that value is central to many social and demographic trends in Cameroon.

In contrast to Johnson-Hanks' argument that value serves as the fundamental criteria of social processes that determine demographic trends, Fleischer's study provides a two-way picture between the value system and the economic factors. That kinship within the extended family system dominates the "migration projects" reveals the significance of family and the lack of individual decision-making maneuvers in Cameroon. This timid sense of individuality under the powerful authority of kinship, when compared to the relatively modernized values held by the Bulu-Beti-Fang ethnicity community, shows how individual freedom of choice could get trumped by family authority and economic constraints. That is, the economic backwardness leads the authorized-authority figure in a family to bet their limited resources as an investment on a chosen member of the family, who does not get a say in whether he or she wants to study abroad with the aim of employment in the advanced economies. Put it another way, the chosen members as investment projects by the figures of family authority can have unique recognition in the meaning of life, marriage, and individuality, but these modernized perceptions and values will have to yield to the wills of family authority because of the value Cameroonian people put-place

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on family ties. This is especially true considering the country's high unemployment rate and low income-level, as those chosen to migrate could care other members in their family with the reimbursement earned abroad.

Nangia and Kelodjoue's discussions on the emerging problem of population aging in Cameroon are complementary. Nangia indicates the detrimental effects of institutional guarantee shortage on the aging population, while Kelodjoue argues that the family ties that conventionally support the aging population ~~is-are~~ deteriorating. For Nangia, socio-economic factors should be defined as the key context to interpret the aging problem. His proposition identifies institutional weakness as the major backlash to the society's caring guarantee for the elderly, which underlies the shortage of economic resources and the malfunction of the government's agency. The picture provided by Kelodjoue, on the other hand, crystalizes the fact that the potential social crisis has its roots in the shaking ground of the family value system, with institutional and economic underdevelopment as merely factors that accentuate the situation. Considering the core value of family in the Cameroon society, as indicated in the studies of migration and education issues, his discussion taps ~~the fundamental of~~ the aging problem as a source of social instability.

Unlike the indirect role that values play in social processes described in the other authors' studies, Vubo identifies ethnicity-based values as the ~~directly~~ cause of political turmoil and separatist forces. That said, different ethnic groups ~~are-do not easy-to-easily~~ coexist peacefully not only because of the incompatibility among their values. In fact, pure value clashes are much less significant than the conflicts where values ~~is-are~~ used as ~~the weapon~~weapons to legitimize each party's power struggle. In other words, values are usually mixed with realist ambitions in political powers to cause political instability in the Cameroon society. Ethnic groups in Cameroon, cohered by unique values and beliefs, tend to ~~politicalize~~politicize their values ~~in~~

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~~contemporary and modern times~~today in accordance with the state's federal structure. This makes sustaining political stability an extremely difficult process of reaching political consensus with cultural differences.

IV. Interpretations & Ramifications: Ethnicity-Derived Value as a Systemic Factor

The demographic, social, and political trends at stake for Cameroon could all find themselves fundamentally shaped by the values derived from ~~ethnicity-ethnic~~ ideologies or cultures. ~~From my point of view, although~~Although it may seem self-evident and a matter of oversimplification to state that ~~the statement that a~~ value system underlies ~~the fundamental cause of~~ social and demographic processes ~~may seem self-evident and oversimplifying, it does not mean that identifying the dominant role of value is futile.~~In fact, realizing the overarching influence from people's value systems is very important for empirical studies of social and demographic phenomenon. Nevertheless, one caveat remains that value's overarching influence could be ~~illusory-elusive~~ as in the case of separationist movements, where differences in value are used by elites of the ethnic groups to stir up social emotions. In other cases, people's values usually play an indirect but decisive role in determining social processes.

To determine the causation between a set of demographic factors and the targeted social variable, it is useful to remember that many of the factors do not manifest randomly as how they are; instead, the hidden factor of value is actually proved to determine the impact that the set of factors has on the targeted issue. In other words, one could argue that the "set of factors" have been proved to be directly correlated with the targeted variable with compelling statistics; however, the existence of the hidden value system affirms that these factors are not independent predictive indicators but themselves correlated by a predetermined mechanism, which is exactly determined by the hidden value factor.

In the case of Cameroonian women's fertility rate, the "set of factors" include education years, premarital sex rate, premarital pregnancy, abortion rate, and so on. It is true that the set of factors all seem to have clear and definitive correlations with women's fertility rates according to the available statistics. However, nuanced observations – that women who receive higher education normally have a lower fertility rate but a higher premarital sex rate and a higher premarital pregnancy rate – would tell researchers that education influences Cameroonian women's choice of giving birth in a way more sophisticated than its conventional negative correlation with education. Johnson-Hanks' further examination completes the story. That is, a typical modernized ethnical group have women with higher education but also higher premarital sex and pregnancy rates, while another typical "traditional" group have women with exactly the opposite characteristics in these aspects. This leads to the ultimate accountability of their value systems, including women's perceptions in regard to sex, marriage, and ultimately self-independence, to reconcile the various demographic trends related to giving birth. Put it another way, the linkage between education and fertility rate in conventional knowledge is only the surface of the problem. To solve the problem of high fertility rate in African countries like Cameroon requires liberalizing the value systems that dominate the "traditional" ethnicity groups so that they can enjoy the transformation-transformative power of education.

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The hidden factor of value does not always perform "behind the curtain" with a decisive voice on the operation of social and demographic variables. It also interacts with social processes in a sophisticated way and therefore is susceptible to the pressures of social trends and transformations. For example, Cameroonians hold the conventional value that the elderly is-are the most respected person-people in Cameroonian families and is-are the key to maintaining family solidarity between generations. However, such a traditional value finds itself elashes

clashing head-on with urbanization and modernization, which leads to deterioration of the livelihood of the aging population in the absence of social welfare protection. In this case, the deterioration of the “family-support” system, or a gradual breakdown of the conventional family-centered value system, is both a cause of the elderly’s deteriorated economic well-being and a result of the younger population’s pursuit of better economic welfare under urbanization and modernization. At the end of the day, the lack of elderly caring/elder care reveals a division between the values in a conventional family-centered social structure on the one side and the values under modernization on the other side. Therefore, by taking the value factor into the picture, one would be able to see that the aging problem in Cameroon is not simply an economic issue but more of a social and cultural issue, which makes governmental guidance and intervention especially important in a period of transformation. Thus, for Cameroon to maintain social stability and to smooth the transformation period of modernization, it is important that the government closely observe the problems related to the aging population and carefully balance the “family-support” system with improved social welfare protections.

V. Conclusion

~~The~~ Cameroon society holds many of the common social trends of ~~the~~ African countries in general, including the decreasing but still high fertility rate, ~~the~~ increasing migration, the aging problems, and political instability. Conventional knowledge tends to explain these trends with a set of social and demographic factors from empirical studies and statistics. Although the set of factors do correlate with the targeted variables in a compelling way, more nuanced observations have proven that correlations actually exist among these predictive factors and that it is the value system that ultimately decides how the predictive factors are going to influence the targeted variable in examination. Such a value system tends to be derived from the history, culture, and

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ideology of an ethnicity group. Specifically, women's fertility rate is determined by the value of self-independence while the degree of their education is only a cause on the surface; similarly, the fundamental reason that the migration mechanism in Cameroon can sustain itself is the value Cameroonians have placed in kinship.

Moreover, the value system itself does not exist in vacuum. It is also influenced by socio-economic factors. In the case of Cameroon, the "family-centered" value system is deteriorating due to the trend of urbanization and modernization and is leading to decreased economic welfare of the aging population. The aging population's problem is actually an epitome of Cameroon's social transformation that might involve the breakdown of old values, which should be carefully examined and monitored by the government. In addition, considering that ethnicity-based values s could be manipulated for political power struggle that may lead to social crises, ~~the~~ Cameroon should both carefully act on domestic policy and actively seek international assistance, so as to prevent ~~separationist-separatist~~ movements from consuming the people of the country. Above all, including ethnicity-derived values s as ~~an~~ underlying factors s in examining Cameroon's social and demographic trends should be seriously conducted by researchers as it may cast light ~~on a~~ more nuanced understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships ~~on of the their~~ subject matter.

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