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The circuits-of-power framework and dance institutionalisation in Cameroon

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Abstract: Dance in Cameroon is witnessing a fast-moving mutation entrenched in power relationships. Based on qualitative data analysis, we conceptualise Clegg's circuits-of-power framework to show how dance institutionalisation is a source and result of power. Hypothesising that power is central in dance practice, we argue that disciplinary machineries inherent in the power-circuit were practised during and after colonisation to institutionalise dance. Findings reveal that, during colonisation, dance institutionalisation was based on the annihilation and alteration of native dances through the development of Eurocentric cultural hegemonic traits. Nonetheless, dance played an important role in the cultural decolonizing process. Still, unfortunately, the dancing body remained subordinate to the (ex)-colonisers domination as professional dancers seek recognition from the West. After independence, the Cameroonian State used institutionalisation to control dance by creating the national ballet to meet national embodiment and unity needs. However, by introducing Western innovative body techniques amidst traditional dance practices, dance became a way to answer the demands of cultural globalization.

Keywords - Circuit-of-power- colonisation, Cameroon, Dance, Decolonisation, Institutionalisation

1. INTRODUCTION

Dance in Cameroon is very rich and presents dynamic aspects that characterise the different transformations it has experienced. An overview of dance history in Cameroon demonstrates that rupture, junction and /or continuity between traditional dances and modern practices structure the emergence of new dance forms. Dance practice in Cameroon has gone beyond the barrier between traditional and modern dance practices. However, this new vision is subordinate to the power relation that led to dance institutionalisation since colonisation. The enthusiasm for innovation is conditioned by the quest for recognition and the demands of globalisation. Unfortunately, despite the rich content of dance history and aesthetics in Cameroon, scholarly works on the institutionalisation of dance in the country is scare. The question has, in effect, remained understudied. Beyond this disinterest, early studies, based on the anthropological perspective, focused on the symbolic aspects of traditional dances in the Cameroonian society (Tsala, 1960; Betene, 1973; Abega, 1987).

These works studied either the *Só* rite, or the *esana* dance of the Fang-beti community in Cameroon, and claimed a sort of authenticity of African. Such works stipulate that these dances witnessed little or no Western influence

during colonisation. In a way, these scholarships echo Wanyu et al. (2021: 77) who posit that African scholars had always supported 'the recognition, development, and preservation of African values, including religious practices [like ritual dances], to decolonise the continent.' To this end, while Tsala and Betene studied the elements of transcription of the *esana* drums lyrics to sustain its authenticity, Abega (1987) elaborated on the meaning of this dance, and stated that the *essana* dance is a political and religious act, inferring that power is substantial to its structure and practice. In the same way, Gufler (1997: 501) showed how palace-centered activities, like the seasonal dances of Yamba, in the grassfield-Cameroon, are practised by 'local initiatic and power-wielding cult.' The identification of power here is relevant in the sense that, power is central in cult or ritual dance practices. This power can be spiritual, physical or psychological, and the status of each member materialises the hierarchy within it. However, the power inherent in these dances is limited to their performance as a ritual act. The efforts of these scholars to sustain the authenticity of these dances seems to be a vain agency as dance institutionalisation has shifted in many ways dance conception and practice within the Cameroonian society.

In fact, in his review of traditional dances in modern Cameroon, Khalilah (2014) argues that Cameroonian native dances have been transformed due to colonisation and globalisation. His opinion reminds that of Mefe (2004) who earlier noticed that modern influences did not exempt the Cameroonian dance environment. In his attempt to give a historical account of dance as an art form in Cameroon since independence, Mefe indicated that pioneer choreographers – Richard Bebey Black and Liza Ngwa- who were trained in Western schools are the foundation of the major aesthetical and political mutations dance has known in Cameroon. Certainly, the contribution of these pioneers to the transformation of traditional dances was essential since they are those who gave a theatrical format to dance, designated it as "art", and gained government support and influenced the policy. In Mefe's historical perspective, one can depict that the promotion of western techniques within traditional dances did not only elicited a change in dance as a ritual act but also opened the doors to exogenous cultural influences that became the measurement tape of dance as an art form.

The above scholarships testify that there is a strong power relationship within dance practice in Cameroon, and this can be twofold: the first is internal to the dance structure and its participants. The second is external and has to do with factors that constitute a throttlehold on it practice within the society. This last form is usually built upon power strategies to maintain and control dance following cultural and political agencies within a community or a nation. However, the present paper is not interested in studying the power relation that exists neither in the structure of the dance nor within the members of traditional/ritualistic dances. Accordingly, this article focuses on the power relationship used by hegemonic structures to condition dance practice through a series of strategies within the Cameroonian society. One of the strategies that have been consistent in dance practice in Cameroon is institutionalisation, and studying dance in Cameroon merits that this is addressed.

1.1. What do we mean by dance institutionalisation?

Scott (2001) with reference to Parson's (1951), definition of institutionalisation framed a functionalist conception of the expression. He says, 'A system of action is said to be *institutionalized* to the extent that actors in an ongoing relation oriented their action to a common set of normative standards and value patterns.' (Scott, 2001: 15). Specifically, institutionalisation is the process of developing, transforming, changing or replacing rules that affect human interactions. It can be both source and result of power through legitimisation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Clegg, 1990) and the process is completed through institutions. According to Acemoglu (2003), an institution is an indicator that symbolises which political pressure group in a given set has the power to control social choice. Other scholars conceptualise institutions as formal and informal humanly created constraints (rules, laws, constitutions, conventions, self-imposed codes) that condition human relationships (North, 1990; Scott, 2001; Greif, 2006), and they

can be both material and ideal elements (Sewell, 1992). Indeed, the polity are those who create the formal rules while the informal norms are "part of the heritage that we call culture".

Unlike North, who claims institutions are the rules of the game, Greif (2006) argues that institutions represent symmetries of the game. In other words, institutions are 'belief systems that furnish guidelines for practical action, [and governance structures], which are the arrangements by which field-level power and authority are exercised" (Rao, Monin & Durand, 2003: 795-6). However, the theory is general and can be applied to a wide range of field. In the domain of art, Machnio and Skwarczynska (2011) claim that: "Institutionalisation is an attempt to keep things, activities and people in their respective places, and a way of identifying and defining what art is and what it is not. It is the authority of an imposed message, of a specific reception of a work of art, of the reactions and more among the audience and of an unequivocal way of explaining the world." Their conceptualisation of art institutionalisation is evocative of Parson's functionalist view which has been criticised for 'assuming a model of human action in which compliance with moral authority is governed by the 'need' to internalise its order(s) rather than, say, a calculation by agents that involves the strategic development of, or identification with particular norms and values.' (Cooper et al., 2017: 666-7) However, in this paper, we maintain the functionalist conception and understand dance institutionalisation as a set or sequence of actions by which institutional actors (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), like the colonisers and the state, create, disrupt or maintain dance practices within the society to suit either policy.

This involves socio-cultural processes, obligations or compliances, actualities that take a rule-like status in social thoughts and actions (Meyer & Rowan, 1991: 42). We thus argue that the (ex)colonisers and the Cameroonian state, as institutions, built sequences of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that together with associated activities and resources of power defined a dance environment embodied in choreographic art as a political weapon. The framework addresses how institutional factors, such as rules and norms, affected Cameroonians attitudes towards dance practices since the arrival of colonisation. This include regulative strategies that established the rules, monitored and sanctioned dance activities; the normative strategy, which evaluated and determined what is appropriate; and the cultural-cognitive strategy, which focuses on the centrality of symbolic systems and representations. This is achieved through diverse elements that are contingent to compliance, power mechanisms that determine legacy and are expressive of the new conceptualisation of dance in Cameroon, and the power relation incumbent to dance as an industry. As such, using dance as an example, the text discusses the question of institutionalisation through Clegg's circuit-of-power framework.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Certainly, the expansion of political power across Africa since the 19th century has in many countries showed the constructive growth of rules and laws to control dance practices either by (ex)-colonialists or the national authorities. Undoubtedly, in Cameroon, dance has suffered varied power influences due to the contact indigenous dances had with the Western culture. Since the Portuguese discovery of "*Rio dos Cameroes*" or "the Shrimp River" - Cameroon, in 1472, and more precisely, with the ever first introduction of Western educational system by the British Baptist Missionary Society in 1844 (Gwanfogbe, 1995), dance has known constant institutionalisation and mutations enthused by western regimes such as the Germans 1884-1916, the British, and the French 1916-1961. Combating native dances became a matter of colonial institution. When the dance performed did not meet colonial expectations, it was disapproved. Colonial administrators chose to concentrate on developing measures to transform this practice to their advantage.

However, a serious institutional reform, 'cultural rebirth', was undertaken in 1961 by Ahmadou Ahidjo, the first president of Cameroon, to give the country's arts and culture sector a national embodiment (Bahokeng & Atangana, 1976). Under the new deal government of President Paul Biya, modern apparatus have been reinforced in the cultural

sector, notably through the National Ballet, to meet the needs of globalisation and sustain international relationship. In such a context, dancers have been trapped between dancing for the state or building an independent career under the stranglehold of the West, whose hegemony is indisputably the locomotive of dance with the establishment of their cultural centres. Indeed, most of the Cameroonian choreographic productions emerge within a strong circuit-of-power interrelationship between the State's cultural policy and the Western domination.

2.1. Objectives of the study

The fulcrum of this article is to;

- **a)** Identify and analyse the sources of power in relation to the circuit-of-power framework in dance institutionalisation in Cameroon.
- **b)** Examine the processes through which power is used to maintain dancers under the excolonisers' control and at the same time used to sustain the state's cultural policy through dance in a globalised context.

2.2. Research questions

- **a)** How relevant is the circuit-of-power framework in the discussion of dance institutionalisation in Cameroon during and after colonisation?
- **b)** What is the nature of dance institutionalisation in Cameroon and what are the mechanisms used to control the dancing body and sustain the State's cultural policy?

2.3. Research hypotheses

- **a)** Hypothesising that power is central in dance practice, we argue that disciplinary machineries inherent in the power-circuit were practiced during and after colonisation to institutionalise dance.
- **b)** We claim that two forms of dance institutionalisation in Cameroon contributed to dance control. The first form refers to the transformation of Cameroonian traditional dance practices by colonial authorities through the development of a set of traits, and state of mind. The second form, after independence, denotes how the State institutionalised dance as a political tool and a national embodiment by taking elements from the cultural environment to foster cultural heritage, and by adopting innovative strategies to meet globalisation needs.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Absolutely, power is a complex concept inspiring diverse theories (Lawrence et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the various theories of power are not mutually exclusive but complementary. The circuits-of-power framework that structures this investigation is supported by Clegg's (1989) conception of power, which, grounded in organisation theory and social sciences, integrates different views of power that enrich each other. To start, Dahl (1968) claims power rests within the frontiers of a given community, and it is the production of obedience to the choice and preferences of the others to the detriment of one's choice. This conceptualisation is directly linked to colonialism. Whereas, for Foucault (1980), power is knowledge, and it is everywhere.

The decentralisation of power is crucial in Foucault's conception. Though Giddens' (1984) approach is a continuation of Foucault's conception, his view is an inclusive social theory based on the *duality of structure.* He argues that power is an indispensable component of the social structure. Human agents exercise it; it is a social factor, as humans create the power to which they are subjected. Clegg (1989), in his turn, considers power as a circular process that flows in three channels that he calls circuits-of-power. To him, power is fundamentally strategic. His approach is different from the structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). Clegg gives credit to the actions of organisational agents,

their intentions, strategies, and plots. In the circuit's framework, power is central in sustaining and providing stability to social systems. (Silva & Backhouse, 2003: 296). When we compare Clegg's model with Giddens, it is clear that the former sees power beyond actions. Giddens' supports that the comprehension of the structuration of social life depends on the knowledgeable individual. Yet, he does not explain how this knowledgeable individual is structured. Nevertheless, when Clegg integrates Foucault's understanding of power, he argues that the knowledgeable individual is the product of discourse and disciplinary techniques. As such, inspired by the circuit metaphor, Clegg builds power in three dimensions: episodic, social, and systemic. Different types of power define each circuit: causal in the episodic circuit, facilitative for systemic integration, and dispositional for social integration.

The episodic power is particular to organisational research and reinforces the classical theories of intra-and inter-organizational power relations (Clegg, 1989; Lawrence et al. 2001; Lawrence, 2008). Lawrence et al. (2001: 629) refer to episodic power as 'relatively discrete strategic acts of mobilisation initiated by self-interested actors', whose actions affect other social systems (Clegg et al., 2006). Inversely, systemic power includes 'dispositional' and 'facilitative' forms of power. Clegg associates dispositional power with rules of meaning and membership that orient action and facilitative power with the power of control over the physical and social environment. For Lawrence (2008: 174-176), systemic power 'works through routine, ongoing practices to advantage particular groups without those necessarily establishing or maintaining those practices. […] It is vested in social and cultural systems". In the present study, we address how both the colonial institution and the state strategically constructed a control system interwoven in a circuit to condition dance practice.

The theory is applied to show how through a set of constraints and dispositions, the colonial institution and the state structured dance practice in such a way that they could exercise power over the dancing body without it necessarily being conscious of the control these institutions have over dance. The circuit framework has, as theoretical underpinning, driven various research works bordering on power, notably in the information systems (Introna, 1997; Silva & Backhouse, 1997). However, no study in the literature available shows that it has been applied in dance studies. This paper thus contributes to the operationalisation of the circuit-of-power framework in the study of power in dance institutionalisation in Cameroon.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research uses a qualitative approach to data collection and analyiss (Bengtsson, 2016; Berg, 2001). The data are both primary and secondary sources. For the primary sources, we conducted fieldwork in the town of Yaounde between 2015 and 2020 to dialogue with respondents who are members of either the National Ballet, independent dancers, choreographers, or cultural administrators. The purpose of the fieldwork was to investigate first whether dance practitioners had an idea of the Cameroonian cultural history and how they perceived the impact of colonisation on dance practice. Secondly, the aim was also to enquire on how foreign and government cultural policies participated in the development of dance as a cultural and creative industry within the Cameroonian environment. The fieldwork was also directed towards understanding the role and mission of the National Ballet and whether this mission was achieved national wide or not. It was also interested in finding out in what ways respondent understood dance as a political weapon in both the hands of the state and the (ex)colonialists, notably in the way professional dancers built their career in the professional milieu.

Understanding what factors motivated their choice for dancing either as an independent dancer or in the National Ballet was also addressed. The researcher used a semi-structured interview to investigate the topic as this provided an opportunity to generate rich data as the language used by the stakeholders was essential in gaining insight into their perceptions and values of dance as a political instrument. Since this format pushed participants to reveal sensitive and personal information, we ensured the interviewees that their participation and answers were going to

be used anonymously when necessary and their identity preserved. All the respondents were above twenty-one (21). Contextual and relational aspects were significant to understanding their perceptions. For instance, we interviewed the cultural administrators of the Cameroonian Cultural Centre on how the state organised the dance sector to suit its political ideology. We also questioned foreign cultural centre administrators on their cultural mission within the Cameroonian State. Independent dancers and choreographers were interviewed on their perception of the state's ideology of dance as an embodiment of national unity. Apart from these first-hand sources, background information is derived from secondary sources. These included historical documents, newspapers, government records, and audio-visual materials. The cross-examined interviewees gave sufficient information to understand the Cameroonian dancers' and cultural institutions' opinion on the power relations that exist during or after colonisation. Nevertheless, though most of the stakeholders gave divergent viewpoints on Cameroon's cultural history concerning the impacts of colonisation on dance practices, the secondary sources supported points that were similar.

We applied a qualitative content methodology and critical observation to analysis the data gathered through four main stages: decontextualisation; recontextualisation; categorization and compilation. (Bengtsson, 2016; Berg, 2001). After familiarising with the primary source data, it was transcribed in text form, and we applied an open-coding process (Berg, 2001) to read them and obtain the sense of the whole. Through a compare and contrast method, both sources of data were split into a series and labeled with codes. Accordingly, through critical observation of the various data, we laid emphasis on power issues; identify themes, instances, and mechanisms that could inform on the power strategies employed for dance institutionalisation. We also identified decisions and actions carried out by the State that enhanced dance institutionalisation as a form of political and national embodiment. The coding also focused on the strategies of legitimisation that facilitated dance institutionalisation after independence; and how power connects dance to serve international relationship. All these were recontextualised through cross-examination in order to identify sufficient arguments that could support the circuit-of-power relations that supplant dance practices in Cameroon during or after colonisation. After categorising the data, it compilation was materialised through an interpretive approach to data analysis (Klein & Myers, 1999) as we compared the information in the dataset to generate knowledge on the strategies binding dance institutionalisation following the circuit framework. Through an inductive reasoning, embodied in a directed content analysis, themes and categories emerged through careful examination and constant comparison. In an in-depth case study, we adapted the circuit-of-power framework and made use of visual and audio-visual material, such as diagrams, photographs and video recordings to illustrate our arguments.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Dance in the midst of the episodic and systemic power mechanisms

As earlier mentioned, the episodic power is a 'relational domination […] (characterised by) inequalities and exclusion' (Azmanova, 2018: 70), where power exercising is expressed through constraints (Clegg, 1989). Accordingly, a progressive mutation of traditional dances through episodic power characterised the institutional structures of dance practice in Cameroon. During the colonial period, the dancing body was the site of socio-cultural control, power, and revolt (Barker, 2012). The colonisers had the 'discretionary power to ignore or override formal institutions, […]' (Tull & Simons, 2017: 8). As a result, they used their supremacy to legitimate, align strategies and actions through coercion. Cameroonians could no more dance for love, joy, nor religious celebrations. The painting and devaluation of the dancers with chauvinistic discourse were generated and deployed by the colonisers to portray local native dances as an expression of primitivism (Castaldi, 2006). Casting Cameroonian dances as homogenously primitive and animalistic helped the colonisers reinforce presiding cultural narratives about the inherently civilized, refine nature of the West and their artistic expression and girded the rhetoric of cultural differences upon which they

constructed a control over the different local practices. The Eurocentric educational system was a power instrument introduced to challenge indigenous cultural practices.

The prohibition of traditional dances was premised on the argument that these dances were satanic and immoral, especially when they were performed naked, with masks or with traditional regalia. Missionaries were particularly offended when these dances emphasised movements of the pelvis, torso, or sensual movements of the waists. Citing an anonymous French reporter, Jann (1961: 30), says the colonised 'were strictly forbidden to practice and dance their traditional dances.' In the light of her personal experience in South Cameroon, Vincent (1976: 13-14) observes that the Germans brutally put an end to native dances such as the *evodo*, the *ngas*, and the *onguda* dances. Along with mental and psychological control of self-perception, the institutionalisation of dance through greatness was based on cultural boundaries and exclusion (Nochlin, 1996), and this produced docile subjects, who gradually integrated Western codes in their practices as they suffered aesthetic injustice due to the colonial mentality of the time (Dalaqua, 2020). Through a cunning social contract, the colonisers created a pseudo-collaboration between them and the local authorities, who, leading by example, transformed the minds of their people. Ranger (1983: 229) shares corollaries as he affirms that, German and British colonisers overtly extended local concepts of kingship to match with the Eurocentric imperial monarchy in order to facilitate their supremacy. A good example is king Njoya of the Bamoun people (Figure 1) in a German outfit instead of his traditional attire during the Nja festival. By giving up his traditional dance regalia, the King surrendered his strength to the colonial entity. Geary and Ndam Njoya (1985) emphasized that King Njoya stopped wearing his traditional dance regalia after European and Muslim clothing was introduced in the palace.

Figure 1: *From left to right, King Njoya dressed in German uniform and his servant wearing the old Nja costume of the king. © Bernhard Ankermann 1908, photographies du pays Bamoum, royaume Ouest -Africain 1902-1915.*

Moreover, the wrapper or what is commonly known today as the wax textile, imposed by the missionaries, has become the material used for most dance costumes in Cameroon. The differences lie in the design; some of these wax textiles are more elaborate, while others are formal. With colonisation, the West proved that they were experts in bringing changes in cultural contacts. The dancer's body, as a receptacle, reveals the instructions to which they were

subjugated. Unfortunately, the idea of the colonial space is still prevalent in contemporary Cameroon, and traditional dances are commonly compared to "more elaborate" Western choreographies as markers of what is considered institutionalised dance knowledge. Gradually, episodic power supports systemic power that has institutionalised change through the skilled use of power by the (ex) colonisers (Figure 2).

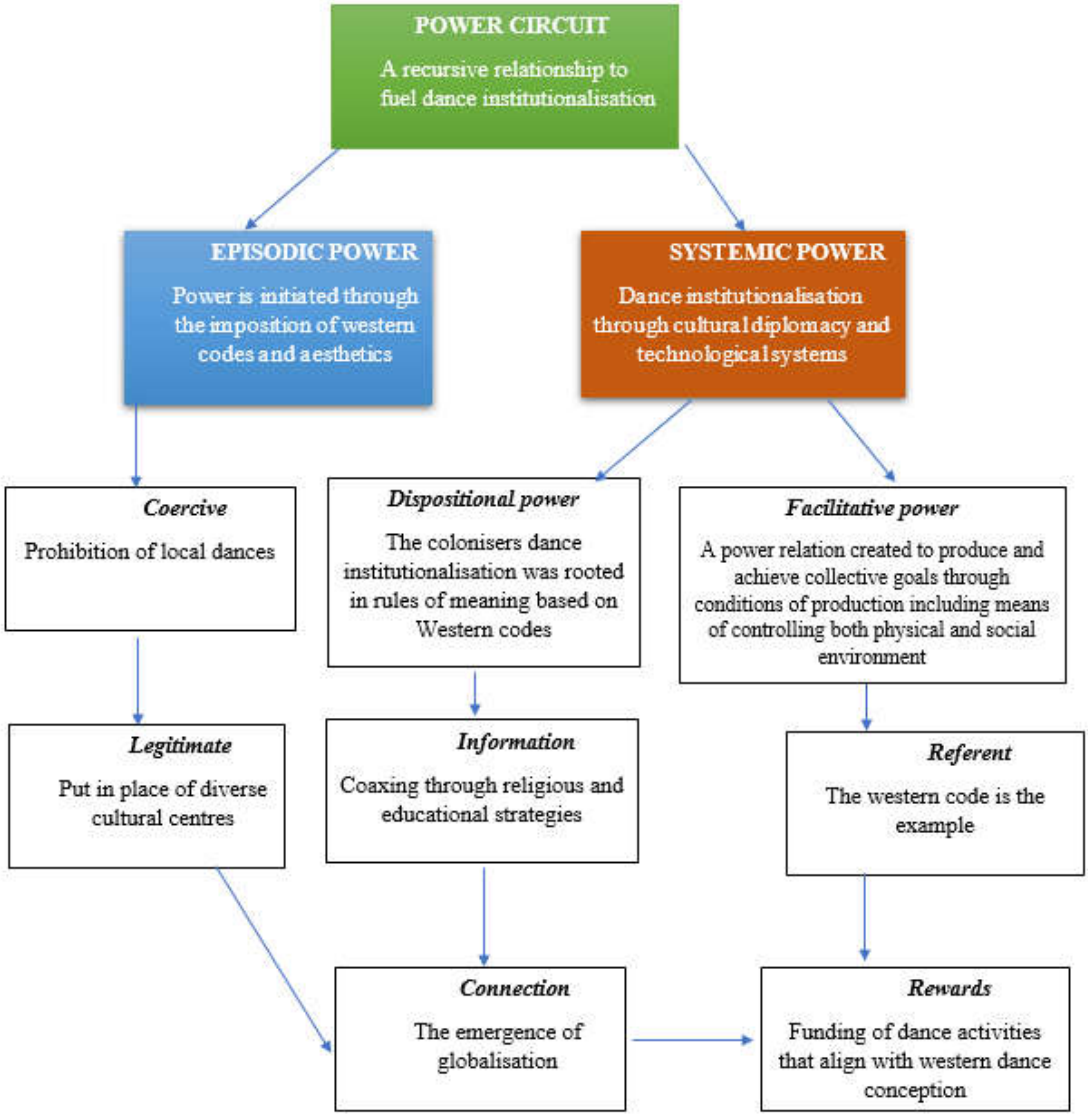

Figure 2: *An adaptation of Clegg's circuit-of-power framework and its interpretation in dance institutionalisation in Cameroon by (ex)-colonisers*

The power strategies illustrated in the above figure facilitated to the establishment of Western cultural institutes in the Cameroonian national territory (Figure 3), and materialised the prolongation of the West's cultural institutionalisation. During the interview with Yves Olivier in 2015, then Director of the French Instiute in Cameroon-Yaounde, he made it clair that their mission is not to 'promote cameoonian native dances for this is the responsibility

of the Cameroonian ministry of arts and culture.' He said, 'the French policy as far as dance is concerned, is to provide a platform where contemporary dancers can express themselves. And to achieve this, a series of actions, like workshops abroad are offered to them.' From his intervention, it is evident that these foreign institutions create values, necessary borders, and more persuasive strategies to engage professional dancers in their cultural imperialism. Choreographers whose works reflect the dominant culture aligned with imported Western aesthetics are easily sponsored because they employ varied dance-making strategies (assimilation, self-determination) in response to the stereotypical representation. Over the Cameroonian national territory, it is paradoxical to notice that there are three (03) European implanted cultural centres against only one (1) Cameroonian Cultural Centre (Figure 3).

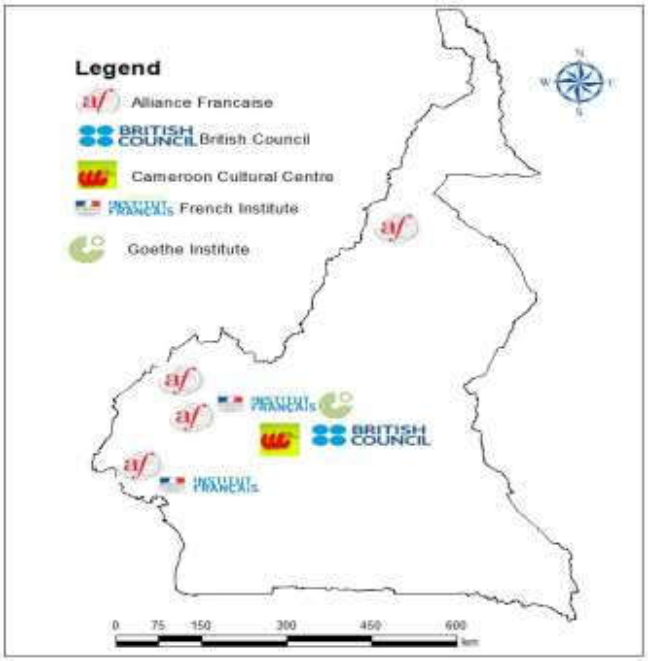

Figure 3: *Cameroon map showing the geographical distribution of (ex) -colonisers' cultural centres and Cameroonian cultural centre. © Aretouyap Zakari, 2020*

The French presence is important, they are rooted in six regions (North; Centre; West; North-West; South-West, and Littoral). The institutionalisation of choreographic practices is framed under contemporary dance. To achieve this, dance is controlled through aid programs for artistic creations and circulation initiated since 1990 (Orsenna, 1992: 293-294). The (ex)-colonisers dance institutionalisation is an epistemological framework that influences how dance professionals, who are unfortunately in the grip of colonial mentality (Dalaqua, 2020), construct, perceive, and understand dance participation in a quest for recognition and membership amidst the hegemonic cultural system. An independent dancer and choreographer during our interview indicated that, he had no choice than to practice contemporary dance. He said,

> *There is much to gain in the field of professional contemporary dance as compared to practicing native dances. With the presence of foreign cultural institutes, I have the opportunity to benefit from training and other advantages that the state do not offer to dancers. Those who are in the national ballet may have some opportunities but those who are independent dancers have no choice but to accept the offer of foreigners.*

From a critical point of view, one can say that the ex-colonisers succeeded in employing modern strategies to ensure their system of monitoring dance in Cameroon is essentially based on the techniques of disciplines and power configuration that 'create a new underdog, a new group who [benefits] from […] the prevailing decision.' (Dalaqua, 2020, p.8) With this apparatus, one wonders whether it was/is possible to envisage decolonisation within dance practices.

5.2. Dance, resistance, and decolonisation

Clegg et al. (2006: 18) consider power in terms of control and resistance, both body and soul, 'soft coercion' meant to govern obligations, and 'productive resistance' engaged in political revolt. Some scholarly works have addressed the deployment of dance within the framework of African decolonisation and postcolonial identity (Apter, 2005; Castaldi, 2006; White, 2008; Djebbari, 2019; Kabir & Djebbari, 2019). Most of the works underscore African resistance to cultural obliteration, and acknowledge that dance was/is an important decolonising tool. Kovács (2010: 25) writes: 'As to the role of African culture in the liberation struggle and African Unity, […] culture had been and will remain a weapon.' In fact, the early decolonisation process was marked by Pan-African movements such as the Negritude movement that developed a series of protests against white supremacy through arts. Kabir and Djebbari (2019) acknowledge that 'dance in varied African contexts is reaffirmed and probed as a complex cultural, political, and affective field.'

Again, secret societies' dances and rituals played an important role to resist colonial forces and procolonialists during what is known today as the bamileke war or hidden war (Deltombe, 2011, p. 144) spearheaded by the Cameroonian Peoples Union (UPC) insurrection (1956-70). Through these dances, activists were initiated in a way that they possessed supernatural powers that rendered them invisible and bulletproof. Weigert (1996: 47) writes that: 'Theodore Mayi Matip, who was the grandson of a prominent Bassa Chief, gave Um Nyobe access to one of the most powerful secret societies – Um Nkoda Nton.' Also, in the Beti society, dances and rituals mobilised people to understand, and reject colonial hegemony. The mevungu women dance played a determined role to resist colonial alienation According to Vincent (1976), Mevugu women sang, dance, and warned whosoever was a problem for their community.

The fight against Western domination also continued after independence. The perception of art as a form of activism integrates the understanding of Negritude as a political movement. This perception was persistent in the earliest postcolonial days in Africa. Dance-based initiatives were one of the many possible weapons used to express revolt against colonial institutionalisation. For instance, in one of his choreographies conceived for the Cameroon National Ballet in 1978, titled the 'Slave Revolt', Bebey Black narrates the Cameroonian struggle that led to her liberation. A recent choreography by Jerome Manda Doun (2018) titled 'Stronger together', recalls the bitter memory of slavery and colonialism. The cases reviewed above indicate that Cameroonian used dance to resist European cultural hegemony; however, it is difficult to determine clearly whether their efforts have decolonised the practice of dance in Cameroon.

In fact, most traditional dances changed their contexts to become stage theatrical performances, branded by the Eurocentric epistemic status quo with the stamps of colonialism (Dover, 2015: 370). Spivak (1997: 202) asserts that: 'Declared rupture of decolonisation has not resulted in the freedom one may have expected, the historical discourse – as independence from the colonial power might free us from our foreign oppressor's armies, but it does not automatically free us from the discourses in which our subjectivities and identities have been inscribed.' Indeed, with the promotion of theatrical or concert dance that was introduced with the creation of National Ballet, traditional dances went through a sort of "artification" nurtured by external factors borrowed from the West. Undoubtedly, the

dancer's body went through external realities, since traditional dance codes were muted in hybrid forms. A respondent from the national ballet acknowledged that, whenever he watched traditional dance performances in their context, that is, in the village, he had 'the impression that his body has been stripped to techniques which are unknown to his origins. Each time I perform a native dance when I go to my village, people around me wonder why my dance steps are different.' In fact, the arrival of the Western culture shifted away traditional models and codes to European-centred dance techniques, and stage constraints (Figure 4). Modified costumes and foreign musical instruments (such as the accordion) were introduced. For instance, German military dances gave birth to Cameroonian dances: The Ball dance of the Fang Beti; bottles and forks, introduced by Europeans, are the main instruments of the Bottle and Cluck dances in the grassfield; Assiko and Ambasbey dances in the coastal areas saw the introduction of the guitar.

Figure 4: *A classical ballet performance (from left to right, Anne-Marie Eno Belinga, Paul Kengmo and Marie Agnes Hell, French Culturak Centre 1981 © Longang (1982).*

Indeed, Kabir and Djebbari (2019, p. 315- 316) corroborate the above observation thus:

> *Decolonisation through dance remains a valid, meaningful, and ongoing process in different parts of the African continent, and one that, despite (or arguably because of), the colonial stereotype of 'Africa' through dance in conjunction with percussion, remains a vital issue for explorations of agency, subjectitivity, creativity, cultural appropriation, authenticity, and reparation in the continental context.*

Overall, infused with Negritude and Pan-Africanism, and entangled at the same time within a discourse on modernity, the theoretical institutionalisation of dance through the creation of National Ballet in Cameroon was articulated to respond to new postcolonial political and cultural environments that concurred with Senghor's (1959: 277) view of the decolonising process. Senghor claimed, 'The problem that now confronts us, […] is how we will integrate Negro-African values into the world […]. It is not the question of resuscitating the past, of living in the Negro-African museum; it is the question of animating the world, […] by the values of our past.'

5.3. Dance institutionalisation as a result of power

Dance as a power strategy **-** With the decolonising struggle, Cameroon gained independence in 1960. As the Cameroonian State took over the administration of the territory, the cultural environment changed and elicited new perceptions. Considered as a ''body politic'' (Bourdieu, 1977), dance provides a fruitful angle for accessing the

dynamics of society, the strategies of actors and their integration into local and international networks. As such, the 1960s marked a turning point in the history of dance in Cameroon. However, since the colonial period, cultural differences emerged in Cameroon and the question of national unity became paradoxical. The idea of unity as the fundamental policy of the State was first materialised in 1961 when the British Southern Cameroon chose through a plebiscite to join French Cameroon. In 1965, Cameroon came under the single-party rule and was renamed the United Republic of Cameroon in 1972 and the Republic of Cameroon in 1984. However, while government policy calls for national integration and unity, Cameroon's linguistic and cultural diversity have been a challenge to this initiative. In tandem with this, Monga (2000: 723) writes that:

> *Throughout Africa, there has long existed a tension between the creation of parochial ethnic identities and the simultaneous creation of a unified national identity. Cameroon exemplifies this situation, especially well. Economic inequalities and social injustice in the country have provided fertile grounds for politicians to exploit cultural differences by engaging in a political discourse that emphasizes ethnic particularities and the importance of localities, with a recent focus on village affiliation and rural constituencies.*

Undeniably, after independence, Ahmadou Ahidjo, president of Cameroon from 1960-1982, faced serious antagonism from members of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC). The latter considered him a sell-out defending French interests. Mbaku (2005: 205-206) indicates that dance was an important vehicle of political protest, and President Amadou Ahidjo's opponents entrenched the culture of dancing to show their disapproval. In view of this embarrassment, Ahidjo implemented cultural and artistic machineries to control dancers and restore the Cameroonian personality, identity and dignity, after a long period of colonialism (Figure 5). In fact, institutionalisation happened to be one of the strategies deployed by the State to decolonise the minds of citizens and stimulate the sentiment of national integration and unity in the country. Bahoken and Atangana (1976: 19) outline that:

> *One of the objectives of our cultural policy is the preservation of individual creativity, […]. It is through this renewed dignity that national integration will emerge and from which we will develop a Cameroonian cultural personality capable of bringing to universal civilisation vigorous and authentic elements stemming from its original vision freed from all alienation. This is the principle behind the creation of institutions responsible for cultural action.*

The answer to this need was the creation of a National Ensemble of Arts. The presidential Decree No. 62 / DF / 108 of March 31, 1962 created the first structure to promote national art and culture; the Federal Centre for Linguistics and Research of Yaoundé (CFLRY), today's Cameroonian Cultural Centre. According to a stakeholder, one of the dancers of the first generation of the N.B, 'the Centre as at then, offered three dance performances per week and dancers could be paid for their performances.' He recalls that 'Between July 1 and September 30, 1967, the centre organised approximately 6000 to 8000 performances. In 1968, the centre organised about 25.000 performances with a minimum entry fee of 100 FRS. This amount to a total generated revenue of 2,500,000 francs (two million five hundred thousand francs); a non-negligible amount at that period.' This respondent regretted however, that today dance is used by the state only to serve as propaganda, minimising the art as an important economic locomotive.

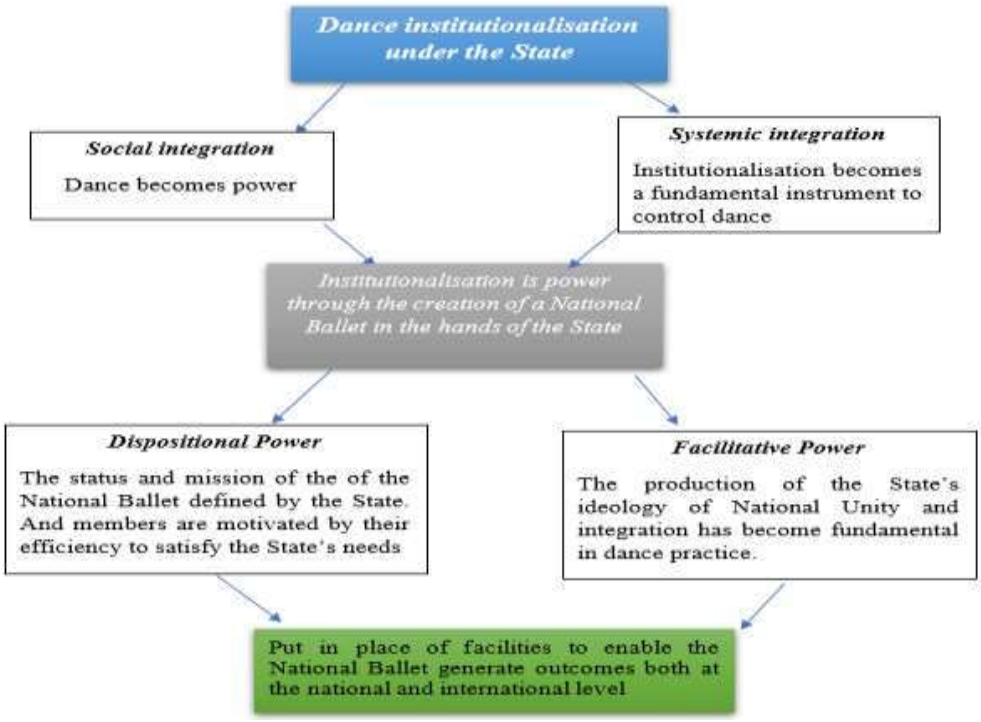

Figure 5: *The levels of integration of the circuit framework in dance institutionalisation by the State of Cameroon*

In March 1969, Ahmadou Ahidjo mapped the new cultural orientation of the Cameroonian State. For instance, he introduced *Decree No.26/DF/335 of 26 August 1968, Creating the National Ensemble*. As published in the Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, the above-mentioned Decree states that:

> *The President of the Federal Republic.*
> *Considering the Constitution of the 1st September 1961;*
> *Having regard to Decree No. 68 / DF / 268 of 12 July 1968 reorganising the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture.*
> *Decrees:*
> *Article 1: A National Dance Ensemble of Cameroon is created composed of best selections of traditional dances from different regions of the Federal Republic.*
> *Article 2: The Minister of Education, Youth and Culture is responsible for the implementation of this decree, which will be registered and published in the official gazette of the Federal Republic of Cameroon in French and English.* (Republic of Cameroon, 1968, p.iii).

This is to say, one of the strongest dance institutions put in place is the National Ballet were the State produces 'docile bodies' that are subjugated and integrated into systems of efficient and economic control (Foucault, 1980: 139). Dance institutionalisation becomes a political power in the hands of the State, and since 'power is everywhere […] and comes from everywhere' (Foucault, 1998: 63), the National Ballet (N.B) as symbol of the 'regime of truth' becomes a 'metapower'.

Dance as a power strategy is thus an essential instrument to express cultural heritage and the reinterpretation of culture (Bennett, Reid & Petocz, 2014) and suit the modern challenges. Considering that power is everywhere, the dancer is not only an object (agent) where the state implements its ideology but also where he is an actor in the transformation of culture. As such, Richard Bebey Black – who then was a N.B. choreographer – understood the need to develop another conception of dance far from any decolonisation process; in line with this, new dance techniques as well as new stage performance aesthetics were introduced. Until then, local dances were merely simply viewed as exotic attractions use for entertainment before "serious things" could start during official ceremonies. With the new choreographic framework, Cameroonian dances could travel abroad; the N.B. was present on the Independence Day in Paris and the Quai d'Orsay. Its mythical participation in 1977 at the second World Festival of Black African Arts in Lagos was a perfect illustration of Cameroon's cultural diversity in unity.

Seven (07) traditional dances portrayed Cameroon's dance potentials at this great cultural event. These were Mbaya, Ngbwao, Kou'ngang, Menang, Lam of Guider, Teme and Tso dances. Again, with the creation of the Cultural Week of Cameroon, the Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1982 and 1988 respectively, the State had more power on arts and culture. Paul Biya, second president of the Republic of Cameroon, in an excerpt in December 1982 said: 'We must welcome the decision to hold a national cultural week every two years as part of a festival of arts and of culture. This will be an opportunity to exalt the cultural ferment and excitement of our people and reveal the creative genius of our artistes'. This desire was fulfilled by the presidential decree n° 91/193 of April 08, 1991, creating the National Festival of Arts and Culture (FENAC).

To control arts and culture during the 1970s, arts associations were subject to 'prior authorisation from the Ministry of Information and Culture. Again, the law on subversion endangered any artist who denounced the regime in place' (Pangop, 2003: 56). The establishment of a 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1998, p.194) forced dancers to discipline themselves and act as expected. Yet, in the 1990s with the arrival of contemporary dance, dancers could now use their bodies to express political issues. André Takou Saa, one of the prominent Cameroonian choreographers addressed political topics like the situation of Cameroon 50 years after independence in his oeuvre titled "5.0" produced in 2010. Irrefutably, in the early days of independence, any dance group in the country had to respect the law n° 67-LF -19 of June 12, 1967, regulating associations over the territory. Recently, a law to control and normalise artistic and cultural associations in Cameroon was adopted, the law n° 2020/011 20 July 2020. Local artistes made incessant calls that the law be rejected but the State gave a deaf ear to their requests. Eventually, this legal framework facilitated to the institutionalisation of all cultural and artistic initiatives, and neutralised any enterprise that could be against the state's ideology.

2.4. Dance institutionalisation for national embodiment and international relationships

The construction of a Cameroonian identity through dance was structured by the representation of ''the national". Politically, the N.B constitutes a scaffolding of cultural relief and national unity. Ahidjo worked tirelessly for national unity and by playing skilfully on this keyboard, he knew how to pull the strings of the "equilibrium policy", and deftly regulated the tensions between the ethno-cultural fractions by associating them within the National Ballet and thereby discouraging ethnic divisions. This was not an easy task and the national character of dance has been explored in a variety of ways, contexts, and interests. For instance, Liza Ngwa's, first female choreographer of Cameroon, blended the different Cameroonian dances in one choreographic phrase without interruption, and baptised this form 'national integration dance.' Working under the banner of the National Ballet (hence under State control), Bebey Black conceived choreographies that reflected the diverse spectrum of the cultural expression of the country marked by colonisation. The political strategy of celebrating national identity and unity through dance

legitimised nationalism. Meanwhile, costumes and props used during performances illustrated this political aesthetics. This is the case with, 'Death of the crocodile'; 'The slave revolt'; 'The dream'; 'The tance'; 'Blues'; 'The Queen of Cameroon'; 'Freedom' were the portraits of the State's ideology. By signing all these works, not only did he magnify the fight for independence, and celebrated Cameroon, but he established the fundamental difference between choreographic creation and dance for entertainment. Chamba (2017: 112) highlights:

> *Perhaps the artistic approach of Richard Bebey Black, breaking with all logic of absolute conservatism, answered to the principles of creativity, openness and universality that the Head of State aspired. As choreographer and especially Artistic Director of N.B., Richard Bebey Black understood [...] the need to work for the perpetuation and popularization of choreographic art. This was possible by developing dance in Cameroon in a dyad that reconciles rooting and openness. From the traditional dances of Cameroon, this architect of dance invented a "Cameroonian dance". He quickly realized that it was necessary to give the dances of Cameroon "a concrete content" framed by a technique and tools that could make the N.B to familiarise the most beautiful Ballets of the West on the international stages.*

Undeniably, dance institutionalisation through the creation of the National Ballet, paved the way for strengthen national embodiment and materialised a political aesthetic. Apart from the N.B., which has made conditions favourable for dance to be used as a political instrument, a number of national dance groups have been promoting the aphorism of national embodiment through their ways of functioning or performances. In most cases, the dancers' costumes have been reflecting the national flag *Green, Red, Yellow*, and most of the local dance groups have been building their choreography on the theme of national unity and integration ideals (Figure 6).

Figure 6: *From left to right, a bikutsi dance group from the Centre region, a gourna dance group from the North, a bendskin and samale dance group from the West performing during the National festival of patrimonial dances and rythms of Cameroon. © Ministry of Arts and Culture, 2017.*

Also, dance has been playing a key role in political propaganda during major ceremonies, like sports events. The National Cup of Cameroon is one of a public event where dance is most often used to support the regime in power. Banners, effigies, the colours of the nation, recall patriotism, and national unity (Figure 7). Indeed, the Chair of the Cultural and Animation Commission of the female African Cup (CAN) 2016 in Cameroon, Marie Chantal Mazoume in one of her reports to the organising committee said that the opening ceremony of the 2016 female African Cup of Nations had as mission to celebrate Cameroon. Consequently, the event was an exceptional moment to celebrate

solidarity and African unity. The choreography illustrated the map of Africa and Cameroon (Figure 8). According to her, it was a moment of total communion between Cameroonians and the leader Paul Biya.

Figure 7: *View of the opening ceremony of the Cameroon Cup at the Ahmadou Ahidjo Omnisport Stadium during the opening parade on October 31, 210. © Prime Minister's Office.*

Figure 8: *View of the opening parade of the Women's African Nation Cup in Yaounde 2016 at Ahmadou Ahidjo Omnisport. © https://i.ytimg.com/vi/zxB2cG7Fx-Y/maxresdefault.jpg*

Beyond this national embodiment, under the new deal government with Paul Biya, dance institutionalisation is developed through cultural micro-universes whose spheres intersect more and more to illustrate a deeper desire to blend cultural differences into a national mould, and shape Cameroon's modern culture. To achieve this goal, the New Deal government strengthened its foreign policy, and engaged foreign Chinese dance professionals, Na-ersi and Juang-Keyu, to train a new generation of the National Ballet. These professionals had the mission to teach the future ''pillars of dance'' in Cameroon, the different contemporary body techniques that would facilitate a better approach to traditional dances of the country. Above dance, the body is the new focus of instrumentation, trapped between traditional dances techniques and modern techniques. For instance, the workshop organised by Robert Garland, a resident choreographer of the Dance Theatre of Harlem, gave another artistic touch to the Cameroonian *Ambasbey* coastal dance (Figure 9). Besides, with the introduction of these new exported techniques, the dancer's body becomes an embodiment of identity contradictions. The ruling regime perfectly uses the dancers' body to create an 'identity' where the modern episteme 'discipline' subject dancers under subtler forms of control. The dancers become the target of power, a political technology of the body that is inherent in disciplinary practice.

Figure 9: *Collage of screenshot of the film documentary, 'Cameroon National Ballet' ©The Hearts Foundation, Maniglia Media*

The various ideological models developed by the state since the 1960s transformed dance into various 'forms of power' (Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou, 2009: 7) and became a political act, and an object of reflection (Rancière, 2011) in the hands of both the State and the dancers. Through disciplinary machinery, the State mounts a meticulous control of power through choreographers who work out the relation between gestures and the overall position of the body to express at the same time cultural heritage, technological innovations as an answer to the challenges of globalisation. The N.B is henceforth, a globalised space and is no longer reserved solely for the valorisation of Cameroonian traditional dances. Paradoxically, we question whether the N.B. mission to consolidate national unity and integration is efficient because their performances are mostly consumed by 'White audiences comfortably seated in the theatres' (Castaldi, 2006: 124) domiciled in the West. Cameroonians hardly see dance groups of the N.B. perform within the country, and even when it is done, spectators are selected elites, including foreigners who are treated to rich cultural choreographic displays during their diplomatic visits. The discursive processes legitimising these institutionalisations underpins the State's ideologies.

6. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY

This article aimed at investigating the power relationship that exists in dance institutionalisation in Cameroon to show ultimately, how power is inherent in the practice of dance in the country. It examined how both Western and the Cameroonian State's ideologies structured the dancing body, and how dance is a political/diplomatic tool in their hands. The paper was anchored in the circuit-of-power theory. It was also based on a number of methods ranging from secondary sources to critical analysis. These methods enab1le to make sense of power and its relation to dance institutionalisation. Even if this study is not the first of it kind as far as the study of power at large is concerned, the investigation is a contribution to the literature in dance research and suggests new perspectives in the contemporary cultural history of Cameroon.

7. CONCLUSION

The present study explored how power has been central in dance institutionalisation in Cameroon since colonisation. Following Clegg's understanding of power through the circuit-of-power framework, the author deployed a

qualitative design for data analysis, and gave particular attention to episodic and systemic forms of power, in order to illustrate how both the (ex)-colonisers and the independent State of Cameroon used institutionalisation to control dance practice in the country. The data analysis claims that dance institutionalisation in Cameroon was both source and result of power. From the body as a site of socio-cultural control, to decolonisation, and the creation of the Cameroon's National Ballet, findings are three-fold. Firstly, they reveal that, during colonisation dance institutionalisation was based on the negation and the deconstruction of local traditional dances, and the introduction of Western codes to such a degree that it became a norm and influenced the local conception of dance. Secondly, dance as practiced today in Cameroon, has not really freed itself from the ex-colonisers who have put in place cultural institutions that continue to enable their control of the dancing body. Thirdly, even though dance was/is a powerful decolonisation instrument, it was shown that, after independence, the State of Cameroon used institutionalisation as a political and national embodiment strategy through the creation of a National Ballet.

The state used this structure to propagate its ideology of national unity and at the same time bridge the margin between Cameroon and the West as an attempt to locate and define their participation within the dominant Eurocentric world. Consequently, by comparing the (ex)-colonisers' form of dance institutionalisation with the system of control that has been existing after independence, the paper concludes that no matter their differences, both forms of institutionalisation are indeed similar due to the fact that institutionalisation is both a source and result of power to control dance practice. By associating power with the dancing body the (ex)-colonial and State authorities has been leveraging dance to express their hegemony and ideology. Nonetheless, while dance plays an aesthetic role (Rancier, 2004) in Cameroon and is at the service of social ideas supported by the authorities, its use by the State remains, indeed, a serious challenge for dance practitioners since to sustain international relationship dancers are subjected to Eurocentric body techniques, in order to meet the demands of globalisation.

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