The Journalist and His Powers in Cameroon: From Mediator to Game Master

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Abstract

Despite the controversy that surrounds their effectiveness, the powers of a journalist or of a media in general   are no less real, though they are not expected to be where they originally ought to be, namely in their capacity to impart beliefs and behaviour on passive citizens. This study re-examines the paradigm of media impact, initiated in the 1950s and which aimed, specifically, at exploring the influence journalists have on the power dynamics that link the press to some major actors in the social space, namely citizens, government officials and the judicial system. Ultimately, it turns out that because of the 'power' conferred on it by its capacity to create positions in the field, to build or undermine reputations, the press has ended up, under the cover of mediation, becoming a dominant actor in the cooperation/conflict relationship or asymmetrical power that links it to other social spaces.

Keywords: journalist, mediation, opinion, power, justice system, public space, government officials

1. Introduction

As an activity in the field of cultural production, journalism developed as a quasi-independent professional field between the end of the 19th century and the First World War. Its emergence and development occurred on the sidelines of the development of great Western democracies which have guaranteed its independence (Chalaby, 1996). Thus, the press is viewed as a constitutive element of democracy because it symbolises the social link of the community and makes public the political word by strengthening it and giving it added value (Park, 2008: 51). Concurrent with a form of political modernity in which the State, as an actor in political life, is observed by a spectator (the journalist) who reports on its actions to the people, journalism has even become the forum for democracy to blend unity and conflict (Muhlmann, 2006). Indeed, the journalist puts into words the conflicting nature of society, refocuses the political community and, in the end, brings out a common 'we' (Glevarec & Aubert, 2013). Hence the obvious link with the public space in which journalism has a particular echo, in the light of the above.

At the epistemological level, Max Weber, cited by Tétu (1992) already pondered in 1910: *"what do newspapers make public"*, and '*what don't they make public?"*, already setting the agenda of a sociology of journalism that was to lead to determining "*how supra-individual cultural assets are influenced (...), what beliefs and hopes are destroyed, created (...), what stances are destroyed forever or newly created"*. But it is especially towards the end of the 20th century that observation points of journalism surfaced in sociological production. Engaged in this direction, Francis Balle (1990: 11) also pondered what influence do the media have on the debates between human beings, on the exchange of ideas, on behaviours or on each and everyone's opinion.

Hervé Glevarec & Aurélie Aubert (2013) who compared the fields of sociology and journalism, wondered whether it is not possible to establish a specificity for journalism that would allow it to avoid the systematic inferiority in relation to social sciences. Another cognitive approach directs the sociology of the press towards the questioning of its relationship with other fields (Marchetti, 2017).

Thus, in our previous research works (Wakata, 2006, 2008, 2017), we questioned the interaction between journalism and public opinion, journalism and politics, journalism and justice, as politics and justice are two fields with real power over both citizens and the press. The aim was to identify the rationales at work and to highlight the mechanisms by which its power is exercised in social organisation, in the construction of opinion and in the structuring of the public space, as well as its relationship with other social fields.

In their sociological basis, these research works investigate the professional world of journalism, using an inside/outside

linkage. Viewed from inside, journalism can be analysed as a place or a complex system where actor-journalists are key elements of the system and intentional producers of meaning, in a symbolic mediation relationship that they have with the other actors in the public space (Lamizet, 2008). From the outside, the activity is seen as a major instrument of the democratic relationship between political actors and citizens. Media and journalists are considered in the primary role they play in the socio-political organisation of society. The aim is to observe them as "mediators", in the sense of Lamizet *(Ibid: 379)*:

> *"(…) that is, as actors of information, articulating a discourse and sound, iconic, or even gesture representations, giving to the reality of events that have occurred in the world the symbolic consistency and meaning of intelligible and interpretable representations in the process of communication".*

This central position in the communication process gives journalists a fundamental importance, even a real 'power' in the exchange of ideas circulating within society. Indeed, they are the ones who, enjoying a 'power of position', establish references, manage reputations and regulate public life (Spitéri, 2004). This is what has heightened our interest to study the professional world of journalism in Cameroon, because of the very atypical nature of this human activity whose nature among science fields and 'powers' (real or imagined) over men and society have fuelled much reflection and given rise to endless controversies.

The starting point of this study is the observation that in Cameroon, citizens, government officials and even magistrates are increasingly dependent on journalists, who have specific skills to provide society with material that plays a crucial role in the exchange of ideas, attitudes, behaviours and social interactions (Note 1). This immediately raises the question of the impact of journalistic activity on the public space. We therefore seek to explore the way in which the influence of journalists is exercised in the power dynamics that link the press to these major actors in the social space, namely citizens, public authorities (governments, administrative authorities) and the judicial system.

From the outset we assume that although it was put into perspective by research since the 1940s, the power of the media can be observed not so much in its capacity to exercise a direct influence affecting the behaviour of the public as in the modification of the mediation links that it creates between social spaces. In order to demonstrate this assumption, the study will firstly dwell on the paradigm of media effects to substantiate the point of observation that we stand for and, secondly, explore the means by which the powers of the journalist in Cameroon are more or less exercised.

2. Brief Comment on the Power of Journalists

How can the power of journalists, of the press or of the media be addressed without taking into account the need to get back to the roots of the media influence paradigm? This debate has been going on endlessly since its origins and has never been definitively closed (Note 2). This debate has encompassed all the fields defined by Lasswell as part of the sociology of the media in his programme question formulated in the 1940s (Who says what, through which channel,to whom and with what effects?). The progressive construction of an epistemology of communication makes it an object of knowledge, taking as its matrix all communication facts, regardless of their nature, their mode of apprehension or the elements involved in their definition (Olivesi, 2004).

There are several reasons for the consensus that unites the research community around this paradigm as a representation of the media action. These reasons are non-scientific and scientific (Balle, 1990). The first reasons are based on the bias of the omnipotence of broadcasting technology, which spread in the wake of the expansion of broadcasting and the advent of the first television receivers. The idea was that it was possible to make anyone believe anything, as long as they knew how to use the new tools.

The scientific reasons on the other hand concern the advantage of this formula, which does not seem to exclude any of the main links of any communication event, and, on the other hand, the advantage of segmenting the field studied into specific objects of analysis. But if Lasswell's approach offers this sequential advantage, it nonetheless has many limitations and dangers which very quickly give rise to criticism and controversy, the interest of which lies less in the nature of the grievances formulated than in the advances they induce by opening up new and more prosperous avenues for reflection. In addition to its connections with the biases of the time, as mentioned above, the weaknesses of the linearity of the model, limited to the sole review of the short-term effects of the media, but also the feedback principle, which makes the receiver of messages the actor in the relationship.

Another generation of researchers advocated, from the 1950s onwards, a change in the way sociologists and psycho-sociologists had represented the action of the media and the results of their observations (Balle, 1990). They argue that while the media have effects, these are rather limited, negligible, short-lived and even indirect. Indeed, specialists agree on the fact that the 'communication machines' do have an influence on the public, but that this influence is neither mechanical nor uniform, but rather indirect, vague and varied (Dortier, 1998).

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) developed the *"two-step flow of communication"* theory, according to which the influence of

the media is exercised in two stages: the messages emitted by the media first reach relays, who are people who are more involved, more informed and influential (*opinion leaders*) than the others and who then take upon themselves to transmit the information received within the relational network in which they live. These personal contacts would be more important than the media, given that media exposure is always selective, as most people are exposed as a matter of priority, to messages that confirm their pre-acquired opinions. This was later confirmed by the work of researchers such as Festinger (1957) on the selective exposure effect (selective reception, perception and memorization): individuals would have the capacity to resist messages and would actively seek out information in line with their opinions, attitudes or behaviours while avoiding mismatch in information.

In the 1970s, the field of research on media and communication was enriched by new orientations concerning, in particular, '*uses*' and '*satisfactions*', extending studies on audiences to the latent, and even perverse, functions of the media on the needs they meet and on the representations that audiences give themselves of the various media. These research works, drawing on public opinion studies, concluded that the mass media, which are supposed to contribute to democratisation, have different expectations of audiences and accentuate social inequalities, since the influence of the media depends not only on what people do with them, but also on what they expect from them and what they think about them (Balle, 1990). The media's capacity to influence society is therefore real, but complex (Note 3). This, according to the *agenda setting* assumption, would be more 'cognitive' than 'normative': the media would have little capacity to direct people's opinions, but would be very effective in directing their attention to various subjects (Charron, 1998).

This study, which is part of this paradigmatic crucible aims at highlighting the mechanisms from which the powers of the journalist in Cameroon derive. The journalist's position above the news production process leads to an examination, downstream, of the way in which the receiver is likely to be influenced by his/her discourse; of the way in which the information affects the latter's cognitive corpus, their opinions in general, their representations of politics and their behaviour, particularly in terms of political participation (which we limit to voting in the context of this work), etc. But also how does the journalist, as the main operator in the distribution of legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1994) affect other social fields that are considered closed, such as justice system?

3. The Influence of Journalists in the Public Arena

Gérard Spitéri (2004) has identified five (05) types of power exercised by the journalist: the power of exposure, the power of interpretation, the power of consecration, the power of amnesia and the power of influence. These powers embody the prominent place of journalists in the public arena, particularly in the mediation role that the press plays between the components of the social community of which it is itself a part. This study questions the influence of the press in Cameroon on the political field and its representations, on the relationship between politicians and citizens and on the course of justice, respectively.

3.1 The Political Arena and Its Representations: A Failed Mediation

An investigation into the field of politics entailed examining the image of President Paul Biya among the public in the city of Yaoundé, based on the reception paradigm. It aimed at highlighting how, in the case of Cameroon, the mediation of the press affects representations of political figures. At the onset was the observation that there was a lack of coherence the image of President Paul Biya as disseminated by the written press and the one perceived by newspaper readers in the city of Yaounde, as well as their attitude towards him (Note 4). Indeed, while newspapers constantly broadcast a negative image of the political figure, the print media public tends to vote for him. Moreover, his election results are ample evidence of this (Note 5). By revisiting the paradigm of effects according to which the media shape opinion and representations of politics, the objective was ultimately to examine the link between media exposure and behaviours related to the electoral process.

We considered that one can, in good conscience, expose oneself to a media without sharing or approving its analyses. In this case, there is a critical distancing on the part of the reader, allowing him or her, on the one hand, to scrutinise the analyses to which he or she is exposed and, on the other hand, to preserve his or her ideological integrity by exposing himself or herself only to messages that reinforce his or her pre-acquired opinion (Reynié, 1996). In this way, the reader would resist attempts to be persuaded and avoid cognitive dissonance whereby his or her behaviour is in contradiction with his or her opinions or attitudes (Hermelin, 1992). When receiving conflicting information, the individual would tend to discredit the sender, to look for elements capable of neutralizing it or to minimise its importance (Chovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953; Festinger, 1957).

As a multifaceted concept, the image touches on the dynamics of marketing, since images produced by, on behalf of or about a political figure constantly reinforce and transform his brand image. These are attached to a set of properties that are associated with a legal or natural person (Gourevitch, 1986). It is in fact a mental and quasi-irrational representation, particularly when induced by such elements as physical appearance or some emotional or affective connection.

The results of the content analysis of the nine most widely read newspapers in 2007 (Note 6), with regard to their perception or, more precisely, the representations they assign to President Paul Biya, were compared with those of a sample survey of newspaper readers in the city of Yaoundé, revealed that: 1. the image of Paul Biya as conveyed by newspapers is mostly negative; 2. newspaper readers have a negative perception of the press, which is considered biased and not very credible; 3. the image of Paul Biya is rather positive among these same newspaper readers. (Note 7)

With almost all media organs conveying negative messages, images and other symbols of the President of the Republic, one would be right in concluding that voters have a certain distrust of the man. Yet President Biya enjoys a rather good image among readers. Instead, he is seen sometimes as a humanist, sometimes as a moral values promoter and a wise man. And his political party, the CPDM, is considered the most fit to run the country. Hence the dissonance between Cameroonians' preference for these newspapers and their opinions and electoral behaviour, which does not fit with the 'orientations' or 'prescriptions' that the press would like to convey.

The reception of a media message is obviously not only reduced to decoding its semantic meaning, but conjures up a whole set of meanings linked to representations, emotional resonances, affective implications and defensive reactions that it creates in the receiver depending on the relationship of places that he/she maintains with the sender (Lipiansky, 2016). This is especially so because at the level of the receiver, an interpretation process takes place, since understanding a message is not only an operation of decoding but also an operation of inference. This inferential process is certainly based on a universe of shared representations and meanings, but also on the receiver's own interpretative framework.

While informing, the press is therefore supposed to shape the opinion of which it is, in principle, the reflection. But the study showed that Cameroonians consider these newspapers neither to be impartial nor credible. This more than justifies the low influence they have on the perception of President Biya. Paradox: not only does the press fail to form the opinion, it does not even reflect it. Rather, it is seen as a cliché of its own aspirations. Withdrawn into itself, it expresses a recursive and closed discourse. Indeed, according to Champagne (1990) journalists close the game when they think they are opening it. They draw the public's attention to certain facts which they establish as events then they ask through opinion polls, which events are the most important and what to think in order to comment on what "the people" think about the problems they themselves have raised".

The press necessarily influences political processes. But this impact operates essentially at the cognitive level, by providing the public with the elements necessary to construct representations of politicians and their actions: what city dwellers know about President Paul Biya, they owe it essentially to the press, since they have never met him to discover for themselves his qualities and weaknesses (Note 8). On the contrary, these representations are not enough to conclude on a normative and cognitive influence. There are other factors to consider in understanding the phenomenon of media effects on representations of politics, particularly with regard to one of the assessment tools of political participation, namely electoral behaviour.

Linking the results of the study to research on the effects paradigm, it is clear that the press can influence the voter, but the latter, even with objective elements of analysis, does not necessarily make a rational choice (Gosselin, 1995). In an electoral context, the voter does not make a decision solely on the basis of a satisfactory knowledge of the protagonists and their proposals; the criterion that enables him to make a choice is often that of a vague and sentimental impression of some of the attributes of the leaders that matter to him (Gosselin, *Ibid.*).

Despite a disparaging media discourse, the public maintains its confidence in President Paul Biya. There is no consistency between the opinion conveyed by the media and the public on the man and his actions. The journalist as an agent of the mediated relationship between the politician and the citizen sees his or her legitimacy being questioned, as intermediation is based on a trust relationship with two poles of interaction, namely the politician and the public. Public mistrust or resistance leads to a breach of the pact of trust. Does the same apply to the politician?

3.2 Politician/Citizen Relationship: Mediation as Smoke-Screen

The review of the means and devices mobilised by those who govern to seduce or convince those who are governed in 'times of peace', in other words, outside electoral periods, constitutes the second focus of the study. Indeed, it is established that most communications aim to influence others, to convince them, to push them to act in a certain way, to command them, to seduce them, etc. These different stakes are dealt with in two main ways. On the one hand, power strategies that establish a power relationship between participants (pressure, antagonism, confrontation, intimidation, effort to convince); on the other hand, strategies to seduce which seek a relationship of complicity, attraction, sympathy, persuasion, assimilation and proximity between the speakers (Lipiansky, 2016).

Government communication falls into this second category. By exploring the determinants that underpin the process in Cameroon, the aim is to see how democratic interaction between politicians and citizens is regulated or structured by

the press. In short, to highlight the way in which the symbolic mediation link of the press does or does not modify the interaction between those who govern and those who are governed.

In the modern world, communication is at the heart of political life. It is mainly carried out through the media, which gives more visibility to the actions of politicians. Thus, far from misrepresenting politics, communication is its natural mode of being, since politics is communication made power (Tixier-Guichard & Chaize, 1993). Being for long characterised by propaganda in the aftermath of the independence of Cameroon until the early 1980s, the mediation between those who govern and those that are governed was relaxed and revived with the institution of an official government communication framework in the 1970s and 1980s. Communication is then considered as a tool for disseminating a rhetoric intended to definitively establish the identity of the nation (Charland, 2003), around the official leitmotiv to: *inform and educate within, and expose and persuade without.*

The vertical nature of the relationship disqualifies any dialogue between those who govern and those who are governed, the latter being perceived as passive and immature recipients. By contrast, the former see themselves as exceptional beings, providential actors of a theological form of politics in which, as stated by Achache (1989:107),

> "*The sender, the one who speaks, is the elite Being, the one whose speech is legitimate because his person is vested with the forces that give life to the narratives. He/she is the visionary, the intercessor, the chosen chargé de mission in view of the historical destination of the political body: a leader and a guide*".

The return of democracy in the 1990s coincided with the emergence of the marketing model of political communication in this new competitive political space. The relationship between the two poles became contractual. And legitimacy is not based on a supposed divine or legendary anointing, but on election (elective legitimacy) and communication (cathodic legitimacy). It becomes imperative to use modern methods to promote transparency in decision-making processes, as well as wider, more fluid and permanent information of public opinion on the government action. The ideology underlying this policy is, however, based on a paradox: in addition to asking leaders to keep the public informed of decisions taken, they are instructed, at the same time to be cautious and to require the prior approval of the President of the Republic before making any statement (Note 9).

The legal framework that now governs public statement underwent real inflation between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 2000s, reflecting a will to improve a perfectible arrangement. But the option exhibited real restlessness, the leaders having to constantly navigate between the need to inform the public and the fear of making *"incautious statements, as well as revelations that are sometimes inaccurate and very often inappropriate"*. The removal of the prior visa of the President of the Republic in 1985 changed nothing (Note 10). The fear of tripping blocks the most courageous.

Before the second decade of the 2000s ended, the Head of State himself only respected the consecrated dates of 31 December and 11 February to solemnly address Cameroonians (Note 11). His appearances, punctuated by the exceptional requirements of the political agenda, made him appear, according to the French newspaper *Le Figaro* in its 12th October 2004 issue, aloof and managing his power with a certain mystery. We can better understand the pessimism of Tixier-Guichard and Chaize (1993), for whom transparency is only an optical illusion that hides the inequality of the exchange of power that motivates it, communication being, in fine, only the modern name given to the power relationship.

Men of power and administrations are *a priori* the main actors of government communication. In Cameroon, it is the highest administration that provides the bulk of the political personnel appointed in the government. In addition to the bureaucratic culture they embody, those who govern do not warrant elective office. They are, with few exceptions, technocrats who owe their existence only to the presidential decree. Their selection is never subjected to a transaction, as they have no prior political power. They are appointed by the Prince to whom they are accountable. As in the United States, the selection of political personnel here makes little or no use of long political careers, but allows for the sudden emergence of sometimes short-lived or blazing careers (Gerstlé, 1991).

But as is the case, they have succumbed to the cathodic temptation. For the communication made around political acts, in addition to giving an echo, is just as important as its content or meaning, which will only appear and be recognised as relevant if it is taken up and commented on by journalists. It is the power of interpretation that makes current events to be apprehended by the hermeneutics of the newspaper (Spitéri, 2004: 239). To be clear, an event only exists if it is covered by the media. Communication also aims at making the authors of these acts popular and to twist to their advantage the information that will then be made available to citizens (Albouy, 1994). Obviously, the government's objective consists less of informing than influencing. And television plays a major role in this process.

Although it was created only recently in Cameroon (1985), television has become the dominant media, particularly at the political level. A tool of mass persuasion (Mouchon, 1998), the embodiment of the cathodic agora (Rieffel, 1989), television has established itself, in democratic societies, as the main source of information for citizens and the one to which they give the most credibility (Charland, 2003). The powers that be in Cameroon have understood this; they

reserve their statements and the slightest media apparition for this medium, conscious of the fact that television gives them visibility and legitimacy (Maarek, 1989). Their fascination with the TV set seems to be paralleled only with their persistent belief in the medium's ability to impress citizens.

Though in the last decade, digital social networks have invaded the media landscape, television has not lost its power of attraction. No event can start in the absence of cameras, even if it means delaying its start for several hours, ignoring the fact that, by abusing them or pressuring to appear in them, the citizens, on the contrary, no longer rush to watch them on these media (Thoveron, 1990). But just like any marketing product, it is essential to be "seen on TV". This is the primacy of poster communication, of which television broadcast is the culminating point. One just needs to look like in order to exist. It is the indexical imprint for their political existence. Two powers operate here: the power of display which puts individuals in the spotlight, and the power of consecration, thanks to which the press gives visibility to people who would otherwise have remained in anonymity (Spitéri, *Op. Cit.*).   Indeed, while political leaders such as Cabral Libii and Maurice Kamto made extensive use of social media before, during and after the 2018 presidential election, they had previously been exposed and consecrated by television.

Until 2000, preference was given to press briefings broadcast on television. But the ritual suffered from its excessive solemnity and corresponded in all points to the observation made by Eliseo Veron (1989) about televised electoral campaigns, during which:

> *"The discourse universe is closed. The interviewer knows (or at least guesses) the answer before asking the question; the interviewee knows the question before answering: all the rules of convention are breached simultaneously. Questions are not questions, answers are not answers. Journalists in this context are not journalists".*

To put an end to this solemn nature, the venue for press conferences has evolved to become a sort of multi-voice performance. But the event itself is to appear on television, not the content of the communication. The purpose of communication lies less in its content than in the communication event itself and, in fine, communication prevails over politics (Wolton, 1995). The ritualised exercise combined with the lack of mastery of the cathodic communication codes are indications of an unclear perception of the need to be trained on norms and rites of democratic communication; each giving the impression to rely on their personal and providential skills. However, a player who has approximate control over her/his communication will be able to gather as many significant measures as s/he wishes, without gaining any media benefits (Chagnollaud, 1996).

In any case, the public image of the leaders does not matter. The Prince, alone, being elected, enjoys the popularity, because he is a "jealous god". During the 2004 presidential campaign in Bertoua, Minister Emmanuel Bonde told CPDM supporters who were annoyed that the presidential candidate's promise to tar the road linking this city to the capital Yaounde was not fulfilled because of blackmail: *"construction works on the Ayos-Bonis stretch of road will be carried out without blackmail".* One can guess that such a message was intended less for the people who might have been upset than for the person on whose behalf he was acting, namely the President of the Republic.

Paradoxically, communication, not intended to the citizens to whom we owe nothing, but rather to peers and the Head of State whom they thank for making them what they are. Power is speaking to power. And the authority figures who enjoy watching their own image broadcast over the media have sucked the lifeblood out of the State media (Wakata, 2006). The people are merely a passive witness of this routinized show. The discourse, highly technical and closed (Gourevitch, 1986), is intended only for those technocrats who share this elitist word. The traditional mediation links induced by dialogue and communication at the service of the democratic ideal are broken. The press is only a screen to reflect the image of leaders instead of being an interface with the public. (Note 12) Its status changes as in its relationship with justice.

3.3 Journalist Vs Judge: From Mediator to "New Lord"

The interaction between the press and the justice system has come of age. In Rome, there were ways to make legal decisions known to the inhabitants of the city, as the authorities were concerned about 'making public' the decisions rendered by those invested with the power to judge, due to their virtues to dissuade or prevent, and *in fine*, their usefulness for the organisation of society. As time goes on, the press has been active in disclosing procedures that are little known to the general public, but also in giving extraordinary exposure to cases by playing on the psychological effect of the verdicts handed down. During the French Revolution, the press specialised in legal matters, transforming public opinion into the judge in major legal cases (Mazeau, 2010).

From the boom in reporting largely on legal cases in the 1990s in Cameroon, journalists gradually became major commentators on judicial debates for their   public , leaving the posture of reserve and neutrality (admittedly being questioned within the profession) imposed by the relationship of strict information, and moving towards the expression of an opinion (Note 13). In so doing, they participate in "relocating justice in the media" (Garapon, 1994), a source of

many conflicts with magistrates. These paradigms of show justice or media lynching became real, notably in the framework of Operation Sparrowhawk, as recounted by one of its ''victims'' who denounced the manipulation of justice and the press by the political power (Olanguena Awono, 2016 : 125) (Note 14).

Standing by its founding dogmas such as independence, the secrecy of investigation, respect for procedural deadlines, etc., justice rejects any idea of external influence in reaching its decisions. It has the power to affect the agenda of the press, with the legal facts becoming current matters, since journalists have a vocation to talk about everything that has a social resonance. The aim of the study conducted in 2017 (Wakata, 2017) was to see whether the course of justice is not also subject to the influence of the press and, if so, to reveal its determinants. By comparing journalistic practice with those of the justice system - both professions being dedicated, each in its own way, to the service of truth - the study questioned, in the case of Cameroon, the reasons at work in the interaction between two 'powers' that are in   permanent tension between conflict and cooperation.

There is an asymmetrical power relationship between the journalist and the judge. In this confrontation, the journalist appears to be weakened: his identity is not clear and his profession lacks social prestige and precise boundaries (Ruellan, 2007). The journalist is faced with the judge, whose identity is well defined and access to the profession is very strongly regulated by legislative and regulatory instruments. His prestige is asserted in society. Moreover, it is a body that acts as part of the State repressive apparatus: it has, by law, the power to condemn the journalist, including forcing him to break a professional taboo: to reveal his sources (Note 15).

Despite the deep-rooted rivalry between justice and the media (a different relationship to time, a divergent conception of the notion of secrecy, free access on the one hand and economic pressure on the other, neutrality and objectivity, instituted power versus symbolic power, etc.), the two fields are constantly cooperating. In an essentially instrumental way, the judge resorts to the press to serve her/his cause: not only does the media accompany the justice system, but the latter solicits them when necessary, in the case of calls for witnesses, for example. Secluded in his cabinet, the judge relies on the press to disseminate his decisions to the general public, when s/he does not simply hope for a certain popularity or, at least, goodwill so as to maintain her/his reputation. It is necessary for her/his decisions to be known in order to be accepted (Nsanzuwera, 2001). The judge, who does not presume anything and is supposed to act in total neutrality and independence, curiously finds himself acting under the vigilance or control of the press or public opinion, whose approval, they now seek, thus getting out of their comfortable isolation (Note 16).

This manipulation is not one-directional. One make use of the other according to their interests. The coverage of judicial current events is both essential to the media, which thus fulfils its duty of informing public opinion, and to the judiciary, which, through this alternative reception, extends the number of citizens who are informed about its decisions. In their absence, the community would be more or less totally ignorant of the judicial world where silence, discretion and procedural prudence are prevalent.

For its part, the specialised press has ended up "relocalising" justice within the media (Garapon, 1994). The defendants, aware of the psychological impact of media coverage of cases, tend to turn to public opinion to obtain justice. In other words, to influence in their favour the court's decisions, whose course continues outside the confines of tribunals, giving rise to the paradigm of 'media trial' (Descamps, 2003), where public opinion, exasperated by the slow pace of justice, is transformed into a courtroom. This capacity of the press to construct a discourse or a judgement on the other party (the judge), reinforces its symbolic power, since it is able to guide the perception of opinion by eliciting approval or disapproval of the judge's action. Through his power as tribunal and the right to say what is recognised (Spiteri, 2004), the journalist widens his margin of manoeuvre and seeks in turn to impose his perception and to rebalance the relationship to their advantage. In this respect, it has a major ally: the public opinion. This change of situation has consequences, since it gives him a *de facto* power over the judge.

Especially since, in his capacity as 'interpreter of collective emotion', he brings facts to life almost 'live', unlike the judge's approach where 'everything is in a reported speech' (Garapon, 1994). Moreover, by the very nature of its activity, the press is a source of information for the justice system. On the one hand, the latter depends on the journalist for the dissemination of images or sketches of people wanted by the police and, on the other hand, the journalist, through his investigations and revelations, acts as an authorised "whistle-blower".

The journalist therefore works to shed light on the work of the judge, who himself is not averse to drawing on the media to support his decisions (Note 17). In their verdict, the latter reflects, consciously or not, on the effects that media pressure has produced on him, particularly in the Law Courts (Philippe & Ouss, 2016). Admittedly, out of respect for the ethical principles governing their profession, judges are reluctant to acknowledge that they may act under pressure of opinion. But there is a wide gap between professional dogma and reality. Like the journalist, the judge is not a supernatural being. But the weight of norms and social control exercised by the peer community dissuades them from publicly acknowledging such an alternative. The judge is under a twofold constraint. Either he acknowledges the

influence of the media and is guilty of professional misconduct or he rejects it and speaks an untruth.

The speed of the procedure and the exemplarity sought through the severity of sanctions handed down, notably within the framework of 'Operation Sparrow hawk' are two modalities through which media pressure is observed in the course of justice in Cameroon (Note 18). In addition to the heavy penalties handed down, the justice system has sometimes acted with a surprising speed and requested that these penalties be published in large audience media outlets. Such emphasis on the publication of decisions is a clear indication of the desire to make an impact and to give the sanction imposed a particular resonance (Note 19). The justice system thus meets, on the one hand, the press in the sensational exploitation of its decisions and, on the other, the Executive Power in its desire to use these sanctions as an example.

A three-pronged approach comes into play, with the politician teaming up with the media and justice duo. The justice system is thus an 'accomplice' on the one hand of the press in sensationally exploiting a fact of justice and, on the other, of the government, eager to politically use these sanctions to prove to the people that it keeps its promises and to clear itself of the endless accusation of laxity in the fight against corruption. Justice, the media and politics find themselves serving a common cause, especially when politics creates an expectation in the public that turns, later on, into an absolute emergency warranting a particular swift reaction for the judge, who is in a hurry to give satisfaction to a public opinion held in suspense by the media. To the extent that it is enough to be cited in a case to be automatically condemned by the media justice. Serving the democratic ideal of the public's right to information on the conduct of public affairs may thus, in certain circumstances, lead the justice system to contradict the equally democratic requirement of guaranteeing every citizen the right to a fair trial, as the exemplary nature of sentences and the speed with which they are meted out may impede the right of every person to have their case heard within a reasonable time (Wakata, 2017).

The power that the journalist has acquired in this interaction is even such that prosecuting a journalist for a crime under ordinary law or punishing them for a press offence has become an attack on freedom of the press. Any crime committed by a journalist is dissolved in the freedom of the press. Exercising this profession automatically confers a kind of immunity. There is a thin line between ordinary crime and press crime. Journalists have thus managed to achieve a master-stroke: to disguise any condemnation as an attack on their freedom. They have *de facto* acquired the decriminalisation of press offences, which they are currently denied *de jure*.

We are indeed in the 'Republic of journalists' described by Spitéri (2004), where the corporation, 'drunk' with its power, is exercising a 'democratic despotism'. All the more so as, thanks to the amnesia power of the press, serious errors committed by certain newspapers are absolved and 'forgotten' by their colleagues. Amnesia guarantees impunity (*Idem*, 2004). Karl Kraus Karl Kraus was no less critical of the press domination which he accused back in the 19th century of gradually becoming the only truly absolute power (Bouveresse, 2001).

From a simple instrument of mediation, the press has ended up subjugating the justice system, which is now forced to deal with it at the risk of remaining in its confines and being condemned by the public opinion court.

4. Conclusion

The media, by disseminating representations of politician, influences the opinion-forming process by providing Cameroonians with the opportunity to know their leaders (physical appearance, weaknesses and qualities, political affiliation, etc.), to have a certain idea of them that is likely to impact their judgement and influence their behaviour as voters. But the link between press exposure and voting behaviour cannot be irrefutable. Newspaper readers in Yaoundé, although bombarded with messages hostile to President Paul Biya and tarnishing his image, nonetheless vote for him, keeping a critical distance vis-à-vis the discourse of the media to which they give no credibility. There is a breach of the pact of trust in the relationship of the public with this press at the service of its own aspirations.

The influence of the media must therefore be tempered. Resistance mechanisms combined with the low credibility given to journalists help mitigate the link between media exposure and voting behaviour among citizens. Clearly put, if the media broadcast representations of political figure and affect the opinion-forming process, they do not necessarily condition voting. The results of research works on this topic confirm the conclusions of post-Lasswellian research, which, from that time onwards, tempered the presumption of the media omnipotence, which led to the malleability or even passivity of the receiver, and, on the other hand, revives the importance of personal contacts or relational networks rather than the media. This is probably the case, because if the public does not rely on the press to form its opinion, it is because there is something else that is more important in this process, and that could indeed be located in the relational networks that are still very prevalent in Cameroon.

The power of influence of the press would thus reside rather in its capacity to 'make' positions in the field, due to the status of main operator of distribution of legitimacy which Bourdieu recognized in journalism. The mediation link between those who govern and those who are governed is therefore modified due to this media legitimacy: power is talking to power through the press. In a mediation paradigm shift, the press has given room to communication for

communication. Instead of having as purpose to inform citizens, it is being used by and for the ruling elite who, if they continue to believe in the media power and, especially, that of television where it struggles to display themselves, the citizens themselves are more cautious.

If it is accepted that, by virtue of the power they exercise over society, they modify the traditional mediation links between politicians and citizens, the media has also contributed in modifying power links between social spaces, by now occupying a prominent place in the interaction relationship they have, in particular with justice. The journalist has ended up overturning the asymmetrical power order in her/his interaction with the established power of the judge to his advantage. The middleman position of the press has turned into a dominant position. From mediator between justice and opinion, the journalist has turned into a powerful actor exercising the opinion pressure on the judge by proxy, who expects results and speed in investigating cases that are keeping society in suspense. It is normal therefore that, contrary to the strict ethical-dogmatic posture, the judge himself in a quest for exposure or consent of the press, whose echo power he fears, is now influenced in his work by the journalist who puts opinion pressure on him.

Finally, if media power is not to be sought in its ability to directly influence behaviour, it seems to be found rather in the modification of the mediation links that it creates between social spaces. Instead of addressing the public, the journalist talks to himself and disseminates the opinion of the media microcosm, pretending to reflect that of the public. S/he is the mouthpiece of her/his own aspirations. Moreover, abandoning the status of an intercom, s/he has turned into a screen on which those who govern mirror themselves, talk to themselves by making the citizens to believe that they are talking to them. Ultimately, instead of remaining the intermediary through which legal matters are known by the public, the journalist has rather comfortably settled on the pedestal given to him by the judge who has now become addicted to media praise. In all three cases, the mediation codes are upended by the action of the press.

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Notes

Note 1. There is reason to qualify this statement by invoking the fact that the advent of digital social media confuses the codes of the journalist-public relationship, from the moment when, thanks to this technological device, any individual has the ability, without necessarily having to justify the required skills, of becoming an author of information, which can be used by the journalist to write articles *a posteriori*.

Note 2. The notion of power is construed here in the sense of "power over", i.e. the capacity, within asymmetrical social relations, to have a hold or an influence on individuals (Chazel, 1999).

Note 3. The general theoretical framework of the effects paradigm, after having been questioned for a long time, has been rehabilitated. This revival is based on the observation that the traditional links between voters and parties are weakening, a phenomenon that would have led to a significant increase in the proportion of citizens making their choice during electoral campaigns, and would thus have contributed to an increase in the level of receptivity of voters to

electoral communication (Nadeau & Bastien, 2003: 176).

Note 4. 14 years later, nothing has changed. The press is still harshly critical of the President of the Republic. Yet in the meantime, he has won two elections, 2011 and 2018. The divide between the press and the readership seems final. However, this must be tempered by the fact that the study only covers newspaper readers in Yaoundé. Extending it to Douala might have produced different results, given that Paul Biya was defeated in this region of the country, the only one of the ten (10) in the country.

Note 5. As a methodology precaution, we reject the electoral fraud assumption often put forward by the press or the opposition parties, but which cannot be verified with the tools we have. We stick to the only objective data published by the authorised bodies, including the Constitutional Council.

Note 6. Cameroon Tribune, Le Messager, Mutations, La Nouvelle Expression, Le Popoli, l'Effort camerounais, The Post, The Herald, le Patriote.

Note 7. The quota sampling method was applied, with a sample of 200 people for a survey population of 23,000 readers. See Wakata Bolvine, F. (2008), L'image du Président Paul Biya auprès des lecteurs de journaux de la ville de Yaoundé, in *Fréquence Sud, n° 19,* Op. *Cit.*

Note 8. And eventually to the political-administrative elite and presidential party militants, even if the latter's voice has more resonance in rural areas where media exposure is almost non-existent.

Note 9. This, in order: *"To tackle disinformation characterised rampant and persistent rumour, which puts citizens into confusion and makes them easy prey to the activities and manoeuvres of intoxication and socio-political destabilisation evil-doers"* (See Circulars No. 009/CAB/PR of 31 December 1985 on public declarations by personalities and No. 002/CAB/PM of 23 July 1992 to revamp government communication).

Note 10. It is limited to *"... interventions concerning decisions already taken by the government and are not considered as confidential nor secret"* (See Circular No. 005/CAB/PR of 26 June 1989 on government communication).

Note 11. The advent of social media has overturned the old order. The President now resorts to it regularly to announce a decision or react to current events, etc.

Note 12. For elected officials, particularly those in the opposition, the situation is different because of the new possibilities offered by social media. Taking advantage of the 'real time' benefit, they publish and share their statements and stand with their 'followers' as soon as they have finished speaking in the National Assembly. Sometimes, they even make their statement in advance.

Note 13. See the cases of: 1. Public Prosecutor's Office c/ Barrister Yondo Black, Lawyer at the Cameroon Bar, Anicet Ekane, Henriette Ekwe, Mukong and Co. for rebellion and breach of State security; 2. Njawé – Monga, prosecuted after they published an article on the health state of President Paul Biya; 3. Zogo Andela c/ La Nouvelle Expression (Séverin Tchounkeu-David Nouwou) : the journalists were prosecuted for publishing an article denouncing the convention between Cameroon and Senegal, exempting from customs duties the company Camecrus which was supposedly fishing mackerel in Senegalese waters to sell them in Cameroon, etc.

Note 14. Operation sparrow hawk aimed, some 15 years ago, to combat corruption and misappropriation of public funds.

Note 15. Article 50 of Law N° 90/052 of 29 December 1990 on the freedom of social communication

Note 16. See for example Note No. 252 of 18 December 2014, « Etude de législation comparée », www.senat.fr

Note 17. Gouaze (1979) shows how media pressure led the judge to acquit the young Marie-Claire at the Bobigny court, despite being accused of abortion at a time when voluntary termination of pregnancy (IVG) was still a crime in France.

Note 18. See also Renaud Revel, "To what extent do the media influence court decisions? *http://www.europe1.fr/medias-tele*, 11 February 2016.

Note 19. The defendants were sentenced to between 15 and 50 years of imprisonment. In addition, and fact without a precedent in Cameroon, the representative of the Public Prosecutor's Office, no doubt wishing to demonstrate that the judges were not insensitive to what was being said in the press, ordered that the sentences be published in the media, naming ten of them.