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## EMERSON'S "SELF-RELIANCE," HYBRIDITY, AND THE CAMEROONIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

This paper examines Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and its relation to education and hybridity in a multicultural society like Cameroon. Since its publication in 1841, Emerson's essay has been considered a vibrant echo of individualism and self-centeredness as evidenced by one of its core statements: "There is time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide: that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion" (Norberg 114). If one takes oneself for better and for worse, we become the standards of our own evaluation. The self consequently becomes exclusive as it rejects any outside or foreign influence.

Thus, it seems paradoxical to relate self-reliance and hybridity, two terms which are apparently irreconcilable. However, this article blends the two terms to highlight that despite its focus on individualism, Emerson's "Self-Reliance" has paved the way for international education and hybridity, which promotes the combination of native and foreign cultural values highly prized in many nations and specifically in Cameroon. This study – which is motivated by the fact that more and more Cameroonian languages are threatened in the global context where dominant economies are synonymous with dominant cultures – tackles the thorny problem of the co-existence of African cultures alongside Western civilisations.

Dwelling on one of the key statements of "Self-Reliance," "trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string" (Norberg 114), many critics have applied Emerson's self-reliance to philosophy, religion, literature, economics and politics. In "Out of Panic, Self-Reliance," Harold Bloom compares the 1837, 1929 and 2008 economic crises in the US to show that all the three crises have one common denominator which is the US reliance on lending. Bloom notes that:

The bank failures of 1837 were followed by high unemployment that lasted into 1843. Foreign overinvestment (chiefly British) had augmented the bubble, which burst when the wily English pulled their money out. President

Martin Van Buren, a Jacksonian Democrat, refused any government involvement in a bailout, and so was widely blamed for the panic. (Par 2)

In other words, Bloom underpins Emerson's self-reliance and admonishes American economists and politicians for their heavy dependence on foreign capital. Buren's refusal of any governmental involvement in a bailout in 1837 jeopardised the country's economy. Bloom's conclusion – "I am a scholar of literature and religion, and would advise whoever becomes president to turn to Ralph Waldo Emerson" (Par 3) – shows his espousal of Emerson's self-reliance, which in this context, means dependence on one's efforts, skills and capabilities to overcome hurdles.

However, as this essay purports, "relying on oneself" in the Emersonian sense does not exclude the contribution of others, a point Ann Woodlief and M.A. Quayum make in their works. They establish a connection between Emerson's self-reliance and reliance on others. Woodlief observes that "all we can really know is within us, but we must assume that other people have the same potential as we do" (Par 2). Her statement drives to the conclusion that reliance on other people is possible as the latter have the same potential as we do.

Like Woodlief, Quayum lays emphasis on both self-dependence and dependence on others. In *Saul Bellow and American Transcendentalism*, he notes that as "a prophet of self-reliance, Emerson is careful not to engage in self-indulgence, isolationism or egotism" (26). In this article, I am going to use the Cameroonian educational system to explain the paradox involved in Emerson's essay which posits that "whoso would be a man, must be a non-conformist" (Norberg 116); at the same time it advises man to go "abroad to beg a cup of water of the urns of other men" (126).

Using Bernard Baylin's, Bernard Fonlon's, Edward B. Tylor's, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's and Bill Ashcroft's educational and cultural theories, this paper studies the relationship between Emersonian self-reliance and hybridism. It shows that Cameroon's reliance on its languages and other cultural values is the first step towards the country's successful espousal of international education and hybridism.

In his book *Education in the Forming of American Society*, Bernard Baylin purports that education in its broader sense "is not only formal pedagogy

but the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations” (14). In *The Genuine Intellectual*, Bernard Fonlon, a Cameroonian scholar, holds that “a good education should be animated by that spirit of inquiry, that thirst for learning, which urges the scholar to keep on searching for more and adding of his/her intellectual stature, as long as he/she lives” (53). From the two definitions of education, I will consider two key phrases: “transmits itself” and “searching for more,” which implicitly point to both self-reliance and openness to foreign influence, a conduit to hybridism. As Bill Ashcroft *et al.* observe in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*,

hybridity occurs in post-colonial societies both as a result of conscious moments of cultural suppression, as when the colonial power invades to consolidate political and economic control, or when settler-invaders dispossess indigenous peoples and force them to “assimilate” to new social patterns. It may occur in later periods when patterns of immigration from metropolitan societies and from other imperial areas of influence (*e.g.* indentured labourers from India and China) continue to produce cultural palimpsests with the post-colonial world. (183)

This statement points at the cultural blend which results from the contact of various cultures. Although this contact may be motivated by political and economic imperialism, it deals a blow to the advocates of “pure” and “superior” cultures.

As a consequence, it becomes interesting, in the case of Cameroon – a bilingual country where more than 240 native languages are spoken – to seek the answers to the following questions: how is Emerson’s self-reliance reflected in the Cameroonian educational system? How does it impact on the process by which culture transmits itself across generations in the Cameroonian society? In other words, what role does the blend of native and foreign systems of education play in the bridging of cultures in Cameroon? Does the Cameroonian experience reflect the experiences of other multicultural societies? To answer these questions, the first section of this article will relate self-reliance to the Cameroonian pre-colonial and colonial systems of education, while the second section will connect self-reliance, international education, hybridity and globalization.

Self-reliance played a major role in pre-colonial and colonial systems of education in Cameroon. Pre-colonial education was the imparting of knowledge, good judgement and wisdom to the younger generations by parents and the community at large. One of its fundamental goals was the transmission of traditional cultures from one generation to the other. In most pre-colonial Cameroonian communities, education was imparted to children through orature or orality: traditional pedagogy was basically oral and deeply rooted in indigenous languages. Traditional literature in Africa served and still serves as an instrument for examination of individual experience in relation to the normative order of society. It was used and is still used in several regions of Africa to chart social progress or to comment on how society adheres to or deviates from general community aesthetic (Enongene & Djockoua 84-85). The moral, spiritual, and intellectual values of the communities were conveyed by songs, proverbs, legends, and folktales. Simply put, reliance on the community's culture was the foundation of pre-colonial education. The pre-colonial traditional society relied on its own wisdom and traditions and was reluctant to imbibe foreign values.

As a consequence, African folklore plays a significant role in traditional systems of education. It validates social institutions and religious rituals. It teaches morals and observance of social norms — group solidarity is one of the most important of these social norms. The ideological matrix which prevailed in pre-colonial traditional communities guaranteed symbiosis between the individual and the group. Although the pre-colonial Cameroonian system of education seemed self-reliant, the individual within that community was not self-centred.

The traditional pre-colonial world shaped individual identity and set goals for male and female children and adults. The male child's growth and masculinity were assessed by his ability to perform some rituals and tasks assigned by the community — circumcision, farm work, wrestling, and marriage, amongst others. The female child was taught housework, farm work, and she was prepared for marriage through servile obedience to the future husband. Obedience and submission to community norms were therefore the chief principles of traditional pedagogy which, as I said earlier, was

transmitted from one generation to another by the family and the community at large.

Although the intrusion of colonial education altered traditional pedagogy, it encouraged the natives' reliance on their languages. Colonial education was introduced in Cameroon by English Baptist missionaries: John Clarke of Jericho, Jamaica, Dr. G.K. Prince, Joseph Merrick, Alexander Fuller, and Alfred Saker. The main goal of these missionaries was to gain converts who could read and understand the Bible and later preach the Christian creed. As the Baptist missionaries wanted learned clergymen and congregations, the Jamaican former slave and missionary Joseph Merrick built the first European school in Douala, in 1844, and set up a small printing press where religious and school textbooks were printed. This achievement marked the beginning of print literacy in Cameroon. Merrick translated the Bible into the Bimbian language while Saker translated it into Duala (Bimbian and Duala are Cameroonian native languages). As Partha Chatterjee observes in "Nationalism as a Problem," print language creates unified fields of exchange and communication (Ashcroft *et al.* 164). Among the Cameroonian pioneers who used print literacy ranked sultan Ibrahim Njoya, who invented what is commonly called the Bamun alphabet, the poet Lotin Same, the storyteller Charles Atangana Ntsama, and René Jam-Afane, poet and composer of the Cameroonian national anthem (*Le Livre Camerounais et ses auteurs* 39-40).

After the Berlin Conference in 1884-1885, Germany took control of Cameroon and this annexation weakened the activities of the English Baptist missionaries. However, the example of the English Baptist Mission was emulated by the Basel Mission (1886), one of the most important religious missions in Cameroon during the German colonization. This mission had its headquarters in Switzerland and its German branch in Stuttgart. Despite some disagreements with the Baptist Church (the Native Baptist Church), the Basel missionaries opened schools in various areas of Cameroon, using local languages as a medium of instruction. Like the Basel Mission, the American Presbyterian Mission, which arrived in Cameroon in 1879, carried out evangelization while it promoted education. It opened many schools in the Bulu region, among which was one vocational school. Other achieve-

ments of the American Presbyterian Mission included a printing press and a pastoral school.

The Catholic missionaries, who came after the American missionaries, left ineradicable imprints on the Cameroonian educational system. They built schools in Douala, Yaoundé and in many other towns. The last group of missionaries, the German Baptist Mission, also built schools to educate the Natives. Christianity was thus the prime mover of colonial education in Cameroon, although it encountered some bottlenecks in the northern part of the country where Islam and its Koranic schools prevailed. To bridge the gap between Western education and Islam, the representative of the German colonial administration in Garoua – a town in the Northern part of Cameroon – decreed that in addition to German, Muslims would also study Arabic and attend Muslim services in the local mosque every Friday.

Most of the schools that the missionaries opened were monitored by the German administration. This administration set up many schools in the main towns, imposed German as the medium of instruction, and helped some young Cameroonians to further their studies. Charles Atangana, a Cameroonian Native, went to Germany to teach Ewondo (a Cameroonian language) at the Colonial Institute of Hamburg. The instances above-cited prove beyond any doubt that German colonial education, despite its coercive methods, sought to bridge cultures by favouring both the teaching of German and Cameroonian native languages.

When Germany was defeated during the First World War, Cameroon was divided into French and British mandate territories, which later became United Nations trust territories. Although there were some schools built by the government, education in the French Cameroon was mainly monitored by the following religious groups: the Catholic Mission, the French Protestant Mission, the American protestant Mission, the American Adventist Mission, and the Norwegian and Sudanese Missions. In the British Cameroon, elementary school was controlled by the government, and the native administration. In 1924, although the government regulations made this education

uniform and prohibited the use of vernacular languages in elementary education, Pidgin English<sup>31</sup> was allowed in the initial stages (Ngoh 174).

As the German, French, and British colonial administrations needed office workers and interpreters who could serve as middlemen between the administrators and the uneducated masses, they had to promote reliance on native and European languages. In the French mandate territory, there were about three hundred secretary-interpreters. The latter were in contact with the cultures of different ethnic groups. They listened to and recorded most of the populations' tales, myths and vignettes of genuine rural and urban life. Since they were the intermediaries between the white colonialists and the Natives, they had to master a European language and many local languages (Bjornson 22-23).

Colonial education therefore framed the post-independence educational system of Cameroon which is divided into Francophone and Anglophone systems. For most Cameroonian parents, Western education is a means which enables their children to secure well remunerated jobs. Western education has fashioned a new identity for the former colonized. It is the means through which men and women climb the social ladder in the post-independence Cameroonian society. Criteria of success have changed from the traditional norms to modern ones. There is a radical change in the perception of manhood and womanhood. To achieve the new goals, many Cameroonians seek admission into American, Asian, and European universities; at the same time, the Cameroonian government opens its educational system to international cooperation.

As aforementioned, Emerson's "Self-Reliance" is more inclusive than exclusive in the context of Cameroon educational system. The trainee blends his native culture and other cultures. Edward B. Tylor, the British anthropologist, notes that "culture or civilization taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a

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<sup>31</sup> In his article "Camfranglais: A Novel Slang in Cameroon Schools," Jean- Paul Kouega, quoting Mbassi Manga and Loreto Todd, defines Cameroon Pidgin English as a language which started up in the years 1400-1500 when Cameroon had its first contacts with Europeans. He concludes that when the Germans annexed the territory in 1884, Pidgin English was already a well-established language.



member of society" (Lentricchia & Mclaughlin 225). Likewise, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer and critic, argues that "culture, in its broadest sense, is a way of life fashioned by people in their collective endeavor to live and come to term with their total environment. It is the sum of their art, their science and all their social institutions, including their system of beliefs and rituals" (*Homecoming* 14). In Tylor's and Ngugi's words, culture includes people's material and spiritual values which are represented in their songs, dances, folklore, drawing, sculpture, rites and ceremonies.

Culture can therefore be altered, modified or developed through the ages. The alteration, modification and development of cultures are fostered by international education construed as a worldwide exchange of knowledge, know-how, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, habits and behaviours, which leads to an intercommunication world in which every culture has something to give and something to take. This type of education thus fosters intellectual and cultural hybridization which today has acquired a new dimension with globalization. It is thus a duty for the post-independence Cameroonian administration to lay emphasis on its local languages and cultures.

In Cameroon, hybridism should not therefore mean the eradication of native cultures by Western education. Ashcroft *et al.* rightly contend that

[t]he transaction of the post-colonial world is not a one-way process in which oppression obliterates the oppressed or the coloniser silences the colonised in absolute terms. In practice, it rather stresses the mutuality of the process. It lays emphasis on the survival even under the most potent oppression of the distinctive aspects of the culture of the oppressed, and shows how these become an integral part of the new formations which arise from the clash of cultures characteristic of imperialism. Finally, it emphasises how hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen to be the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth. (*The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 183)

Evading binary categories in a way means seeking a medium course which combines the cultures of the former colonizer and those of the colonized. In Cameroon, this medium course has given rise to a new cultural

identity and to new linguistic and literary formations. At the same time, some scholars like Fonlon advocate an authentic Cameroonian cultural identity while they acknowledge the contribution of modern sciences and other cultures. In his poem, Fonlon highlights his hybrid identity:

I am no crusader for things English  
 I do not worship English  
 I worship Lamnso,  
 But I am a plain, blunt, practical man. (Bjornson 178)

This poem shows his author's pragmatism which backs the idea that the Cameroonian new cultural identity should be a whole that combines traditional Cameroonian values as well as modern Western values and practices.

International education has thus enabled Cameroon to bring together its numerous ethnic groups. French and English are the country's official languages. As languages of education, they bolster the goals that the government has assigned to education in the third article of the 1998 law which stipulates that at all the levels of education the State must promote bilingualism as a factor of national unity and integration. The promotion of bilingualism and biculturalism seeks to bridge the gap between the English-speaking and the French-speaking populations of the country. The contact of local and foreign languages, as earlier mentioned, has given rise to new linguistic and literary formations, which strengthen national integration. Pidgin English and Camfranglais<sup>32</sup> are examples of these new formations. Pidgin English is the *lingua franca* in the west, littoral, north-west, and south-west regions.

Camfranglais – a composite language consciously developed by secondary school pupils who have in common a number of linguistic codes, namely French, English, Pidgin and a few widespread indigenous languages” (Kouega 230) – has become the main means of communication among the youths of various ethnic groups. Some statements common among these young people are: “Ça me wander” meaning in English “I won-

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<sup>32</sup> In the same article, Kouega observes that the term “Camfranglais” seems to have been coined by Ze Amvela in the footnote of a paper: “Camfranglais is used here as a cover term to what has been called “Franglais,” “Pidgin French,” “Majunga Talk,” “Camspeak.” The distinctive feature is the hybrid nature of these languages which function mainly as a *lingua franca*.

der" or in French "Cela m'étonne," "je go" (I am going / Je m'en vais). Although these formations are deviations from the standard languages, they unite social and age groups.

In literature, to enrich their works, many writers use terms drawn from many languages in use in Cameroon. For example in *Lettres de ma cambuse*, later translated into English as *Tales from Cameroon*, René Philombe combines French and some terms from Eton, his native language: *akus* (mourning) and *elonn* (a poisonous plant) (78). Alobwed'Epie mixes Bakossi words and English in his novel *The Lady with a Beard: mved* (knife), *mbeh e bii* (the pot is ready) (8). In "Écriture de l'insolite: Le français écrit au Cameroun," Tabi Manga explains the use of Cameroonian puzzles and idioms in literary texts written in French as a test that evaluates the ability of this language to accurately express the Cameroonian culture. German, French and English languages — the inheritance of colonization in Cameroon — convey foreign cultural values which modify the national culture. However, these languages too are modified by elements of the Cameroonian culture.

To boost cultural hybridisation, the Cameroonian government has signed some texts and adopted policies and reforms which open its educational system to international cooperation:

- The World Declaration of Education for All adopted at the World Conference on education held in Thailand in March 1990 (Harmonization of basic education in various countries and reduction of illiteracy).

- The educational policies adopted at the World Forum on education in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 (Achievement of the goals of education for all by 2015).

- The Proposals made by experts at the International Conference for the reform of secondary education in the twenty-first century. This conference was organized by UNESCO in Beijing, China in May 2001.

- The World Declaration of the Reform and Development of Higher Education adopted at the World Conference on Higher Education organized by UNESCO in Paris in October 1998.

This patent international cooperation is effected through a number of academic and cultural exchanges between Cameroon and other countries: Peace Corps, cross border programs and Fulbright programs, to name just a

few. Today, statistics show that thousands of young Cameroonians are admitted into American, Asian and European universities.

As a result, to paraphrase Michel-Guillaume St. Jean De Crevecoeur, I will ask the following question: What is a Cameroonian in the twenty-first century? The modern Cameroonian is a cultural hybrid, a cultural mulatto who endeavours to blend his or her traditional culture and the Western and Oriental cultures, sciences and technology. If De Crèvecoeur's question: "What is an American?" is reiterated today, I guess many people will give the following answer: An American is a person who, grounded in his or her American culture, is open to other cultures. Blending many cultures, he or she has become a citizen of many worlds; a man or woman who shares his or her knowledge, judgement and wisdom with people of other countries and who, in return, willingly accepts the knowledge, judgement, and wisdom of these people.

The definitions of the Cameroonian and American citizens that I have given are applicable to the citizens of other countries who heed the advice that Ralph Waldo Emerson gives in his essay "Self-Reliance." They, like Emerson, purport that "man does not stand in awe of man, nor is his genius admonished to stay at home, to put itself in communication with the internal ocean, but it goes abroad to beg a cup of water of the urns of other men" (Norberg 272). "Going abroad to beg a cup of water of the urns of other men" is what international education, hybridity and globalization are all about.

Globalization, according to Phillip Brown and Hugh Lauder, refers to the transfer, adaptation and development of values, knowledge, technology and behavioural norms across countries and societies in different parts of the world. It greatly influences education through Web-based learning, the use of the internet in teaching, international immersion programs, international exchange and visit programs, international partnership in teaching and learning at the group, class, and individual levels, and interactions and sharing through video-conferencing across countries, communities, institutions, and individuals (Brown & Lauder 1-25).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Yin Cheong Chen quotes Brown and Lauder in "New Principalship for Globalization, Localization and Individualization: Paradigm Shift," a Keynote Address presented at the Interna-

The global dimension of Emerson's "Self-Reliance is evidenced by the epigraph, "*Ne te quæsieris extra*" ("Do not search outside yourself"), a borrowing from Aulus Persius's Satire 1.7. The use of Latin by a writer whose native language is English contradicts the statement "Do not search outside yourself," and proves that Emerson, the father of self-reliance, was a learned scholar who sought knowledge outside his national boundaries. His references to Plato, Aristotle, Socrates and Lethe — a mythical river in the underworld — demonstrates his acquaintance with Greek philosophy and mythology. At Harvard, Emerson learnt Latin, Greek, English rhetoric and oratory, ancient and modern history, mathematics, logic, French and German — subjects which show his "thirst for learning" and his wish to go out and "beg a cup of water of the urns of other men." Consequently, when Emerson resigned as church minister in 1832, he travelled to Europe and was fortunate to acquaint himself with British Romanticism. He was influenced by William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Thomas Carlyle. In Italy, the American scholar visited architectural sites and museums and acquired a good knowledge of ancient Greek and Roman culture. Emerson also travelled to Switzerland and France to "search for more and add to his intellectual stature" (Norberg xvii).

Emerson's advocacy of the blend of native and foreign cultures explicates the didactic tone of his essay and his use of epigrammatic statements: "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist" (116), "imitation is suicide" (114). This tone is reinforced by rhetorical questions and biblical allusions such as "why drag about this monstrous corpse of your memory, lest you contradict somewhat you have stated in this or that public place? Suppose you should contradict yourself; what then? . . . Leave your theory as Joseph his coat in the hand of the harlot, and flee" (119). All these statements prod the reader into adopting individualism. Yet Emerson's statement "society is a joint stock company" (116) is a metaphor which acknowledges the influence of societal and foreign forces on the individual's education and actions.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has related Emerson's "Self-Reliance" to the Cameroonian educational system to show the preponderant role that native languages have played in pre-colonial and colonial educational systems. The Cameroonian educational system has moved from oral traditional pedagogy to print literacy and international education. These different types of education, which have given rise to cultural hybridity, have fashioned Cameroonian men's and women's identities. Brought on by colonization, hybridity is today fostered by globalization and its worldwide communication facilities and programmes which bridge cultures. As a result, Emersonian self-reliance today, seen from Cameroon, appears as more inclusive than exclusive since it promotes international education through the blend of national and foreign cultures.

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