

# Political Instrumentalization of Ethnicity and Maintenance of Social Status Quo in Multi-Ethnic Contexts

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**Abstract** This research examines the effect of political instrumentalization of ethnicity on maintenance of social status quo in societies characterized by the ethnic heterogeneity of their populations. It defends the thesis that the objective of the manipulation of ethnic identity is not to change the system made up of dominant and dominated groups, but rather to overthrow the existing hegemony to install another one or maintain it as it is. Theoretically, it is within the framework of the instrumentalist approach of interethnic conflicts (Henderson, 2010), but it differs from it because it analyzes a second aspect of the social function of the mechanism of political instrumentalization of ethnicity: its contribution to the perpetuation of social inequalities in intragroup and intergroup relations, between members of the governing elite (dominant group) and populations (dominated group). This function is not well documented by the psychosocial literature; hence its interest for this study. From a methodological point of view, this research proceeds to a review of the constitutive works of the literature relating to the inclination of individuals in favor of maintaining social inequalities. It emerges that the political elites exploit the naivety of the populations, who live in uncertainty about reality and social exclusion, to provoke inter-ethnic tensions and serve, at worst their selfish interests, at best, the interests of their ethnic group of belonging. Thus, the political instrumentalization of ethnic groups does not only generate intergroup tensions. It also contributes to the establishment and maintenance of social inequalities within groups where it is used as a strategy for capturing material and symbolic resources.

**Keywords** Political instrumentalization of ethnicity, Maintenance of the status quo, Interethnic tension, Multiethnic society, Ethnic quest for power

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## 1. Introduction

The differences between individuals are one of the bases of intergroup relations. These differences are related to socioeconomic status (rich vs. poor), race (white vs. black), age (adults vs. youth), gender (men vs. women), or ethnicity. Due to their deleterious effects on intergroup relations, they are potential sources of intergroup conflicts in the medium to long term (Michel et al., 2012). By way of illustration, we can cite historical events relating to the genocides of Armenians by Turks, Jews by Nazis, or Tutsis by Hutus (Staub, 2010). These antagonisms arise due to the motivation of group members to seek for or maintain a positive social identity, through a privileged position in the social hierarchy made up of dominant and dominated groups, whatever the means deployed (Day & Fiske, 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Situational and individual dispositions (threat from an outgroup or propensity for individuals to adhere to certain

forms of ideology such as social dominance orientation or system justification) are likely to favor the maintenance of inequalities between these groups, and consequently the social status quo.

## 2. Support for Status Quo

The notion of social status quo is evoked to account for the mechanism by which social inequalities or interpersonal and intergroup asymmetries are maintained as they are. In the field of social psychology, events, attitudes and behaviors that are its concrete manifestations are studied in the perspectives of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), social dominance (Sidanius & Pratto, 1993), system justification (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Van der Toorn, 2012), belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980), cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), extreme right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1981) and belief in meritocracy (McCoy & Major, 2007). The literature thus constituted suggest that individuals participate in maintaining the status quo when they rationalize certain forms of stereotypes (Allport, 1954; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Banaji 1994; Jost & Kay, 2005); defend certain forms of social, economic and political

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Received: Feb. 17, 2021; Accepted: Mar. 12, 2021; Published: Mar. 28, 2021

Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/ijap>

arrangements that are beneficial to the system in place (Brandt et al., 2020; Brandt & Reyna, 2013; Jost, 2019; Jost & Major, 2001; O'Brien et al., 2012; van der Toorn et al., 2011); adhere to certain attributions and explanations of poverty and inequalities (Ali et al., 2018; Durrheim et al., 2014; Godfrey & Wolf, 2016); consciously or unconsciously defend opinions and emit judgments on their group of belonging or outgroups (Jost et al., 2005; Kay et al., 2005; Jost & Thompson, 2000; Monteith et al., 2016); adopt behaviors that are favorable to ingroup and discriminatory towards outgroup (Sidanius et al., 2001; Struch & Schwartz, 1989); adopt collective behaviors that are favorable to ingroup and unfavorable to outgroup (Becker & Tausch, 2015; Cheung et al., 2017); participate in the devaluation of the disadvantaged outgroup (Owuamalam et al., 2016; 2019); adopt favorable behaviors for oneself or ingroup (Horwitz & Dovidio, 2017; Rudman et al., 2002); have favorable attitudes towards disproportionate social, economic and political systems (Day & Fiske, 2017; Jost et al., 2003; Kay et al., 2009; Tan et al., 2017; van der Toorn et al., 2017); adhere to religious and political ideologies that are favorable to intergroup inequalities (Jost et al., 2004; Jost et al., 2003; Jost et al., 2009, 2014); and adopt behaviors that are opposed to social equality (Brandt, 2013; Jost et al., 2004; Sidanius et al., 2001; Trump & White, 2018).

The conceptions presented in the previous paragraph benefit from an undeniable empirical support. Despite this, they are far from covering all the aspects of the issue of individuals' support for existing social arrangements. Indeed, the abundant existing literature does not pay much attention to the instrumentalization of affiliations to social categories in general, and ethnic ones in particular, to understand the inclination to defend social status quo. The present research is devoted to that issue. Situated within the theoretical perspective of instrumentalism in the explanation of interethnic conflicts (Henderson, 2010), it defends the thesis that the objective of the manipulation of ethnic identity in the asymmetrical intergroup relations' system is not to change the system consisting of arbitrary groups; a system which enshrines the domination of one group over another. Rather, it is to overthrow or maintain the existing hegemony, depending on the interests of the groups that carry out this manipulation (Diallo, 2013).

### **3. Support for Status Quo, Instrumentalization of Ethnicity and Intergroup Hostility**

Ethnicity is an identity marker as are gender, age, religion, race and language. It is constituted of the set of individuals who share a distinctive and sustainable collective identity based on common cultural traits. It regulates the attitudes and behavior of its members and promotes, like other identity markers, the emergence of a hierarchy constituted of dominant and dominated groups. As a result, it participates in social categorization and in the definition of group identity.

Consequently, it is likely to motivate group members to seek for or maintain the superiority of ingroup over outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It follows that contact between groups increases antagonisms that can cause instability or the maintenance of the hierarchy. These antagonisms are fueled by inclination to ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation; two attitudinal and behavioral robust tendencies, well documented by the literature ranging in the social identity perspective (Messanga, 2018). In the context of intergroup relations based on ethnic origins, these two tendencies are constitutive of tribalism, a form of intergroup discrimination (Messanga & Nzeuta Lontio, 2020). According to Clark et al. (2019), in its aspect relating to the inclination to favor ethnic ingroup's members, this variant of intergroup discrimination is a natural behavior. Indeed, these authors suggest that any society characterized by social diversity is inevitably confronted to the emergence of a social hierarchy based on hegemonic groups and the subsequent intergroup bias, whose origin lies in tribal loyalty. However, this "natural" tribalism is a problem when individuals make their ethnic identity salient with the aim of devaluing members of ethnic outgroups; thus generating social tensions. This maneuver is one of the sources of interethnic conflicts (Matsievsky, 2000).

Henderson (2010) proposes to explain interethnic conflict by examining the conditions associated with increased salience of ethnic identity. Concretely, he believes that it is important to answer the following two questions: 1) what drives groups to mobilize on ethnic bases? 2) to what extent and under which conditions are ethnic groups likely to fight each other rather than to cooperate? Primordialism and instrumentalism, the two main approaches of interethnic conflicts, offer answers to these questions. The first emphasizes ethnocentrism, that is the belief that the ethnic ingroup is superior to outgroups. In this logic, the primordialists argue that social reality must be interpreted according to the priority perspectives for the ethnic ingroup. According to them, intragroup relations are more peaceful, orderly and supportive, while intergroup relations are more confrontational, anarchic and destructive. They insist that ethnic similarity leads to cooperation, while difference leads to ethnic conflict. The second, on the other hand, suggests that conflicting ethnic intergroup relations are not necessarily the consequence of natural differentiation between groups, but rather the result of the manipulations of the elites pursuing egotistical interests. For instrumentalists, indeed, ethnicity does not emerge naturally. It would be the result of socialization, under the pressure of elites and community. Socialization not only instills a common language, religion, customs, clothing and dietary patterns, but also a sense of loyalty and ingroup affinity, as well as feelings of enmity towards outgroups. Thus, cultural differences are not a necessary condition for interethnic conflicts. They simply make it easier for elites whose purpose is to draw their communities down to the path of hostility and rivalry. More specifically, proponents of this approach insist that ethnicity is malleable, and its boundaries

and contents are subject to change. They posited that ethnic ingroup and outgroups are generally sub-groups within a larger whole: society. In this logic, social integration can bring together previously separated groups, while the manipulation of ethnicity for selfish goals could be the source of intergroup hostility.

The present research is within the framework of the instrumentalist approach. However, It differs from previous works which are situated in the same theoretical perspective. Indeed, the latter propose that the manipulation of ethnicity aims to generate inter-communities hostilities, at the end of which one group will gain the upper hand over the others, thus guaranteeing privileged access for its members to scarce and therefore socially rewarding resources (Messanga & Npiane Ngongueu, 2020). This study rather argues that asymmetric interethnic relations are perpetuated because the elites of each group manipulate their ethnic identity and mobilize their consanguineous in order to replace or maintain the existing hegemony which, in reality, does not benefit these consanguineous. They would therefore exploit the naivety of their blood relatives for selfish ends: acquiring and/or maintaining a position for themselves in the political/administrative chessboard. Thus, in agreement with the specialized literature, it is suggested that the political maneuver consisting, for the elites, in instrumentalizing the ethnic group is likely to be observed when the goal to be achieved is the capture of material or immaterial resources. The former is about living space, infrastructures, access to health care, education and employment in particular, while the latter relate to political authority and power.

Social dominance theory proposes that access to resources confers disproportionately positive social value to members of a group in the framework of the social hierarchy constituted of dominant/hegemonic groups and dominated groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). This type of hierarchy is more likely to emerge in societies that produce an economic surplus. This concept proposed by marxist theory refers to the wealth created through technology and production instruments. It enables the development of a system of arbitrary groups, by allowing the creation of social roles that facilitate the formation of an expropriating political authority (Dambrun, n.d.). Within this type of system, resources are generally distributed unequally, in favor of hegemonic groups; hence the interest, even the need, for groups to seek to acquire and/or maintain a dominant hierarchical position. In this logic, political power is the most coveted scarce resource. It is also one of the major causes of social instability in social hierarchies made up of arbitrary groups, which are characterized by a high level of violence and oppression. This is explained by the fact that dominant groups generally rely on a variety of collective representations to legitimize the disproportionate (and therefore unfair) allocation of resources to their members. As a result, they reinforce intergroup inequalities that can cause frustration and therefore a feeling of injustice and revolt within dominated groups; hence the relentless struggle for the acquisition and maintenance of the maximum possible

resources by the groups. For example, in Rwanda, before independence, Tutsis held power and controlled most of the country's resources. This situation generated a feeling of discrimination among Hutus and a desire for revenge; two instigators of the 1994 genocide (Staub, 1999; 2010; 2011).

The political instrumentalization of ethnic group is based on four levers: loyalty towards ingroup, uncertainty of its members about social reality, relative deprivation and threat to group identity (Clark et al., 2019). The importance of loyalty towards the group of belonging stems from the fact that, given that the group works as a coalition, it is likely to develop negative attitudes against any member who violates the principles of shared community life. The reason is that this transgression is a concrete manifestation of the fact that the said member does not cooperate with the group for the satisfaction of collective interest. As an illustration, during the Rwandan genocide, members of the Hutu community who did not want to participate in mass killings, even preferring to help Tutsis, were targeted by the genocidal Hutu extremists (Staub, 1999), because their behaviors were manifestations of disloyalty or betrayal towards their ethnic ingroup.

The potential for political manipulation in the uncertainty of group members about social reality stems from the complexity of social reality and the ambiguity it can generate. Political elites use it to mobilize members of their group for a common cause. It is undoubtedly Gurr (1970) who sums up well their role in conflicts, by asserting that in intergroup relations, discontent must be politicized before being transformed into conflict. Indeed, it is in the struggle for the acquisition of economic and political resources that political elites can play a role in interregional differences. Concretely, they may intentionally ignore or downplay factual evidence in order to strongly emphasize their group's disadvantages and portray outgroups negatively (Bourhis & Foucher, 2012). Very often, this manipulation of resources takes on a strategic electoral dimension that can contribute to intergroup divisions. The reason is that their speeches play an important role in guiding the attitudes of individuals in one direction or another.

The presentation by political elites of the disadvantages experienced by ingroup and the advantages enjoyed by outgroup is likely to generate a feeling of relative deprivation among ingroup's members (Smith & Huo, 2014). This feeling is felt when an individual or a group feels that they are not in possession of the resources they should have or that another individual or another group does (Bouguignon, 1999). This feeling is very often experienced by individuals confronted to social exclusion. It generates frustration and grievances directed against the outgroup, and leads to aggression (Greitemeyer & Sagioglou, 2016; 2018) and participation in collective actions (Becker & Tausch, 2015; Cheung et al., 2017), due to the fact that when an individual or a group finds that he does not have access to a resource to which he feels he has a right, intergroup aggression or participation in collective violence constitutes an effective means of remedying the negative emotions felt (Cheung

et al., 2017).

Intergroup threat theory proposes that the members of a group may feel the threat to group identity when they believe that their counterparts, belonging to outgroups, are capable of causing them harm (Stephan & Renfro, 2002). This harm can result from the real, imaginary or symbolic presence of an outgroup living within the same social environment as ingroup. The perceived threat can be realistic or symbolic. In the first case, it stems from the fact that ingroup and outgroup are competing for social benefits, jobs or economic resources. In the second case, intergroup competition on value systems, world view, self-esteem, honor, reputation and beliefs challenges the ideology defended by ingroup. These threats can be exploited by elites whose objective is to push members of their community to adopt discriminatory attitudes and behaviors towards outgroup and satisfy their interests, including in particular the acquisition or maintenance of a status in the political/administrative sphere. This political maneuver is facilitated by the fact that the tribes subscribe to the logic of commensality, by making the State “a foster mother” or “a food community” that the cameroonian expression “national cake” sums up well (Messanga, 2018). For each tribe and its members, the sharing of this cake implies the occupation of key positions in the administration (Dimi, 1994). Concretely, in Cameroon for example, the memoranda sometimes addressed by the populations of the various regions of the country to the political authorities often contain demands on this point. These documents reveal that the State, and its secular arm which is public administration, are caught between demands that do not have the national interest as their finality. We can therefore consider that, in these texts, there is a manifest desire for the instrumentalization of State for the benefit of tribe. In cases where some of these demands were to be satisfied, the sons of the regions concerned, who would thus benefit from a promotion whose source was a demand of the ethno-regional ingroup, would undoubtedly be indebted to that group. As a result, they would be inclined to work more for its interests, to the detriment of those of outgroups (Som I, 2014); at least in theory, because in reality, it is not certain that the real beneficiary of these promotions is the tribal ingroup, since the promoted also derives undeniable advantages.

In the case of Cameroon, considered as a *stationary state* (Minkonda & Mahini, 2019), i.e. a political organization that produces a system of clientelist allegiances whose central objective is the conservation of power, there is a mode of state management which is distinguished by governing maneuvers oriented towards the unconditional maintenance of the presidential leader and his associates at the top of the institutional hierarchy. This country is evolving in a context marked by the tendency of hegemonic actors to dominate state devices and drag on in power; hence the scarcity of alternating dynamic to high positions in the political/administrative hierarchy. In fact, the senior officials of this presidentialist political system behave as entrepreneurs and economic operators essentially motivated

by the development of resources of monopolization of power, such as to allow a clientelist redistribution and the installation of the means of timeless and eternal domination. These various actors who revolve around the Head of State have put in place instruments which allow the consolidation of the preponderance of the presidential office and which help them channel a renewal without renewal of the political elites (Eboko, 1999 cited by Minkonda & Mahini, 2019). This maneuver of monopolization of dominant positions by a few political elites is part of the neo-patrimonial mode of political regulation. From this, it will result a constant interpenetration between private and public interests, the management of official duties in a private manner, nepotism in the recruitment of staff and selection of the entourage of officials, primacy of personal loyalties on institutional relations, as well as a corresponding weakness of institutions and law which do not have the capacity to regulate actors' behaviors. One can also add to this list the low accountability of leaders, a strong clientelism and the absence of incentive or obligation to adapt economic policies promoting development, due to the fact that the political/administrative authority is converted into private heritage by the bureaucracy and the governing party (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement). Thus, in this central african country, the personalization of power, the confusion between public and private domains and the lack of distinction between the function and its holder are marked.

Hypothetically, the clientelist distribution of resources mentioned in the previous paragraph is such as to make the emergence of intergroup biases, emotions and unfavorable psychological states towards outgroups more observable, and consequently, the engagement of individuals in interethnic hostilities, because of the psychological effects of an unequal distribution of resources between the different ethno-regional components of society (Henderson, 2010; Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). How do the political/administrative elites of the different ethnic communities exploit these elements to instrumentalize their ethnicity and generate castes, social classes or hegemonic groups that favor them and at the same time keep populations in subordinates hierarchical positions, characterized by limited access to valuable social resources (power, material resources, jobs, access to health care, education, etc.)? The answers to this question constitute the contribution of this research to the literature on the individual dispositions that explain the maintenance of social status quo. In addition to this contribution, this study aims to contribute to the debate on the idea that certain members of high and low status groups sometimes agree on strategies that help to maintain asymmetrical intergroups relations (Jost & Van der Toorn, 2012), in particular by defending the thesis that the instrumentalization of ethnicity does not only generate intergroup tensions. It also allows the perpetuation of social inequalities through support for existing social arrangements, the purpose of which is to maintain an unequal distribution of resources between the dominant and the dominated, even if the two categories of individuals belong to the same ethnic

entity.

#### 4. Demonstration of the Link between Instrumentalization of Ethnicity and Maintenance of Social Status Quo: The Case of Multiethnic Societies

The present research addresses the question of the role of the instrumentalization of ethnicity in maintaining the social status quo (the perpetuation of asymmetrical interethnic relations). It achieves this objective through a review of a variety of social sciences researches which have focused their attention on this issue. Specifically, it is based on researches that took into account aspects of the support for status quo, which are: participation in collective actions to defend the dominant position of a group, adoption of behaviors that legitimize discrimination against ethnic outgroups and aggressiveness towards their members, adherence to attributions humiliating members of the outgroup, and support for the elites of the ethnic ingroup to access privileged political positions. These different aspects of support for the status quo can be seen in multi-ethnic societies which, because of their diversity and the political manipulation to which it is subjected, are real hotbeds of intergroup tensions based on simple ethnic belonging (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Indeed, the crises of belonging that arise there play a key role in the establishment of disproportionate interethnic relations. As an example, the literature reports the *ivoirity* crisis that destabilized Ivory Coast (Banegas, 2007); the community violence that rocked North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Bucyalimwe Mararo, 2003); the Rwandan genocide (Prunier, 1998) and similar violence in Burundi (Chrétien, 1997); the inter-communities' tensions during the elections in Popular Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda or Tanzania; aspirations for self-determination in Morocco, Nigeria and Cameroon; and the fear of Fangs in Gabon (Moro Ngui, 2018).

In Africa, the quest for independence and democracy was the starting point for armed clashes (Mankou, 2007), with protagonists engage in the ethnic quest for privileged positions. Indeed, division and manipulation of populations based on ethnic characteristics are the strategies used by most political authorities to maintain the various groups in antagonism and satisfy their personal interests (Mbonda, 2003). It is therefore an issue of divide and rule (*divide et impera*). This well-known political strategy makes it possible to rule over populations because they are divided, whereas if they were united, they would have the means to bring down the power they are subjected to. Its objective is to avoid, in these populations, the awakening of a national consciousness that compels to silence the ethnic particularisms to allow the emergence of political or social attitudes and behaviors based on social, economic or political interests, rather than on filial links with the

authorities; hence the possibility for them to disregard their ethnic origins when positioning themselves during political events such as elections or popular protest movements. However, as revealed by François et al. (2014), the leaders of sub-Saharan African countries characterized by the ethnic heterogeneity of their populations increase their chances of staying in power by disproportionately investing in their localities of origin; thus activating the ethnic fiber in the political field, in particular as the elections approach. Thus, they do not hesitate to practice a “shadow ethnicity”, often breaking with official anti-ethnic speeches (Messanga, 2018). These maneuvers are particularly useful because they give them the political support they need to prevent alternation. However, their consequences are the exacerbation of interethnic conflicts and the emergence of discrimination between ethnic groups (Messanga & Nzeuta Lontio, 2020).

According to Eyenga (2017), in the implementation of the strategy of instrumentalization of ethnic groups in the political struggle, elites proceed first by bringing together the members of their community, by making them believe at the outset that the groups created are secular and apolitical. However, their real objectives are clearly identifiable in the speeches of these leaders. Indeed, the community groups thus created do not generally oppose the established political system. Rather, they seek to integrate or participate in the management of public affairs (Mbebi, 2015). This is the case of the New Social Movements (NSM) which have been emerging in Cameroon since the 1990s. These are initially apolitical associations which become politicized in view of their development and relations with state bodies (Eyenga, 2017). After their creation and legalization, the leaders proceed to a succession of meetings and discussions where the emphasis is on the physical, historical, psychological, cultural, political and economic differentiation between the ethnic groups, with the aim of generating cooperation, boosting the sense of belonging and the desire for domination and recognition (Martinello, 1995).

The instrumentalization of the ethnic group contributes to maintaining the status quo through the adherence of individuals to different intergroup attitudes or behaviors. For example, the affirmation of ethnic identity reinforces identity withdrawal, motivation to create lobbies and to get involved in propagandist actions aimed at devaluing and humiliating members of ethnic outgroups (Tchagneno Tene, 2015). The objective of these actions is to remove all obstacles to an ethnic conquest of power and to the control of resources. In this logic, the specialized literature lay more and more emphasis on models of diversion to explain interethnic conflict. It suggests that ethnic ingroups often target outgroups to build solidarity among their members through fear or some real or imagined external threat. In these circumstances, the groups suggest that ethnic differences provide evidence of the betrayal and disloyalty of outgroups to justify the mistreatment inflicted to them. For instance, in the tribalism of confrontation between Bamiléké and Béti during the 1990s (Onana Onomo, 2002), the strategy of fear employed by the Beti elites consisted, first of all, in

identifying Bamileke as the source of the danger that weighed on ingroup. They were presented as hypertribalist and hegemonic invaders against members of the ethnic group related to the head of state. They were credited with the intention of monopolizing everything, ruling without sharing and threatening Beti's survival if they managed to take power. This political maneuver was in reality aimed at maintaining President Paul Biya in power, by associating his presence at the head of the state with the survival of Beti people. Those people were warned against Bamileke's expansionism which would result in the loss of their lands. In response, the Bamileke intellectuals implemented the strategy of frustration, consisting in considering that what their ethnic group receives from the distributing authority is less than what they are entitled to expect, considering their efforts and talent (Messanga & Dzuetsou Mouafo, 2017). In this logic, this authority in general, the person who embodies it (the Head of State Paul Biya in this case) and the group to which he is related are accused. In addition to ingroup apology, celebrated for its merits, virtues and achievements and complained for the unfair and frustrating treatment to which it is subjected by the ruling authorities of the country, this strategy consisted of the denigration of other ethnic groups, considered as enjoyers. In this vein, their favorite targets were the Beti, enjoyers who revel in the pleasures of stomach and lower abdomen and balk at any effort (Onana Onomo, 2002).

Beyond the intergroup hostility that it is likely to generate, the instrumentalization of ethnic origins in the political field is also a potential source of intra-group conflict, due to the fact that it involves two categories of actors belonging to the same groups: elites and populations. The former betray and the latter are malleable (Keza, nd). The betrayal of the elites is revealed by the fact that they have failed to supervise the people. They generally side with power, since it is more profitable to them than to the populations, insofar as they serve as a guarantee. Thus, they regroup in mass around the Head of State to each have their share of the booty. The populations, for their part, are described by the author as mediocre, due to a lack of collective intelligence. Caught in the gears of tribalism, they are panurge sheep, flexible at will, and sometimes, they are the performers of the dirty works of power in order to tame people who do not want to submit to the imposed dictatorship. When they belong to the president's ethnic group, they feel an obligation to defend him against everyone, even in the face of the indefensible. The latter gives it back to them, since they benefit from special attention from him, through the appointments of their elites in the political/administrative apparatus and the distribution of prebends. However, in practice, the ethnic link alone is not enough to qualify for an appointment. This is explained by Augé (2007) who was interested in the Gabonese case.

In Gabon, Freemasonry solidarity dilutes other relational resources for the benefit of the Freemasonry link and deactivates the strength of previous ties, including the ethnic link. Members of Freemasonry come from all ethnic groups

in the country. As a result, alliances between them do not take into account ethnic solidarities, but rather socially constructed solidarities that obey codifications. "When we respond to a brother's request, whatever it is, we are not concerned with who he is or where he comes from. All that matters is our common belonging. Ethnicity has nothing to do with it." (Augé, 2007: 261) The study of social networks applied to the formation of Gabonese elites highlights unprecedented relational configurations in which ethnic solidarity, very often privileged in studies of politics in Africa, certainly appears to be necessary, but not sufficient to benefit from promotion within the political/administrative apparatus. This is supplemented by alternative solidarities, including friendships, family ties or brotherhood within an esoteric group. In addition to being combined with other links, the ethno-community link is latent. When the actors belong to the same ethnic group, the said link is not a sufficient resource for establishing relational connections useful for individual promotion. It follows that the ethnic relationship is latent. Its multiplexity is necessary for the activation of ethno-community solidarity. This relational device suggests that the ethnic resource is not an isolated factor in the individual promotion process that can be represented by the following formula: potential ethnic link + other types of links = strong ethnic relationship. In short, even if the elites proceed to the manipulation of ethnicity to acquire a high hierarchical position within the governing system, the fact remains that the other members of their respective ethnic groups will not all have access to the fallout of the control of a section of the political/administrative apparatus by one of them, if beyond ethnicity, they do not share other links with the distributing authorities. In the same vein, some members of ethnic groups other than the one that holds the central position of the system (the Head of State) can access high hierarchical positions through alternative forms of solidarity and the necessary involvement of all the ethnocultural components of the country in its management. In short, all the members of the group from which the president comes do not have access to socially valuable resources, just as all those who do not belong to this group are not excluded in the distribution of positions within the political/administrative apparatus. This reality is sometimes a source of frustration for the members of the group from which the president comes. It is the case in Cameroon, where the youth of Sangmélina (capital of the Head of State's subdivision of origin) consider themselves to be a "sacrificed", "lost" and "disillusioned" generation (Mbala, 2019).

Following the assassination, on October 9 2019, of a young motor-bike taxi driver, ethnic riots set the town of Sangmélina ablaze. Young people armed with bladed weapons (clubs, knives and machetes) attacked the town market, blocked traffic, set up roadblocks, improvised a march, looted businesses and ransacked shops. To calm tensions, public authorities and elites have mobilized. The minister of finance, an elite of the region, called a meeting on October 12. Many young people from the locality attended.

“If we broke the shops in the market, it was to send a strong signal to our elites who are taking over all the country’s fortune and positions, leaving the youth to an uncertain future. There was no problem with the foreign communities living in Sangmélima and we regret our behavior” said a youth leader on condition of anonymity. Despite the promises made to them during the various passages of the elite in the locality, nothing has been implemented so far; hence their desire to organize a large march in Sangmélima on November 6 to humiliate the elite of the head of state’s subdivision on the anniversary of his accession to power (Mbala, 2019). Thus, stricken by unemployment, due to the lack of solutions offered by the government and the numerous local elites, these young people have chosen to loot foreigners’ shops (Boyomo, 2019); an act constituting in reality a blatant case of displaced anger, since their real target was the local elite, accused of monopolizing all available resources and having no sense of solidarity for the other ingroup’s members. “The President of the Republic must know that the elite he has appointed to help the South have failed”, said an activist from the ruling party’s Youth Organization. A municipal councilor indicates, for his part, that “the young people of Sangmélima are very anxious about their future and are paralyzed by a feeling of discrimination and exclusion, for which the elites of the Dja and Lobo subdivision are primarily responsible.” Thus, the failure of the elite to respond to the needs of young people and the actions that lead to their marginalization “cemented a sense of bitterness and provoked resentment.” (Mbala, 2019)

The situation of young people in the town of Sangmélima was summarized as follows by a member of the ruling party, a native of this locality: inter-communities clashes are the consequences of the bankruptcy of the local elite, which shines with its egoism and individualism (Bodo, 2019). According to him, the youth of the Cameroon’s Head of State subdivision of origin is plagued by unemployment, job insecurity, poverty and underemployment. Despite the fact that the said subdivision has many elites, the repercussions of their positioning in the political/administrative apparatus are not visible on local development. They are only visible during elections and their corollary: the search for votes. The October 9 and 10 2019 riots would then be the expression of a long-repressed discomfort: displaced anger on their fellow citizens from ethnic outgroups, while their initial target is the local elite. They use them during elections to gain the popular support they need to keep the existing political system in place; a system that ensures them privileged and disproportionate access to socially valuable material and symbolic resources, and to which most populations do not have access. But, once the elections are won, the elites abandon the people to their fate. In short, the latter adopt hostile intergroup attitudes and behaviors towards ethnic outgroups in order to maintain a political status quo that brings them nothing, compared to the political, administrative and economic gains garnered by the elites who use them to perpetuate the existing social arrangements.

## 5. Conclusions

The instrumentalization of ethnic identity is a disposition that contributes to the satisfaction of epistemic, existential and relational needs. Indeed, this disposition contributes in particular to the satisfaction of epistemic needs, mainly by the reduction of uncertainty, because the interethnic competition for the acquisition of scarce resources gives rise to the fear of being eventually defeated and consequently to make the bitter experience of the non-representativeness of the members of the group in privileged positions of the State. This is why the frequent use of ethnic identity is the effective way to lead the said group in collective action in order to reduce the uncertainty which hangs over its future. The instrumentalization of ethnicity for political ends makes it possible to satisfy existential needs by reducing the psychological distress generated by the feeling of threat to ethnic identity. Indeed, when the elites of a community manipulate their ethnic identity, they reveal to what extent the image of the group is threatened by the mere presence of outgroups (Staub, 1999; 2011). This situation contributes to the legitimization of aggressive behavior against threatening ethnic outgroups, and consequently to the reduction of this threatened psychological state. This political maneuver also participates in the satisfaction of relational needs, mainly by activating the feeling that social reality is shared with other members of the ethnic group to which they belong. Indeed, when individuals decide to make their ethnic identity salient, it facilitates the sharing of the same culture, history, physical and behavioral traits, and frustrations among members of their ethnic community. These realities are accepted by other members of the group and motivate them to engage in hostile behavior towards members of the other ethnic groups. Whatever the reason for adopting the said behavior against ethnic outgroups, the objective is to establish the hegemony of the ethnic group of origin to the detriment of outgroups.

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