

Photographic Entanglements a Study of Column Backdrop in African Photo Studios: The Case of Cameroon

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Abstract

As an imperial photographic backdrop, the column backdrop is identified in colonial and post-colonial photographic studios in Cameroon. There are a few contributions to address the column as an element of dense photographic composition in Cameroon photo studios. The use of Columns as the vitality of ancient and Renaissance theory and practice in Roman architecture makes up extant literature. In Cameroon, grey literature in museums and archives like the Cameroon Press Photo Archives (CPPA), Presbyterian Basel Mission, and West Cameroon Archives have ground sheets that portray missionaries and the colonialist empires using the columns in buildings, decorations, and photo backdrops. Extant literature in books and newspapers also portrays the use of columns in varying forms. A recent study on the rise and fall in the statistics of commercial photographers in Cameroon shows the use of carved ornamented parapets as props and the column backdrop in one of the early photographs taken in the coastal town of Douala (Duala). This study aimed at sourcing the column backdrops in albums, photo collections, museums, archives, and extant literature as socio-cultural material. To unearth the extent to which the column backdrop connects people and places, to the history of the colonialist and the colonized in Cameroon. As a method, the use of eliciting interviews qualitatively forms a base of three questions: How could the source of a column as backdrop be traced in Cameroon with three colonial masters? To what extent has the column backdrop entangled architecture and decorations in colonies and former occupying states? What is the fate of the column photo backdrop in the post-colonial states? These are questions that form the major concerns that are addressed in this paper.

Keywords

Entanglements, Column Backdrop, Cameroon, Colonial Masters, Photo Studio

1. Introduction

This paper examines the columns as an imperial photographic backdrop in Cameroon, entangling photo studios to former occupying states, Germany, France, and Britain. The column in this study presents its other lives connecting colonial culture to African history and visual culture. As a remnant of colonial culture, photographers, sitters, and artists resonate an entangled devolved history and culture. A history of colonial absence and presence connects visual materials in Africa to the diaspora. There exist some extant publications in the Cameroon visual scene; the rise and fall of commercial photographers, the professional legacy of studio photographers, the decaying state of the archives, photography in the Atlantic Visualscape, the precarious and precious images in photographic studios, studio portraiture, the intra-interregional and intergenerational circulations of photographic backdrops in Cameroon (Zeitlyn, 2008, 2009, 2019; Mckeown, 2010; Schneider, 2015, 2017, 2018; Gruber, 2021; Nyamndon, 2023). In the first place, the photographic road junction of Cameroon, and history in Africa is crucial for this study. The column backdrop forms a narrative among other colonial—post-colonial backdrops as an agency of power, modernity, and hierarchy. The use of painted columns as backdrop and in some photo studios as props in the form of parapets in the 19th century and later in the 1960s and 1970s posed more questions than the answer to the questions I have posed earlier on in this paper. The handing over of the column backdrop as a gift to an apprentice marks the end of an apprenticeship in Cameroon. Also, the column backdrop marks the beginning of a new photo studio by an apprentice. The case of Djeuti Boniface who received the rounded and fluted motif backdrop to start his photo studio from his master Tokontio Abraham in Bamenda, Cameroon is an instance that triggers an interrogation of column backdrop post-humous narrative as a painted backdrop in Cameroon. Other narratives about column backdrop commission, provenance, and interregional reproduction between photo studios and its representations in colonial and post-colonial heritage than other colonial relics in the 1960s and 1970s are cause for concern. As a column, it also forms a product of the alliances of bureaucracy and totalitarianism in the former occupying state. Further, the relation of the column backdrop to photographers, photo studios, and its former occupying state is interrogated as an agency beyond photo backdrop in the former occupying states. The paper wraps up with a retrace of the column at post-colonial Cameroon visual and multi-ethnic scenes.

2. The Geo-Political Location of Cameroon

The political history of Cameroon in “West-Central” Africa is complex, metaphorically speaking Cameroon assumes the “Armpit” of Africa. For the sake of political gerrymandering and ease of administration, it is divided into ten regions Central, Littoral, Southwest, Northwest, West, Adamaua, North, East, South, and Far North regions. Cameroon shared land borders with 6 countries Congo, Chad, Central Africa Republic, Gabon, Nigeria, and Equatorial Guinea.

Its position with as many as six neighbouring countries is rare in the West, East, and Central Africa. This geo-strategic location showcases Cameroon as a cross-road nation south of the Sahara. The Northwest and the Southwest regions are two English-speaking regions of Cameroon, historically known as the Southern Cameroons. Ongoing political instability which is not the concern of this paper has given rise to several names for the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. “Ambozonia” derived from the Ambas Bay in the Southwest region is preferred by the separatist movements clamouring for outright independence. “No-So” is yet another name for the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. However, some historical pundits opine that the appellation “No-So” is merely the francophone distraction from “West Cameroon” or “Southern Cameroons” as an entity with historical backing. Despite the foregoing contrasting views about the naming (Ekah, 2020), studies on Cultural Diversity Peace, and International Cooperation at the International Relations Institute of Cameroon (IRIC) have considered “No-So” as part of arguments about the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. My preference for Southern Cameroons in this study is because of its historical source. The Southern Cameroons form one-fifth of the total population of Cameroon with about 8 million population. Originally British from 1858-1887, ceded to Germany in 1887 and captured again in 1914 after World War I by the French and the British allied forces. From 1915 to 1961 a period of 46 years, the British bequeathed its Anglo-Saxon heritage to the people of Southern Cameroons. Cameroon is often referred to as “Africa in miniature” because of its geographical and cultural diversity within the central African political and economic unit in the Subregion. The preceding geo-strategic location of Cameroon buttresses its photographic studio road junction position. Other details concerning its legal systems, economy, society, geography, and climates are its peculiarity in the Central Africa Subregion (Tamasang, Effala, & Tassah, 2021). The Northwest and Western regions where samples of the column backdrop were collected belong to the mountainous Grassfields while the Southwest belongs to the coastal oceanic region.

3. The Imperial and Colonial Backdrops as an Agency

The choice of the Column backdrop by photographers in the Francophone and Anglophone regions (provinces) of Cameroon with little explanation as to why they preferred it before, during, and after independence¹. Like the colonial gaze used in Bazar, quay sites, bridges, the Eiffel Tower, and Champ Elysees painted backdrops, the column also forms one of the imperial genres. In Cameroon, grey literature from museums and archives like the Cameroon Press Photo Archives (CPPA), the Basel Mission, and West Cameroon archives have ground sheets, that portray the colonialist using the painted column as a backdrop. Some photographs present the column as decoration in buildings the case of the Prime

¹I can only say that I am using the column backdrop because I saw my apprentice master using it in his studios in Cameroon and sitters preferred the column to other backdrops. Djeuti Boniface. Bamenda. 23/6/2019.

Minister's Schloss in Buea and in group and individual portraits in sitters' albums as backdrops².

The first thing I would like to present here is Robert Travenors' contributions on "Palladio and Palladianism" which focuses on the use of Column as vitality of ancient, renaissance theory, and practices in Roman architecture.

Kleiner in "A History of Roman Art" opines that the Doric Column is one of the architectural developments in the Roman Empire in the early century³. The Doric column conjures the image of the power and grandeur of its mighty armies and fearsome gladiators (Kleiner, 2016). Further to foster the imagery of power and greatness (Hutcheon, 1986) contends that the position held of post-modernism processing its product and production as a relation to the art of the past from the history, parody, politics, and cultural critique. Considering the Doric column as an entity that makes up modern cities, they are accused as a product of an alliance between bureaucracy and totalitarianism. Modern architecture, Hutcheon argues, fits in the new machine age that breaks historical continuity. To support the argument further, she contends that designs and decorations are gestures of social context that clamour for a return to traditional, social, and historical dimensions in architecture. Taking the Doric column to the Greek Classical society, it stands for hierarchy represented by the West façade of the Parthenon as a totality of form (Mare, 2000). A pitting argument by Bachelard stresses the social context in which no work of art is made only with one form. Like Pierre Bourdieu's *Habitus* as an embodiment of deeply ingrained habits skills and disposition through experience. Bourdieu opines that power is culturally and symbolically created and constantly reinforced through an interplay of agency and structures (Bourdieu, 2005). Western objects and relics serve as agencies of hierarchy and power in colonial and post-colonial states as supported by (Gelemter, 2001) in "A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context." Gelemter's argument relates the use of the "Western eye" in the history of Indian Eastern architecture as a benchmark for the assessment and evaluation of architecture in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Back to Hutcheon and considering the foregrounded premises as a logical deduction in attributing them to the Roman Doric column as a symbol that conjures power and mightiness as its empire in the early century. This follows that architecture as public space is an art of design in buildings that provokes and reinstates a conversation about its structures which are inescapable with the socio-cultural background and ideology of the building in the past, present, and posterity (Hutcheon, 1986).

²See the Basel Mission Archives, Cameroon Press Photo Archives, and "The Making of History" board at the National Archives in Buea. Some examples are also found in photos pasted on the walls of the National Museum in Yaounde.

³The use of this term here particularly refers to the "Doric column" in the history of Roman Arts. At research time interviewees had different names attributed to the Doric column belonging to the Greek and later Roman architecture and the two canonical order the Ionic and Corinthian. Some of these names were [column, pillar, round pole, support, and footing] I decided to adopt the column backdrop in this paper.

I recall that the theoretical depth of architecture and its praxis is not my focus here but more of those perspectives have been extensively dealt with by (Woodward, 2007, 2013, 2016) on regional tendencies, meaning columns in buildings, and the basis of the use of columns in temple constructions. The argument (Tavernor, 1991) in “Palladio and Palladianism” holds for the vitality and renaissance of ancient Roman architecture that disseminates formula (column as decoration and support inclusive) over the world. Andre Palladio probably the most famous architect of the world stands at the beginning of a movement called Palladianism. A renewal that combined classical authority, dignity, and comfort was made available to the whole of Europe and other countries in the eighteenth century. Palladianism was more than a style; it expresses a way of life and moral philosophy. As an art, it embodies values that link meaning and history together. In a bid to relate the Doric column (pillars, round, spherical, spiral poles, and column) are name varieties given to columns by users in the Cameroon photo industry. A retrace of Germany, France, and Britain in that order of colonization forms the basis of my investigation, of the column provenance and transcultural entanglements. Let’s investigate the column backdrops to the former occupying states.

3.1. Germany

The foregrounded narratives extend the argument to when Kamerun was an African colony of the German Empire from 1884 to 1916. At this stage, the focus is on imperial and colonial relics that serve as model pieces to the colonized. This could follow that by the turn of the nineteenth century, Palladio’s architectural rebirth cum renaissance in the sixteenth century made available to Europe and other countries of the world were brought to Africa by the colonialist (Tavernor, 1991). Parallel structures in Architecture the façade, windows, staircase, Chimney, and Doric column of the Doge’s palace and Palazzo Barbarano in Venice built in the sixteenth century are like the Prime Minister’s Schloss in Buea, the Bamenda Fortress, and the Palaces of the Bamoum and Bali-Nyonga in Cameroon.

Thus, the German imperial rule in Cameroon and its architecture might have influenced the visual representation of photographers, sitters, and artists as they use these relics daily. Concurrently a parallel study on German influence in Qingdao by (Zhao & Tao, 2012), shows large-scale German construction during the period of occupation from 1897-1914. The influence of Western architecture embodies the culture and art of a specific historical period and reflects the architectural and cultural trends that appeared in urban development and social evolution. Besides, the prominent historical Schloss in Southern Cameroon and other German buildings are identified in the regions of Cameroon. Also, of interest is the Bismarck fountain at the foot of the Cameroon mountain that makes up extant visual materials⁴. The changes it has undergone and the meaning and uses attached to those changes build up a chronological historical narrative.

⁴See the Bismarck Fountain in the “The Making of History board.” in the West Cameroon Archives.

More studies on the integration of Western aesthetics, like form, roofing, and chimney in local and traditional architecture as exhibited in imperial and colonial photographs could be engaged. Jenkins (2014), and the material evidence of the parallel structure of the history of Column in Koblenz-Germany depicts two thousand years of history from Roman domination during the Classical world, slavery, Renaissance, and revolution to the twentieth and twenty-first-century disconnection at the top of the column. Similar buildings that use the columns as support and decoration could be identified, matching up with semi-circular windows and doors that are typical of Palladio's revivals in architecture across the world. Like the kurfurst liches schloss electoral palace in Amberg, the Water Spouting Boy and Fountainfalz Am Plan in Koblenz in Germany all form parallel structures to Cameroon's former Presidency in Yaounde town centre presently hosting the national museum, and Prime Minister Schloss and Bismarck fountain in Buea, Cameroon.

3.2. France

Tracing the column from France's architectural history shows that as a modification in the nineteenth century, the column existed as Paris plaster⁵. Spotting some of these details and comparing them with the extensive contribution of Robert Tavernor's "Palladio and Palladianism," is worth mentioning that before the development of the Doric column in plaster form, France's Renaissance architecture gained prominence in the fifteenth and Seventeenth centuries as it succeeded Gothic architecture. France's renaissance architecture taps the architectural revival of Andrea Palladio summarised in the architectural treatise "The Four Books of Architecture." Arguably, the trajectory of Renaissance architecture shows Doric column dissemination from the city of Vincenza in Italy to France as could be seen in chateaus-Langeais, Chambord, Gaillon, and others. Holding on to France's imperial and colonial influence in Cameroon at colonial and post-colonial state might serve as a premise to source the Doric column as props and photographic backdrops used by sitters to depict hierarchy and vertical culture as these special decorations' forms painted backdrops and props in photos taken in studios in the field.

3.3. Great Britain

Britain on its part got the Southern Cameroon as a mandatory territory of British Cameroon made up of Northern Grassfields and Southern coastal zones. Although the myriad seems the best, since 1961, the union between the French and British Southern Cameroon has had some challenges⁶. However, the British colonial influence in the British Southern Cameroons among others could be seen in the domain of education, history, museums, archives, anthropology, administration, and photography. The influence of Sally Chilver, Ardener, and Kabbery

⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doric_order. Accessed on the 23/08/20.

⁶The differences in law and education and its application in French and English Cameroon are in a continuous process of redress.

in documenting the history and anthropology of the people of the Grassfields Cameroon and the mission of the colonial office concerning the documentation and circulation of photographic materials is worth mentioning. Chart boards, like the “making of history board”⁷ and wall photographs displayed in the West Cameroon and Cameroon Press photo Archives as extant grey archival visual materials which portrays the column in use as backdrop and props⁸. Back in England as of the nineteenth century, columns were used to erect statues of prominent figures in history at city centers, parks, roadsides, schools, and Universities. The statue of the Earl Grey of the Abacus of the Column in Newcastle, a design by Messrs. John and Benjamin Green of Newcastle, is a faithful representation of the noble lord⁹. As an imaginative work of art, The Column of Newcastle is associated with a noble lord that underpins Marx’s dichotomy between the proletariat and feudal lords. An attribute, that serves as a gauge of hierarchy and power in visual ephemeral. Concurringly, the column erected in Shrewsbury commemorates a noble general Lord Hill, and the Anglesey column in commemoration of the battle of Waterloo on the Island of Anglesey¹⁰. Besides class distinction, war veterans, battlegrounds, and the ranks and files in the military are commemorated with the use of the decorative column. In some examples, the column is used as a memory to celebrate victory in votes. A case in point is the British parliament, when they voted the magnificent palace of Blenheim to the great Duke of Marlborough, they erected a triumphal column in the park with his status upon the abacus supported by captured enemies and surrounded by trophies¹¹. Although the column’s style of erecting status sparsely represents monuments in Cameroon its design as a backdrop forms the repertoires of Cameroonian photographers. Apart from colonial monuments that represent foreign heroes in their entirety, objects, symbols, and craft designs form a greater proportion of the monuments. The foreground depicts the column as a symbol of loyalty, greatness, victory, promotion, memory, and death.

Summarily, the foregoing narrative highlights the German imperial and post-colonial column remnants, the dissemination trajectory of columns from Italy to France, and the mandatory role of Great Britain in Southern Cameroon. It also pointed out the Great Britain column’s ubiquitousness in battle, victory, death, hierarchy, memory, and promotion. All three former occupying states like Cameroon signal a continuity in the production and use of backdrops in architecture and the photographic industry. Nyamndon (2023), three phases of Photographic backdrop production from 1958 to 1980 with the column as an example chats about the continuity argument. Paying attention to his interlocking perspective as another lens that informed the “colonial,” “post-colonial” and “decolonizing” scholarly discussion. Although Stoler’s “Imperial Durability”

⁷See the “Making of History Board” and its recounts of the history of the national archives of Buea, Cameroon.

⁸See the “Making of History Board” uses of enlarged black and white photo frames of the West Cameroon archive Buea.

⁹The Mirror No. 920 of Saturday, November 10, 1838. p. 306.

¹⁰The Mirror No. 920 of Saturday, November 10. 1838. pp. 306-307.

¹¹The Mirror No. 920 of Saturday, November 10. 1838. p. 306

(Stoler, 2016) presents a motion argument, the interlocking perspective in backdrop production with attention on column backdrop entanglements argued in this paper reflects the synergy between photographers, artists, and sitters used of old and present temporalities. Thus far, offering another angle to the motion claim with the production, use, and circulation of columns in the former occupying states and the Cameroon visual scene.

4. The Column-Painted Backdrop in Post-Colonial State

Books, journals, and newspapers portray the different uses of the column-painted backdrop in Cameroon. A recent study focusing on the statistics of commercial photographers in Cameroon shows one of the early photographs taken in the coastal town of Douala, Cameroon by William Mudisa Bell (see Zeitlyn, 2019). Although the photo that has King Bell of Cameroon in a sitting position dated before the independence of Cameroon. A decade after the independence of Cameroon in 1961, the use of a carved column served as a prob and chair for sitters in Bit-by-Bit (Njong Njomeleng) photo studio in the 1970s in Bamenda, Cameroon. See **Figure 2**.

From data collected among photographers in Cameroon, the column backdrop was represented in the repertoires of studio photographers. Quantitatively the representation of column backdrops among four randomly chosen photographic studios in Bamenda, Mbouda, and Buea, towns in Grassfields and Coastal regions of Cameroon have the following result:

Table 1. The representation of column Backdrops amongst Photographers in Cameroon. Source V. Nyamndon 2018.

Photographer/studio	Town	Photos with Backdrops	Column Backdrop	Others
<i>Young Abraham</i> (Djeuti Boniface)	Bamenda	98	20	82
<i>Bit by Bit</i> (Njong Njomeleng)	Bamenda	77	08	69
<i>Saint Delmas</i> (Delmas)	Bamessingue/Mbouda	20	02	18
<i>Davisco</i> (T. David)	Buea	56	12	44

From **Table 1**, the extent to which sitters, photographers, and painters attribute meanings and uses of columns as photographic backdrops to imperial and colonial gaze forms the crux of the argument at this level. Already, the use of a carved column in the foreground of an earlier photo of King Bell evidences the use of columns in the Cameroon photographic industry. The origin of the Column dates to the second century as one of the three orders of ancient Greek and later in Roman Architecture while the Ionic and the Corinthian form the other order (Kleiner, 2016). Interestingly, the use of these special objects as paintings, moulded concrete spiral flute forms and carved structures has entangled architecture, decoration, and the photographic studios industry in Cameroon see **Figures 1-4**. The contributions of Christraud M. Geary retrace the Chiefdom of



Figure 1. J. Toussele’s Archive-Column painted backdrop Cameroon.



Figure 2. N. Njong’s archives-carved column as a carved seat, Cameroon.



Figure 3. Abraham Photo’s archives Column painted backdrop¹².

¹²Tokontio Abraham also known as (a.k.a) Abraham Photo started his studio business in the 1960s in Bamenda.



Figure 4. Djeuti's photo's archive painted column backdrop¹³.

Weh, Esu, and Aghem as of the 1970s in the Mechum division in the Bamenda Grassfields, her contributions, document traditional buildings' shapes, forms, and decorations using wooden carved objects in traditional architecture with some appearing as background for her sitters underrepresented in photo studios and as photographic backdrops (Fardon, 1989; Geary, 1991). Further in the "Roots and Routes of African Photographic Practices: A Companion to Modern African Art" she examines the impact of Western civilization on traditional buildings and decoration in palaces, citing the case of a traditional chief who replaces traditional structures with Western ones upon his return from a sojourn from Europe (Geary, 2013). The foregoing example retraces the impact of colonialism in a post-colonial period which could be extended to the use of the decorative column backdrop within the Photographic industry and other domains in Cameroon. A further argument, that piques my interest is Young Abraham (Djeuti Boniface) who owns photo studios in Douala, Mbouda, and Bamenda testifying to have received a painted column backdrop as the first gift upon his completion of training from his master¹⁴. Column backdrops were painted on plywood and distributed to his four studios in the Littoral, West, and Northwest regions of Cameroon¹⁵. From the sitter's perspectives to why they use or prefer the Column backdrop, Ndaghu a retired civil servant holds that:

At first, it was not my choice, but when I came to realize the beauty, it presents as Western forms of decorations in photos I watch in films and cata-

¹³Djeuti Boniface also known as (a.k.a) Young Abraham photo. "Young" means an apprentice of Tokontio Abraham.

¹⁴According to Djeuti Boniface such a reward was compensation for loyalty, punctuality, and hard work from a photographic master.

¹⁵Detail of the intra-interregional circulations of backdrop is found in Nyamndon Valentine's "One Photographer Four Studios: Circulations of Photographic backdrops in Africa." *African Journal of Art and Humanities* [under review].

logues it became my favourite. But when I was transferred to my new station in Kumba, Southwest of Cameroon, I requested to use it as a backdrop from a studio photographer who unfortunately did not have it among his backdrops¹⁶.

Apart from the impact of colonialism, exposure to films, catalogues, and photographers' influence over the use of column backdrop also influence the sitter's choice. The artists who painted the column backdrop before during and after independence have diverse opinions as could be portrayed by the extent of its fragmentation¹⁷. In the post-colonial period, artists and photographers painted backdrop monopoly buttresses Ndaghu's column backdrop scarcity.

In an interview concerning the uses of backdrops during national days in Cameroon, Djeuti Boniface noted that:

On Christmas, New Year, and national days, my four studios were very busy. I makes good money from youths and adults who come in with family and friends to have individual and group portraits. It was on such days that I made good use of important backdrops that attract customers to my studio. On such day, the pillar backdrop (column) and the story building/two-way road painted backdrop were used. My apprentices in Douala, Bamenda, and Mbouda were supplied with new sets of backdrops before the day proper¹⁸.

The pillar backdrop was the name Djeuti preferred to column from his interview excerpt¹⁹. Also, material preparations for the celebration of national days got masters and apprentices involved in the Cameroon photographic industry. More so, he reveals and maps out the national trajectory of backdrops that form the middle term that chats the central theme of intra-interregional and inter-generational circulations of backdrop in Cameroon. Like George Orwell's lucid prose in "Animal Farm," (Orwell, 2021) "some animals are more equal than others" and so too are backdrops. The foregrounded excerpt on the "importance of backdrops" evidence the grading and classification of backdrops' meaning and uses by photographers. Again, "new sets of backdrops" form the antecedent of meeting customers' or sitters' satisfaction as an interplay of profit margin within the photographic industry in Cameroon. The emphasis on new sets of backdrop evokes creativity and innovation between Photographers, sitters, and artists in the post-colonial state²⁰.

However, investigating further, I purposively gauge uses and meaning based on the "importance" backdrop from extant monochrome photos in active and retired Photographer's studios. To do this, the use of rubber stamps and dates on the back of photos, national day celebrations in Cameroon, sitters, and backdrop

¹⁶Ndaghu T. Thomas. Bamenda. 09/8/2018.

¹⁷See Nyamndon and Zeitlyn in "How painted backdrops link photographic studios: a case from Cameroon" forthcoming.

¹⁸Interviewed. Djeuti Boniface. Bamenda. 12/7/2018.

¹⁹Other names such as spherical, spiral, round poles, and pillars were names preferred to address the column by studio photographers in the field.

²⁰See how creativity evokes production within three categories of backdrop production phases in Chapter III of Nyamndon, 2023.



Figure 5. The Column backdrop (Back and Front) taken during the week of the celebration of the national day in Cameroon. Djeuti's Archives.

on the front of the photo form the basis. About, national days in Cameroon, it is a day on which celebration mark the nationhood of a nation or state. As a target, I purposively chooses the twentieth of May and the eleventh of February annual celebrations. An example from Djeuti Boniface, reveals the use of the painted column backdrop in his “*Carefour Bon Fils*” studio in Douala the Littoral region of Cameroon see **Figure 5**.

Thus, to quote Elmes in “The Mirror of Literature, amusement, and Instruction” a British periodical No 1920, “Columns even in form of carve wood were most usual and most practicable in countries like Egypt where timber fit for their construction was scarce and stone abundant becomes principal material for a column.”²¹ To resonate with Elmes further, columns exist in the form of fine marble among the Greeks. In forms of monuments and architectural support like the Trajan and Antonine in Rome where they are abounding in form shapes and meaning. Like the Eiffel Tower backdrop, the column has got a comfortable position in the Cameroon photographic industry as a backdrop that depicts modernism, hierarchy, fame, loyalty, and greatness through the impact of imperialism to colonization as an extension to the post-colonial state. Some photographs present the column as decoration in a group photo of Schloss and individual portraits in Cameroon as earlier mentioned in this interrogation²².

5. Conclusion

This study has argued that the column is not only a backdrop and support as they present to photographers and artists, but they are an agency that has its roots in imperialism, colonial and post-coloniality in Africa. A deconstructive narrative from its architectural focus points to a painted backdrop used by studio photographers in the celebration of national days in Cameroon. Column

²¹Elmes cited in The Mirror No. 1920.

²²The groundsheets of the Basel mission archives, Cameroon Press Photo Archives, “the making of history” board at the West Cameroon archives Buea and National Museum Yaounde are examples using Schloss and its column in photographs.

backdrop as a writ large in colonial buildings stands as a symbol of power, wealth, and stratification in Africa. This study has also demonstrated the level of fragmentation in the structure of the column backdrop as it circulates from one studio to another interregional and intergenerationally. Thus far, the circulation perspective of the column backdrops unravels diverse backdrop painters' perceptions in productions and uses fallout from a complex colonial residual heritage culture of the German, French, and English. In this light, the value and symbol of the column backdrop within and without the photo industry form a nexus as it crisscrosses the Francophone and Anglophone boundaries in the form of photographic materials embedded with a mitigation effect of the dichotomy of "two cultures" and "two people" in Cameroon.

Although I have unpacked the column not as painted backdrops in the former occupying states, Germany, France, and Britain, my arguments have aptly demonstrated and related column presence in buildings and monuments in the former occupying states with those in the Cameroon visual scene. The argument presented in this study piques the column backdrop as an object that entangles people, places, studios, architecture, and monuments in colonial and post-colonial states. Thus far the paper has shown the presence of the column in the three former occupying states though unable to pin down which of the nations was the first to introduce it to Cameroon. But the logical sequence of colonization starting with Germany could be suggestive of another lens of column backdrop introduction from the perspectives presented in "African photography in the Atlantic visualscape..." taking precedence from early Roman architecture. I will say that although painted backdrops have taken a different phase in the Cameroon visual scene the column influenced as objects of designs in architecture and monuments in Cameroon, Germany, France, and Britain cannot be overemphasized.

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Valentine Nyamndon

Interviews conducted by Valentine Nyamndon.

Djeuti Boniface. Bamenda. 11/7/2018.

Djeuti Boniface. Bamenda. 12/7/2018.

Ndaghu Taboh Thomas. Bamenda. 09/8/2018.

Archives/Museums

The Basel Mission Archives—Buea, Cameroon.

The West Cameroon Archives (National Archives) Buea, Cameroon.

The Cameroon Press Photos Archives (CPPA) Buea, Cameroon.

The Cameroon National Archives—Yaounde, Cameroon.
The Cameroon National Museum—Yaounde, Cameroon.
The National Museum of Scotland.

Studio Photographers' Collections

Djeuti Boniface “*Young Abraham Photo*”—Bamenda, Cameroon.
Njong Njomeleng “*Bit by Bit photo*”—Bamenda, Cameroon.
Tekam Delmas J. “*Photo studio Saint Delmas*”—Bamissengue, Cameroon.
Jacques Toussele “*Photo studio Jacques*”—Mbouda, Cameroon.
David T. “*Davisco Photo*”—Buea, Cameroon.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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