

# Sociocultural Barriers to Women's Political Leadership in the North Region of Cameroon

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**ABSTRACT----** *The issue of gender studies in general and women's political leadership is increasingly gaining impetus in scientific discourse in Cameroon in general and in the north region in particular. Despite comprising of more than half the north region population, Women are more active in politics as voters and helpers for activities related to politics, and specifically political leadership in the north region of Cameroon. They perform the majority of campaign activities linked to mobilisations. Yet across the north region, women face an array of barriers to achieving their full potential in political leadership, from restrictive cultural practices to discriminatory traditional laws and highly segmented familial division of labour. This paper addresses the various social and cultural barriers that drag women backward as far as political leadership and decision making are concerned. From the onset of democracy in Cameroon, cultural barriers, social and religious cumbersome limits women's entry in political leadership.*

**Keywords----** Women, North Region, Cameroon, culture, Political leadership

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The most powerful barrier to women's political leadership in the north region of Cameroon is the impact of societal culture, specifically, persisting gender stereotyping of politics as exclusively a man's activity and the perception of politics as 'dirty business.' Facing these deeply held stereotypes and beliefs is not easy for most women. Prevailing gender norms generally assign women domestic and caring duties and in some cases can proscribe or discourage women from taking on public responsibilities in general and political leadership in particular. Thus, "*the explanations and justifications for women's marginalisation from public life run from those rooted in certain ideological-religious beliefs to philosophic theories on 'natural' (recently, biological) differences and roles.*"<sup>1</sup> This is especially the case in regions such as the north region with widespread conservative religious and/or patriarchal customary practices. The resistance faced by women in quest of political leadership in this region of Cameroon is partly due to the above mentioned factors. These barriers, and unequal access to quality education, the patriarchal nature of the society, men stereotypes towards women political leaders and the scarcity of role models, contribute to the marginalization women from the political sphere in this region. These archaic traditional practices keep on obstructing women to access to political leadership instances. This section examines the various proven troubles women witness in the course of decision-making processes. The interventions below range from raising awareness among girls and women particularly the most marginalized and demoted from their fundamental civil rights in leadership role first of all in the names of Custom and tradition (I), and besides, social and religious hindrances (II)

## 2. CUSTOMARY RESISTANCE TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

The existence of powerful traditional beliefs and assumptions has helped to create gender stereotypes. Since most individuals are still firmly attached to their customs and traditions, some women perceive and preach that socially high offices are not God given to women, only to men. This has strengthened males' social positions as superior to females. In the name of custom and tradition, women continue to face barriers in political leadership (A) and also some women in the name of culture are reluctant to engage in politics (B).

### A- Cultural resistances to women's leadership

In the North Region, it is observed that the womanhood is reduced to a mere second-class citizen, hence, there is the commonality of general belief system that the best place for women is in the "Kitchen". The unequal access of women to political leadership in the North Region of Cameroon is partly due to the persistent practice patriarchy in this society (1), besides, those willing are not encouraged by the society and the face many insults from others and consequently they are stereotyped by the men and even fellow women (2).

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<sup>1</sup> Mino Vianello, Gwen Moore (eds.), (2000), *Gendering Elites: Economic and Political Leadership in 27 Industrialised Societies*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. P 66

## 1- The patriarchal culture

The existence of patriarchy in this part of the country limits women's to run for political leadership. According to Walby, the concept of Patriarchy is defined as "a system of social structures and practices in which the male dominate, oppress and exploit Woman making the woman subordinate to the man"<sup>2</sup>. In a sociological perspective, patriarchy is a socially constructed system in which males hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property as it is the case in this region. Since right in the family, fathers hold authority over women and in simple terms, it is the "male dominance and female subservience"<sup>3</sup>, it will certainly be very difficult for a woman to stand for a public competition as far as political leadership is concerned to challenge men. As male dominance is defined as "a situation in which men have highly preferential access, although not always exclusive rights, to those activities to which the society accords the greatest values, and the exercise of which permits a measure of control over others"<sup>4</sup>, women therefore tend to be dominated everywhere by men except in the kitchen. The practice of patriarchy has been prevalent in the world since quite a long time. Unchallenged till recent periods, and even now, it still hasn't quite disappeared from our lives. The issue of giving men a higher social status over females has slinked into the public life. Empirical evidences in the North Region shows that the society is permeated by patriarchy whereby women are expected to conform and confine themselves to male dominance and female subservience. From this ideological construction, women are seen to belong to the home, and are forbidden to take decisions, to expose themselves in public for political activities such as campaign rallies. It becomes unconceivable and unrealistic for men especially in the rural areas to see women participating in politics in general and presenting herself self as a political leader in particular. Farzana Bari<sup>5</sup>, in a report concerning women's exclusion from the formal political arena, she describes this situation as being part of a historical tradition, which is not an entirely new situation. Historical facts proved that "As in all societies, male supremacy was both ideologically and effectively a reality, and the public sphere, considered the most prestigious, was reserved for men. Women's domain was domestic life..."<sup>6</sup> The patriarchal ideology operates at the sociocultural levels and creates disparities of social capital and political capacities between women and men. Prior to colonialism, Elizabeth Eviota<sup>7</sup>, "explains that patriarchy operated through an extended kinship group structure, which positioned women within the private structure...and were treated as family property". Realities from this part of the country as in most African countries imposes a dressing code especially for Muslim women, as this observer explains that "women are not allowed to address men in public because it is considered taboo to do so"<sup>8</sup>. This really limits women's aspiration to even dream to become a political leaders as they are not allowed to be seen or address people in public. As stated by Tabuka Elisabeth Tundi, "culturally, leadership has carried the notion of masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women is still common today"<sup>9</sup>. This proves to what extent cultural construction of leadership in itself instigates difference and set women out of the path to gain access to political leadership positions. The predominance of patriarchy is therefore a hindrance to women political leadership since they were granted the right to vote and to stand for election since the country's independence in 1960 as stated by the constitution, but in practice, the traditional construction of women's place is at home have excluded them from political life except for few who are forcing their way through the tough competition to stand for political leadership. From current data we have only **(2 women mayors, 3 women senators and 4 women in parliament)** proves the difficulties women faced to pave their way in this public sphere reserved to men, as it is widely conceived in the mind of people in this part of the country that only men have the abilities, capacities and intellectual requirements to run for political leadership. "It has long been assumed that traditional anti-egalitarian attitudes toward gender slow down the political advancement of women, though little systematic cross-national evidence has been available to verify this proposition"<sup>10</sup>, the statement of this observer reinforces the empirical evidences that we observed during our investigation. This is equally demonstrated by this observer who recognised that, "custom in Africa is stronger than domination, stronger than the law, stronger even than religion. Over the years, customary practices have been incorporated into religion, and ultimately have come to be believed by their practitioners to be demanded by their adopted gods, whoever they may be"<sup>11</sup>. This a clear prescription that if mentalities does not change, women in areas dominated by

<sup>2</sup>Walby, S, (1990), *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford: Blackwell. P 20

<sup>3</sup> Arowolo, D. & Aluko, F, (2010), "Women and political participation in Nigeria". *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 14(4), p 583

<sup>4</sup> Friedl Ernestine, (1975), *Women and Men. An Anthropologist's view*. New York. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. P 7

<sup>5</sup> Farzana Bari, (2005), "Women's Political Participation: Issues and Challenges, paper" (Bangkok: Division for the Advancement of Women-UN)

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Coquery-vidrovitch, Beth Raps, Translator, (1997), *African Women: A Modern History*. Westview Press. p 11

<sup>7</sup> Eviota, Elizabeth Uy, (1992), "The Political Economy of Gender: Women and the Sexual Division of Labour in the Philippines". (London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd), p 34

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Lucas Kivoi, (2014), "Factors Impeding Political Participation and Representation of Women in Kenya". *Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 2, No. 6. p 178.

<sup>9</sup> Tabuka Elisabeth Tundi, (2015), "Factors influencing women participation in political leadership- the case of kimilili constituency of bungoma county, Kenya". *Global Advanced Research Journal of Geography and Regional Planning* (ISSN: 2315-5018) Vol. 4(1) pp. 001-031, Available online <http://garj.org/garjgrp>. p 9.

<sup>10</sup> Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, (2001), "Women and Democracy: Cultural Obstacles to Equal Representation". *Journal of Democracy* Volume 12, Number 3. p 131.

<sup>11</sup> Hanny Lightfoot Klein & Ellen Cole, (1989), *Prisoners of Ritual: An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa*. Routledge. p 47

customs will face difficulties on the path to modernism due to cultural lag that force them to remain under the control of their male counterpart. Patriarchy justifies the marginalization of women in all sectors of public life in general and political leadership in particular. *“Such processes of inequality and inequity are believed to be perpetuated by cultural norms, regulations and religious beliefs and practices. These are some of the common conundrums that patriarchal male societies have used to oppress and subjugate women”*<sup>12</sup>. Many patriarchal communities in the North Region do not see the need for gender parity since most of them are patriarchal in nature and often see gender equality as a challenge to male dominance and hegemony.

## 2- Stereotypes towards women political leaders

The reaction against women winning office can discourage other women from standing for office, as it is the case in this part of Cameroon with high levels of gender inequality and discrimination. In this part of the country, women who are actively participating in politics are seen and treated as free women (prostitutes/wayward) of easy virtues, stubborn people, whores, too domineering, cultural rebellions, etc. It is observed that during campaign, the political opponents (mostly men) use the alleged loose moral standing of these women against them and often insult them directly in public. Thus, they are often subjected to public ridicule and are socially stigmatized by both men and women. Gender stereotype defined as *“the gender based ascription of different traits, behaviour or political beliefs to male and female politicians”*<sup>13</sup>, is a reality for women who are active in politics in general from this region. Thus *“Claiming the public world for themselves, men assigned women to the private domain, allotted them responsibilities that men chose not to perform (childcare, eldercare, emotional labour, and social reproduction) and attributed to women characteristics that men devalued...”*<sup>14</sup> Historically, men have dominated the world of government and politics everywhere. Up till date, women still face enormous difficulties to ascend to political leadership position due to stereotypes, in the mind of the people in this region, women are not capable to lead and women in general, are also regarded as weaker than men. That is why *“women have been depicted as politically ineffective, unmotivated, naive, invisible and dependent upon the wisdom of men”*<sup>15</sup>. They consequently tend to depend solely on their husbands and do not possess the courage to make their own decisions. For most conservators of traditional norms, they believe that *“in many settings, women who are politically active and who take on responsibilities outside the home transgress ideas about what women should do”*<sup>16</sup>. At the core of this sociological analysis, gender is socially constructed and socially created. As a matter of fact, the most powerful barrier is the impact of societal culture, specifically, persisting gender stereotyping of politics as exclusively as a man’s activity and the perception of politics as ‘dirty business’<sup>17</sup>.

Besides, even though modern democratic norms today preaches equality between men and women in all aspects of private and public life and this has even become public the leading model within the mainstream political discourse. Men and women according to the fundamental law and CEDAW<sup>18</sup> convention signed by Cameroon give equal rights and duties to both sexes as far as political activities are concerned, (*Article 5: Gender roles and stereotypes Old age cultural practices, customs and traditions continue to exist and constitute hindrance to efforts of government and civil society organisations to improve the status of women in all areas. VAW is rampant with no instruments in place for redress*<sup>19</sup>). As from the year 1990, the waves of democracy that blew throughout the world in general, in Cameroon in particular and more specifically in the North Region gave women opportunities to express themselves in politics with the freedom of association and freedom and expression that followed that period. Unfortunately, female politicians were still scarce but totally absent in elected functions such as mayors and parliamentarians until recent time (2007), in this region because men were and are still very conservative to their tradition of superiority and best politicians. Right back in history, politics was seen as men duty, Vicky however observed that, *“in the past men’s political behaviour has been seen as the norm by political scientists, and women’s analysed in terms of its deviation from this male norm. As part of this, many myths and stereotypes about*

<sup>12</sup> Stephen I. Akaranga & Jude J. Ongong’a, (2013), “African Traditional Cultural Conundrums Which Make Women Prone To Hiv/Aids Infections: A Case Of The Maasai Of Kenya”. International Journal of Education and Research. Vol. 1 No. p 2

<sup>13</sup> Huddy, L., & Terkildsen, N. (1993b). “Gender stereotypes and the perception of male and female candidates”. American Journal of Political Science, 37. p 120

<sup>14</sup> Mino Vianello, Mary Hawkesworth (eds.). 2016. *Gender and Power: Towards Equality and Democratic Governance*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. p 118

<sup>15</sup> Marjorie Lansing and Sandra Baxter, (1980), *Women and Politics: The Visible Majority*. University of Michigan Press. p 6

<sup>16</sup> Tam O’Neil and Pilar Domingo. 2016. “Women and power: Overcoming barriers to leadership and influence”. London. Overseas Development Institute. p 10

<sup>17</sup> Active women in politics as considered as unfaithful to their husbands because they are in constant contact with other men as most political meeting are held at night hours

<sup>18</sup> Cameroon is a signatory of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

<sup>19</sup> Cameroon Non-Governmental Organizations Shadow Report to CEDAW: 2007. The Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Coordinated by Women In Research And Action (WIRA). Sponsored by UNIFEM, Cameroon.

women's political participation have grown up, e.g. That women are passive, apolitical and conservative, which feminist political scientists have endeavoured to puncture (Randall 1987)<sup>20</sup>.

Empirical evidences pointed out the weight of traditional views on gender roles among voters work against female candidates by influencing their votes since men will traditionally vote men because they will not want to be led by a woman. The stereotypes faced by female candidates leading to *“the resistance of voters to accept women as political leaders has also been noted, and has mainly been explained with reference to the rather general variable of ‘culture’. The cultural acceptability of women in politics is held to be a function of the timing of women’s suffrage”*<sup>21</sup>. As consequence, women in a political competition will have less voters because the public is reluctant to thrust women as political leaders because many consider that their place is at home, not in public. These *“Cultural factors are linked to stereotype beliefs about the ability and capacity of women across many communities”*<sup>22</sup>, which sees the woman as being unable to undertake certain duties believed to be responsibilities reserved to men. The value estimation of the role performance of most often based on a different set of expectations for male and female politicians. For *“any politician trying to cross the line between the realm of male and female politicians will stand out as misplaced and risk becoming a laughing stock among both women and men”*<sup>23</sup>. The courageous women who get involved in politics are considered as outsiders and adventurers by the public. The construction of traditional *“social norms, in the form of views on the appropriateness of a women’s place in the public arena, are still widely held and act as a formidable obstacle for women seeking participation or influence”*<sup>24</sup>. As consequence, women who wish to do politics are discouraged because most people are not willing to listen to them and some men and even women insult women politicians during campaigns. A former deputy mayor of Garoua 2 who was victim of this bad practices as she said *“I was insulted by men during campaigns but I stood firm to avoid being destabilised by my distractors during campaigns, for me, women really face difficulties are stereotype during campaigns”*<sup>25</sup>. In the same way, Voters are also doubtful about electing women rather than men, the electorate is thus reluctant to support them because of this retrogressive belief.

These stereotypes affect women’s levels of representation throughout the political process, from an individual woman’s decision to enter politics, to party selection of candidates to the actual voting patterns by the electorate. Above all, *“There is an overwhelming prejudice on behalf of men and even women that females are not competent to assume leadership roles in the community. Instead, women are relegated to proscribed domestic roles in society, a rejection that strips them of their political voice and potential for leadership”*<sup>26</sup>. Dominant opinion on women political participation in general and political leadership by the majority of people consider women as political “outcast”, not suitable for political responsibilities but important as far as votes are concerned since women constitute an important part of population in the North Region. From a constructivist point of view this is a social construct of gender.

## **B- Weak self-esteem and lack women support**

The construction of cultural considerations towards women and political activities developed a weak self-esteem for those who wish to run for political leadership and also, the social construction of politics as male activities prevent other women to support those willing to enter politics. Previous literature have attributed the lack of female political elites to the relative reluctance on the part of women to run for women for political leadership (1), besides, there is also a weak support of other women and also the absence of a unified women movement in this region (2).

### **1- Women’s low self-esteem and reluctance to run for office**

The low self-esteem is an attitude that is ‘constructed’ in the psychology of women and this consequently, reinforce their marginalisation in political leadership. It is widely known that, *“in general, it is a well-known fact that many women, particularly those in low-income household, develop very discernible low levels of self-esteem”*<sup>27</sup>, holding women back in the quest for political leadership. This social construct has been conceptualised and operationalized and thus, it upholds the patriarchal relations which consider women as inferior to (and dependent on) men. The outcome of this attitude include low self-confidence, lack of motivation and ambition to accept challenges, low morale for leadership, being less assertive, less emotionally stable, and lacking ability to handle crises. Mme Ndjoume deputy mayor of Garoua 1 mentioned

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Haleh Ashfar, (2005), *Women and Politics in the Third World*. New York. Routledge. p 11

<sup>21</sup> Anne Marie Goetz, (2003), “Women's education and political participation”. “Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4, The Leap to Equality”. P 12

<sup>22</sup> Douglas Lucas Kivoi. 2014. “Factors impeding political participation and representation of women in Kenya”. Sciencepublishinggroup. 2(6): 173-181. p 178

<sup>23</sup> Toril Aalberg & Anders Todal Jenssen, (2007), “Gender Stereotyping of Political Candidates: An Experimental Study of Political Communication”, Nordicom Review. p 20.

<sup>24</sup> Priya Nat, (2013), “Women in Power: Beyond Access to Influence in a Post 2015 World”. VSO International 100 London Road Kingston upon Thames. UK. p 15

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Mme Roukayatou Youssouf in Garoua on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2018

<sup>26</sup> Atanga, Lilian Lem, (2010), *Gender, Discourse, and Power in the Cameroonian Parliament*. Langaa Research and Publishing CGI: Makon, Bamenda. p 96

<sup>27</sup> Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo, (1995), “Women, Education and Empowerment: Pathways towards Autonomy”. UNESCO Institute of Education. HAMBURG. P 15

that “the challenge of succeeding within male-dominated political parties, the impact of entering politics on their families, welfare or careers, and a lack of confidence in their ability to serve effectively as reasons for a reluctance to run for office”<sup>28</sup>. The lack of confidence is therefore one of the main reasons for women’s under-representation in formal political institutions, whether parliaments, ministries or political parties. Since women do not believe in their capacities as leaders may be due to low level of education, the widespread perception that men have to be their leaders is a mere construct since no scientific experiment has proven that women are fundamentally unable to be political leaders. As human beings, women are equal and have the same potential as men, but due to their weak self-esteem and the social construction through which they have inculcate the sense of inferiority, prevent some women to fight for their rights. From empirical facts, it has been noted that “women are very good campaigners, organizers and support-mobilizers”<sup>29</sup>, but fear and weak self-esteem sometimes prevents women from participating in political life.

Besides, the fact that the cultures of most African countries and that of Cameroon in particular and specifically that of the North Region influences women negatively in domain of political leadership thereby inculcating to women that they are not fit for politics. This is confirmed by Pippa Norris as she advance the fact that “in cultures with traditional attitudes toward the role of women in the home and family, many women may be reluctant to run and, if they seek office, may fail to attract sufficient support to win”<sup>30</sup>. The knowledge of less support from others, leads to the development of a weak self-esteem and most of women do not even try to run for political office thinking that the battle is already lost. This is characteristic of most areas dominated by cultural norms as it is the case with this region we are concerned with.

Furthermore, from being regarded as powerless, women themselves are overshadowed by a feeling of inferiority. An interviewee Mme Hadja Fadi a councillor clearly asserted the “women are really dominated by the feeling of inferiority dictated by the culture and custom in this region”<sup>31</sup>. This situation makes women reluctant to run for political leadership and is therefore partly attributed to cultural prohibitions on women speaking in public or going to public places. For senator Didjatou Oumarou, “political campaigning that requires that one travel extensively, spend nights away from home, go into bars, and for women it means meeting men, these situation are not easily accepted by husband in this society”<sup>32</sup>. Women who wish to run for political posts have to consider the risk of being labelled ‘loose’ or ‘unfit’ as mothers and wives, and being socially stigmatized. Such considerations in a Muslim and Islam dominated region make many women shy away from politics, and positions that put them in the public eye, this consequently develop the sense of women being powerless by those willing to run and also by others who will not be willing to support their fellow sisters running for politics. Also, the childhood inculcation of the idea of women’s inferiority is a socially constructed norm known as “habitus”<sup>33</sup>. Then we realise that “at the collective level, habitus is responsible for the continuities and regularities empirically observable in the social world”<sup>34</sup>, transmitted through generations, inculcating the feeling of political inferiority to women from this region of Cameroon.

## 2- Weak support from others

The weak or total lack of family support is a critical challenge to women active participation in politics in the North Region. Because of the social construction of politics as being a male job in this society, it is culturally assumed that women who will wish to run for political functions must seek permission of their men/husbands before venturing into this domain reserved to men. However, if such permission is not granted, the only option for such women is to drop their political ambitions, and it is an evidence that most husbands will refuse, thus, this leads to a weak support for women willing to run for political leadership. Accordingly, most family members especially husbands even among the educated ones do not allow their wives to participate actively in politics in North Region. For Mr Ousmanou, I quote, “I will not allow my wife to go in public places in the name of politics, her place is at home and I never allow my wife to out without permission even when she wants to go the market, in brief, politics is not suitable for women”<sup>35</sup>. This is an evidence that women from this region will hardly be granted the permission by their spouse to run for political leadership. In the same manner, poor women aspiring for political offices will not enjoy their familial and financial support to succeed in politics.

Besides, women political aspirants/politicians from this region lack support of their fellow women politically and this further constitute a major challenge to their active participation in politics since most voters are women. Therefore, Women willing to run for political leadership are not supported by others due to the social construction of politics as being a “dirty job” for women and exclusively reserved to men. As observed by Tamale, “women are women’s worst enemies”<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Mme Ndjoume Ateke Lydienne on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2018 in Garoua

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Mme Ai Tdjiani, épouse Mamadou on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2018 in Garoua

<sup>30</sup> Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, (2001), Op cit. p 131

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Mme Hadja Babatoura on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 2018 in Garoua

<sup>32</sup> An interview with Mme Didjatou Oumarou on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2018 in Garoua

<sup>33</sup> Habitus is a product of the environment or conditions of existence and is mediated by the family in the form of lessons in morality, taboos, worries, rules of behaviour and tastes

<sup>34</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1973b) “The Three Forms of Theoretical knowledge”, Social Science Information, 12(1). p 73

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Mr Ousmanou Soudi in Garoua on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 2018

<sup>36</sup> Tamale, (1997), “When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary politics in Contemporary Uganda”. Doctoral Thesis, University of Minnesota. p 127

It is unfortunate that women in from this region lack confidence in the abilities of their fellow women to hold a political function, the consequence is that those willing to run for a political function are not supported by their sisters to win an election. For instance, Mme Fanta a woman from a rural area of Pitoa said “*she will not vote for a woman because she do not thrust their skills and ability as a political leader where as she can vote a man because they are the ones use to activities linked to politics, women in politics will not take the right decisions*”<sup>37</sup>, this statement from a woman proves that they are not supportive of their fellow sisters when it comes to politics. However, for this councillor “*many North Region women psychologically regard and perceive the social stigma that politics is a “dirty game” and as such tend to wrongly perceive fellow women into politics as arrogant and irresponsible and want to pull them down*”<sup>38</sup>. As a result of this syndrome, most women from this region dread politics to retain their good personality traits and not break their matrimonial home (for the married ones). Women found supporting other women in political competition often face numerous resistance which goes from repudiation for married women and familial exclusion for young girls.

### 3. SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS HINDRANCES TO WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP

Social practices and religious hindrances are persistent barriers to women willing to actively pursuit their dreams and obtain political leadership positions in this society (the North Region). Education, or lack thereof, influences an individual’s intellect, goals, and values as far as politics is concerned. The way in which an individual is educated will thus determine who is able to hold office; how those in office are elected (or chosen); how much power and control those in office will have at their disposal, due to their intellectual background. In the same way, religious considerations also determine the political engagement of women in a given society. In some places, the interpretations of holy books leads to the prohibition of women's in political participation thereby relegating them to their homes and household duties. In the name of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the north region the society, they girl child has historically been denied equal access to education (A), religious practices also constitutes a hindrance (B)

#### A- The education of the girl child

The Cameroonian education policy does not discriminate against girls and women, but their participation is characterized by manifest disparities in the north region in the past 30 years. But it is often unfortunate “*when the dominant social culture precludes young women from enjoying a full education and socializes them from birth into roles that are removed from the world of public decision making, then the pool of likely women politicians is substantially reduced*”<sup>39</sup>. There is however, a high level of women illiteracy rate in this part of the country (1), and they also experience a Weak political socialisation (2).

#### 1- The high level of women illiteracy rate

The level of education is one of the important factors that hinder women participation in political leadership. This is because not all women for the last 30 years have acquired adequate education and the consequence is that, they generally know nothing or less about politics. In his study, Hansen argued that for women to have an impact in politics, they need to be “*competitive, qualified candidates and not simply nominal candidates*”<sup>40</sup>. Through the process of education, the young girl acquires knowledge and realizes her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to others and herself. According to the Beijing Platform for Action, “*discrimination in girls’ access to education persists in many areas, owing to customary attitudes, early marriages and pregnancies, inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials, sexual harassment and lack of adequate and physically and otherwise accessible schooling facilities*”<sup>41</sup>. The disparities in the percentage of educated females and males demonstrates that women really face difficulties in the educational process and this has a consequence on their political aptitudes. To overcome this situation, this author proposes the, “*Creation of an educational and social environment, in which women and men, girls and boys, are treated equally and encouraged to achieve their full potential, respecting their freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, and where educational resources promote non-stereotyped images of women and men, would be effective in the elimination of the causes of discrimination against women and inequalities between women and men.*”<sup>42</sup> It is true from the wester experience that the level of education influences the degree of women’ engagement in politics. To take just an example, Angela Merkel, the German chaneclor has a strong educational background, Helene Johnson Sirleaf the former president of Liberia also has an acceptable level education of education. This few examples demonstrates that the level of education influences the presence of women in politics, since it generates development both for the individual, and for the community and society as a whole. Though today gender enrolment for formal education have narrowed during the past 10 years, disparities still persist, particularly at higher levels of study in this region. Dropout rates for boys and literacy rates are still much lower

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Fanta in Pitoa on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2018

<sup>38</sup> An interview Mme Fidissala on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August in Boklé

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Reynolds, (1999), Op cit. P 550

<sup>40</sup> Hansen, S. B, (1997), “Talking about Politics: Gender and Contextual Effects on Political Proselytizing”. Journal of Politics, vol. 59, no. 1, pp. 73-103. P 75

<sup>41</sup> Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, paras. 69, 80(a) and 81(a).

<sup>42</sup> Beijing Platform for Action, Paragraph 72

for women than men. Limited educational opportunities are preventing women from acquiring the skills and confidence to put themselves forward for leadership positions. Cameroon's education budget, while increasing, the level of the girl child is still low in this region of the country, and despite the government's commitment to provide free and compulsory primary schooling for all children, poor families still face unaffordable out-of-pocket costs for expenses or other fees. *Sex differences in socialization relate to other geographical and cultural factors. Customs such as the preference for sons who would, as is commonly believed, uphold the family has led to the neglect of the girl*<sup>43</sup>. Boys are given the priority for schooling, and girls often cease education at the primary school level because of early forced marriage or simply for agricultural work in the rural areas. A 2012 study published by the Cameroon government found that for every 100 boys enrolled in school, only 85 girls attend. This gender disparity becomes evidence in the adult literacy rate, which was estimated at 64.8% for women and 78.3% for men in 2010. Generally, women who come from rural areas hardly or do not speak French or neither English, this situation makes things difficult for those women as far as getting information about electoral procedures to run for office or about candidates to make an informed voting decision. In the same way, for those who happen to be elected, also face the challenge of having the technical capacity to take on responsibilities. Now a days, it is a worldwide evidence that formal education is strongly associated with political participation in general and political leadership in particular for women and for men. Unfortunately, structural barriers of poverty and the cultural marginalisation of the girl child mostly in the rural areas of this region has limited their educational opportunities. Since priorities are given to the boy child in formal education, for the young girls some cease formal education at the primary school level because the priorities of the parents is to give her to marriage. For Haoaua Mahamat, *"the low level of education really hinder women to effectively and actively participate in political leadership, for the simple reason that they face difficulties during meeting when it comes to taking and jotting information"*<sup>44</sup>. However, even though the influence of education is limited for the few women political leaders in this region of Cameroon, a reasonable level of literacy is better. However, in most cases, the level of education of women is significantly associated with their roles in political power decisions-making. According to American sociologists Burns and al, they assert that, education is an *"especially powerful predictor of political participation"*<sup>45</sup>. Formal education has a direct effect on women political participation and particularly political leadership because it increases the communication skills that is useful for political analysis, knowledge improvement, and the development of their political openness. In the same way Putnam observed the importance of education for individuals no matter their gender in political leadership as he declares that, *"education is one of the most important predictors usually, in fact, the most important predictor of many forms of social participation from voting to associational membership..."*<sup>46</sup> From this assertion, it is evident that the level of education is a powerful catalyst for women seeking to run for political leadership in this region. The traditional construct from this region reduces the chances of the girl child to complete secondary school and this has as consequence a limitation of opportunities for them to develop skills and talents in activities related to political leadership. For Fatime, a former deputy mayor, *"higher education is a privilege many women political leaders in this region did not enjoy"*<sup>47</sup>. However, women from this part of the country hardly attain university, only those that were not married are allowed to go the university while waiting for a pretender. Since most women are excluded from leadership roles in this region as a result of low level of education, their political ambition is therefore hampered due low skills on issues related to politics. As it is argued by these authors, education *"imparts the knowledge and skills most essential to a citizen's task....Because of their schooling, the highly-educated have the skills people need to understand the abstract subject of politics, to follow the political campaign, and to research and evaluate the issues and candidates"*<sup>48</sup>. Education happens to be a good device capable of shaping ones abilities, the *"lack of education and low levels of literacy make access to information difficult and commonly undermine the confidence and skills needed to enter public life whether at village, community, local, or national level"*<sup>49</sup>. The weak and proper educations is therefore one of the major causes of gender inequality.

## 2- Weak political socialisation

In the socialisation process girls face discrimination from their birth in this region. This is because *"women have been socialized to see politics as outside their area of concern, and since so few of them have played an active role in the political arena, they have neither grown up with expectations of becoming politicians nor do they dream about influencing public affairs"*<sup>50</sup>. Define it as follows : *"Political socialization processes operate at both the individual and community levels. At the Community level it is best understood as cultural transmission". Secondly, "political socialization directs*

<sup>43</sup> Thérèse Mungah Tchombe, (1994), "Access of Girls to Basic Education in Cameroon". Unesco Regional office, Dakar. P 40

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Haoua Mahamat on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August at Lopéré

<sup>45</sup> Burns, N., Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba, (2001), *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Harvard University Press. p 286

<sup>46</sup> Putnam, R.D. (2000), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon and Schuster, New York. p. 186

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Mme FATIME ABDU on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2018 IN Rey-Bouba

<sup>48</sup> Rosenstone, S. J., & Hansen, J. M. (1993), *Mobilization, participation, and democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. P 136

<sup>49</sup> Oxfam GB, (2008), "Women's Leadership and Participation: Overview Women's Leadership & Participation", Programme Insights. P 5

<sup>50</sup> Jane S. Jensen (auth.), (2008), *Women Political Leaders: Breaking the Highest Glass Ceiling*. Palgrave Macmillan US. P 8

attention to the politically relevant learning experiences of the individual”<sup>51</sup>. The effect of poor political socialisation of the girls in this region acts as a barrier to their political participation in general and political leadership in particular. In the same way, the effect of domestic socialisation also contribute to hold women back in politics. The weak political socialisation of the girl child to womanhood deviate them from issues related to politics, “this socialization incorporates a view that regards politics as a domain better left to men, and this view can explain why even well-educated women are “substantially less likely than men to exhibit political ambitions”<sup>52</sup>. The tradition of placing a higher value on male offspring has a strong correlation with traditional and Islamic laws existing in that part of the country, which makes it obligatory for a son to be responsible for the care of the parents and thus prescribes sons’ shares of property to be double than that of the daughters. Bourdieu states that, “every established order tends to produce the naturalization of its own arbitrariness”<sup>53</sup>, this is to say that the established social order in this society practice discrimination in gender socialisation thereby socialising the boys to be future leaders and the girls as future mothers. This traditional sex-role socialization, defined by Conover and Gray as a “division of activities into the public extra-familial jobs done by the male and the private intra-familial ones performed by the female”<sup>54</sup>, has historically resulted in men's entry into the public world of politics and women's relegation to the private realm of the home. The inadequate political socialisation of the girl child in this region is a permanent process because socialising agents and institutions such as the family, peers, education, mentorship, the media, produce less effort to socialise women politically. The absence or a weak political socialisation of the girls from childhood to adulthood is also an obstacle to women's political participation in general and their politically leadership more specifically in this given region of Cameroon. To quote Melody Emmett, “the life passages of women are not sacramentalized, celebrated or even acknowledged”<sup>55</sup>. This is illustrative of the social position attributed to women, right from the birth of the girl child to adulthood, in comparison to the boy child and the subsequent position of men in society as leaders in all the aspect of life activities. The social construction of women as being made for household activities acts as a barrier to their entry in politics in general and political leadership functions in particular. This is “because many women are socialized to be passive, they lack the knowledge of seeking help, for the financial and moral support of running for office”<sup>56</sup>. It is therefore an evidence that the society does everything to limits women entry into political leadership functions by socialising them mainly in household related activities.

Besides, girls are traditionally socialized to play their allocated roles in life, that of been a wife and mother. It is therefore quite unlikely that just being a girl leads to less political participation. In the same manner, this author observes that most people, “emphasise the role of 'socialisation' and especially the way that children assimilate sex roles through a process of imitation, identification and internalisation”<sup>57</sup>, the fact that women internalise this socialisation from child contribute to limit to entry in political leadership functions. Since “the family is seen as the crucial site of socialisation. Indeed, since children spend more time with their mothers than their fathers, the ironic fact may be that mothers are the single most powerful agents of their daughters' acquisition of gender”<sup>58</sup>. Therefore, it is clear that the degree to which basic political orientations are retained by an individual varies as a result of the discontinuities one experiences in the political socialization process right from home, as a consequence women who have the sole responsibility for the upbringing of the girl child lack this political skill as a result of weak socialisation in political related activities.

## **B- Religious resistance's to women leadership**

Religion is another important source of cultural beliefs in most countries. *Arguments about women's inferiority to men are present across all dominant religions, and religion has long been used to exclude women from aspects of social, political, or religious life around the world*<sup>59</sup>, as it is the case from this region of Cameroon. Religious values, norms, and laws negatively affect Women in this part of country, thereby, legitimizing male dominance and leading to the marginalization of women. Gender roles and hierarchies exist in the Christian religion (1) and also the Islamic faith (2)

### **1- Christianity**

Religious doctrines are one of the instruments used in keeping women in everlasting, domination. Christianity is sometimes regarded as a religion that reinforces patriarchal values in our modern societies. Womanhood is defined within

<sup>51</sup> Dawson, R. E., & Prewitt, K. S. (1969), *Political socialization. An Analytic Study*. Boston: Little Brown. p 13

<sup>52</sup> Fox, R. L. and J.L. Lawless, (2010), “If Only they'd ask: Gender, Recruitment, and Political Ambition”. *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 72, no. 2, pp. 310- 326. P 311

<sup>53</sup> Bourdieu Pierre, (1977), “Outline of a theory of praxis Cambridge”: Cambridge University Press. p 164

<sup>54</sup> Conover, Pamela Johnston, and Virginia Gray, (1983), “Feminism and the New Right: Conflict Over the American Family”. New York: Praeger. P 2

<sup>55</sup> Emmet, M. 2001. “Women at the heart of a renewed vision for humanity”. *Agenda*, 49, p 67.

<sup>56</sup> Tucker, Katherine K. (1999). “The impact of socialization on the political participation of women in the American political system”. ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library. Paper 1385. p 7

<sup>57</sup> Ann OAKLEY, (1972), *Sex, Gender and Society*, Maurice Temple Smith, London, , p. 179-80

<sup>58</sup> Vicky Randall, (1987), *Women and Politics: An International Perspective*. Macmillan Education UK. P 34

<sup>59</sup> Kunovich L, Paxton P, Hughes M, (2007), *Gender in Politics*. Annual Review of Sociology. Cited by Kassa S. 2015. “Challenges and Opportunities of Women Political Participation in Ethiopia”. *J Glob Econ* 3: 162. doi:10.4172/2375- 4389.1000162. p 4

the context of gendered discourses that construct the concept according to the women in the Christian ideologies. This is the case of our field of research where Catholicism is one of the dominant religion, we also have some protestant churches. Many biblical verses states the superiority of men on women, clear examples are these biblical references “*So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man and he brought her to the man*”<sup>60</sup>. (Gen. 2:21-22). Consequently, Christianity portrays Eve as an after-thought produced from Adam’s spare rib. Furthermore, it is held that the origin of gender discrimination began from their sins. Women in this religious context are regarded as inferior to men in almost all the activities related to leadership in the religion and political leadership in particular in this part of the national triangle.

*“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I (Apostle Paul) do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner”*<sup>61</sup> (1 Timothy 2:11-14)

Besides, as the exponent of the Christian rules, women are the keepers of the household honour and the procreators, and this is in fact just another manner of controlling their lives. In these conditions, the conceptualization of womanhood is to be related to the catholic and Protestants which envisages female persons within the social structure of the family according to the image of the ideal wife. The beliefs and values of most religions are sexist and patriarchal in structure and character, as they perpetually seek to subjugate women.

The different Christian’s religious traditions and congregations shape women’s attitude towards political related activities both at the individual and societal levels specifically. According to this line of reasoning, not only the individual religious affiliation but also the level of religiosity in a given society potentially affect political participation. Some religious doctrines militate against the active participation of women in politics and position of authority (we have as examples the Born again faithful’s; Jehovah Witness) just to name a few amongst them.

The Catholic and the protestant religions are the most popular Christian religions with the highest number of faithful’s in this region. These religions are dominated by patriarchal tradition, this is proven by the fact that the Pastoral Councils are led by the male parishioners. In this religion like many other religions, there exist the image of the ideal women who are at the entire disposal of their husbands and the home as a whole for domestic activities. Political activities are not inscribed in their religious agenda even though this aspect is gradually changing with the modernisation of religious principles. According to Hunter, “*Clergymen still refer to the teachings of Paul and the early church fathers to sanction the enduring exclusion of women from positions of power in their churches. The Bible still lends support to those seeking to justify the idea that women have no roles other than wife and mother*”<sup>62</sup>. This statement confirms the fundamental lectures of Christianity in which gender roles are pronounced and men and women practicing this religious faith have distinct responsibilities prescribed by the religion. Women are specialised in domestic activities such as child bearing and taking care of the house as whole where as men are those supposed to fend for their families, this therefore gives the green light mostly to men to run for public activities in general and political leadership which is our main concern.

## 2- Islam

In Cameroon, Islam is a religious barrier to women’s political leadership, field work survey reveals that Islam does not allow women to take up senior positions such as the presidency, but that they can take up other junior positions. Some respondents also said that Islam requires women to stay at home. It is widely observed especially from Islamic government that “*Muslim women generally face tremendous opposition and are often criticised by religious fundamentalists on the ground that there is no provision for women to be state leaders under Islam*”<sup>63</sup>. Islamic doctrines therefore strictly bar women from some political endeavour public speaking etc. that can facilitate their political ambitions. Religious barriers linked to “*stereotypes either depict Muslim women as exotic, oppressed and almost totally enslaved by men in Islam, or as defending the virtues of Islam and the status and rights accorded to women*”<sup>64</sup>. In a region dominated with Muslim culture, and where Islamic religion is rooted in popular minds, instituted and adopted as a conservative religious view echoed in the conditions and social laws specific to women, rigid and conservative religious jurisprudence and strict religious interpretations have all worked to reinforce the marginalization of women in political leadership. Religious Islamic law known as the Sharia prevail in neighbouring Nigeria. This “*Religious law known as the sharia was maintained only to regulate the “private” or the family code*”<sup>65</sup>. There are also a wide range of historical, cultural, and

<sup>60</sup> (Gen. 2:21-22).

<sup>61</sup> (1 Timothy 2:11-14)

<sup>62</sup> Hunter, J. E, (1976), ‘Images of Woman’, Journal of Social Issues 32 (3). P 15

<sup>63</sup> Nomita Halder, (2004), “Female representation in parliament: a case study from Bangladesh”. New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies 6, 1 (June.). P 32

<sup>64</sup> Brill, K.. 2005. *Encyclopaedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV. P 755

<sup>65</sup> Hoda Rouhana et al., (2003), “The impact of religion on women in the development process”. Vol. 1 No. 1. Copyright ©Women for Women International. P 15

societal practices existing in this community. Muslim women are most often excluded, discriminated in political leadership. Portrayals in the media of Muslim women suffering abuse at the hands of religiously fanatic men give the idea that Muslim women have no agency or ability to resist this use of religion as a tool. Empirical evidences demonstrates that only few female political leaders reach the highest levels of government (ministers). This alliance of conservatism between the culture, religion and the tribal structure has contributed to a historical absence of women from the public sphere, especially in the political domain in this region. Women in Islamic societies throughout history have experienced this kind of discrimination and have been subjected to restrictions of their freedom and rights. The social structures and political leaders in this region have legitimized their physical, legal, or psychological subordination of women in religious terms, thus constructing a distorted, imagined social reality in which Islam requires and produces the subjugation of women. This beliefs is so much entrenched in these communities to the extent that they are regarded as constituting reality and religious leaders become unable or unwilling to challenge them.

Besides, the clothing of Muslim women in this part of the country is a great hindrance for their political leadership. This is because this religion prescribes a dressing code to women which consist of hiding their entire body in public, except the husband has the right to see his wife unveiled for those practicing radical Islam. As stated this author, “*in practical terms, this means that these areas of the body are not to be shown to anyone except the spouse (or, if necessary, a doctor) and, in the case of women, it refers to what she must cover when in public not when she is at home or with her family members in a private area*”<sup>66</sup>. The dressing code imposed on women in Islam as it is practice by some fanatics in this region do not give way to some women to participate in political leadership related activities as it necessitate going out in public for political campaigns and meeting. Many husbands do not permit these political related activities to their wives as going out imply meeting with other men, discussing with them and sometimes spending time with them discussing political issues, this is not accepted by most husbands. Women are advised to “*wear either a jellaba (long robe) and veil, or a haik, a large piece of fabric which they wrap around themselves so just their hands, feet and eyes remain visible*”<sup>67</sup>. When we interviewed a number of women dressed in this manner, we discovered that most of them do not have an identity card and other do not even possess a birth certificate. Women do not possess an identity card because their husbands refuse theme to unveil for the passport photograph needed for the identity card. There is therefore that Islamic conception which says that, “*the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands...*”<sup>68</sup> This dressing code imposed by the religion disfavour women from political leadership as their public appearance is not accepted by their husbands and due to some conceptions, women do not possess the most important document to file for a political leadership function.

Furthermore, Islamic fundamentalism is another factor that contribute to women’s invisibility in the political leadership field. This “*religious fundamentalism is defined as a religious movement with the militant desire to protect itself against the perceived onslaught of modern culture*”<sup>69</sup>. This is a hostile, expansionist, and uncompromising movement existing as a rooted cultural phenomenon in this region. Islamic fundamentalists regard the *Holly Qur’an*<sup>70</sup> as immutable and divine, and seek a return to an imagined model of 7th Century Islam at the time of the *Prophet Muhammad*. Though not a homogeneous movement, Islamic fundamentalism in this region, is adherent to a single and narrow set of principles. This fundamentalist movements is as a result of the threat of “Western” cultural domination. Islamic fundamentalists in this part of Cameroon often praise and celebrate the role of women as mothers, but in every other role, women are portrayed as deficient and subservient. Islamic doctrines therefore strictly bar women from some political endeavour public speaking etc. that can facilitate their political ambitions.

Again, the Islamic faith encourages early marriages of the young girl child. This way of doing do not enable women to participate in political leadership in this region where Islam predominates. As “*the family is usually referred to as 'the fundamental unit' in Islamic society and the woman is described as the 'pillar', the 'goddess', and the 'queen' of the house*”<sup>71</sup>. In the Islamic faith, marriage is encouraged for the young girls and even boys at early ages. For the girls, they go for marriage earlier than boys, just after their first menstruation since a marriage is most often arranged before she

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<sup>66</sup> Aishawood Boulanouar, (2006), “The Notion of Modesty in Muslim Women’s Clothing: An Islamic Point of View”. New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies8, 2. 134-156. P 135

<sup>67</sup> El Guindi, Fadwa, 1999. *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. Dress, Body and Culture Series. Oxford and New York: Berg. P 61

<sup>68</sup> Jamal Badawi, (1980), “Women & Men Dress In Islam”. The Islamic Education & Services Institute <http://www.2discoverislam.com>. P 4

<sup>69</sup> Colleen Lowe Morna, Chloe Hardy et al. (2002), “Culture, Religion and Gender: A Training Manual for the Media”. Inter Press Service. P 153

<sup>70</sup> *Islams Holly Book*

<sup>71</sup> Amina Abdullah Abu Sheehan. 1992. “Women, Islam and Modernity”. Master of Philosophy, Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics, University of London. P 151

sees her first menses. This do not favour the political emancipation of women because their religion prepare them to become good house wives and not political leaders, because this is a domain reserved only for men.

Moreover, the author Mino Vianello made a reflection on the influence of religion specifically the Islamic faith as demonstrated by Fatima Mernissi in her book *Sultanes oubliées: les femmes chef d'Etat en Islam* (1990), “shows that religious discourse and nationalism often relegate to the background the issue of women and their political participation.”<sup>72</sup> The impact of religion is clearly demonstrated as a hindering factor to women’s political leadership worldwide, and in this region of Cameroon in particular. In brief, be it Christianity or the Islam faith, “the notion of female inferiority appears prominently in religious teachings”<sup>73</sup>. This is for the simple fact that be it in the holy bible or the holy Koran, the book of genesis, it is written that the woman is part of the man’s rib meaning that she is inferior to a man. This religious consideration has led to the absence of women in religious decision making bodies (for instance, in the catholic faith, no woman can be a priest and in the Muslim faith, no woman can be an imam). This kind of discrimination has a repercussion in the political field in general and political leadership in particular largely dominated by men who most often think that power was given to man by God. The consequence is that women are relegated to domestic roles as religion demands (a good and faithful wife who respect her husband). Being a global phenomenon, this author confirms this situation by demonstrating that “arguments about women’s inferiority to men are present across all dominant religions, and traditionally religion has long been used to exclude women from aspects of social, political, or religious life around the world”<sup>74</sup>. This is to say that the discrimination women face in the political field due to religious consideration in the North Region is not an isolated situation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The presence of women in political leadership in the north region constituted the major aim of this research work. The different interrogations on the factors hindering women to get access to political leadership functions opened the valve that led to the double reflexion thereby opening the two principal axes analysis. We first of all began with the social resistance that push women out of the realm, that is the path through which they get access to political leadership without leaving behind cultural barriers that continue to oppose resistance to women’s political leadership in this part of Cameroon. However, from the actual situation, much need to be done to empower women politically.

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<sup>72</sup> Mino Vianello, Mary Hawkesworth (eds.) .2016. *Gender and Power: Towards Equality and Democratic Governance*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. P 44.

<sup>73</sup> Nomita Halder. (2004). “Female representation in parliament: a case study from Bangladesh”. *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*6, 1 (June,). P 33

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