

# The Anglophone Question in Cameroon: Historical Context and Evolution from “Everyday” Resistance to Armed Conflict, 1961-2017<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

One of the unfaltering legacies of colonial rule in Africa is that it left the continent in a dissevered state which has bred conflicts of various forms and dimensions. This was because while in the continent, the colonialists created new boundaries (both ideological and conventional) to expedite their administration and exploitation of the continent's resources. However, these boundaries were largely unseemly to the Africans after the demise of colonialism. In this regard, Abwa has maintained that, inevitably,

[The] European colonial boundaries have had profound effects, generally, negative on the history of statehood in Africa as they are generally responsible overtly or covertly for many inter and intra-state conflicts in the continent. This is because many of them were created without due considerations of the traditional state boundaries that pre-colonial African state-builders had made and sanctioned through different types of traditional diplomacy mechanism (Abwa, 2011:2).

In fact, by creating new boundaries in Africa, the colonialists were not only doing so for the purpose of facilitating their administrations and exploitation of African resources but also as a means of promoting their unity which was detrimental to Africa. According to Hazlewood;

In a sense, the unity which appeared once to exist [in Africa] was illusory. It was a unity imposed from outside for the administrative convenience of the colonial power – it was unity of Europe in Africa, ... It was not to be expected that, with the removal of Europe from the scene, the unity would necessarily continue (Hazlewood, 1967: 3).

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Colonialism therefore created a situation where African states have tended to be particularistic, emphasizing micro nationalisms at the expense of continental unity (Ngwa, 2011: 55-60). Ostensibly, the European-created boundaries (ideological and conventional) have remained a potent source of conflicts in the continent since the demise of colonialism. After the fall of German Kamerun in 1916, the territory came under the direct tutelage of the League of Nations, which in turn surrendered its control to Britain and France as Mandatory Powers. These powers experimented with a shared-dominion arrangement called the Condominium; with its ultimate failure, Britain and France decided to partition the territory. In the course of the partition, Britain and France acquired 1/5 (20%) and 4/5 (80%) of the territory respectively (Ndi, 2013b: 74-6). The territory taken by Britain was not only small in terms of surface area but was also narrow (elongated), non-contiguous (separated) and marred by transportation and communication difficulties that made its effective administration as a separate entity from Nigeria nightmarish (Ngoh, 2001: 3). In spite of this, the British deliberately decided to administer Southern part of her territory (Southern Cameroons) as a part of Southern and later Eastern Regions of Nigeria. While this decision was intended to satisfy British administrative ambition (at least by reducing administrative costs and ensuring its effective economic exploitation) in the territory, it was to expose the Southern Cameroons territory to experiences that significantly altered and configured its historical evolution from 1922 to 1961 (Budi, 2019b: 2). Consequently, British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon were administered separately from 1916 to 1961 (about 45 years) during which period they were socialized in the Anglo-Saxon and French systems respectively. By 1961 when both territories were reunifying, they had emerged a perceptible ideological boundary between them. The inability to manage the two different identities effectively by the post-independent Cameroon governments invariably created the Anglophone Question which became violent by 2017.

## Conceptual Clarification

For a proper appreciation of the issues discussed in this paper, a proper understanding of some concepts which are implicitly and explicitly reflected therein is necessary. These concepts would include The Anglophone Question, “Everyday” Resistance and Armed Conflict.

The Anglophone Question in Cameroon is not a tittle-tattle subject at least within the precinct of the Cameroonian academia, politics and social interactions. It has animated debates within the academic, social and political specialisms for a greater part of the post-independent era. Politicians, Cameroonian citizens at home and abroad as well as academics have passionately defended their views on this question and interestingly, such debates have often generated emotions and sometimes acrimonious outbursts (Budi, Forthcoming: 3-4). However, many scholars have harped on different aspects of the Anglophone Question in their numerous writings, sometimes taking divergent positions in their submissions (Dze-Ngwa, 1997; Dze-Ngwa, 2013; Awasom, 1998; Ngoh, 1999; Chem-Langhee, 1995; Nyamnjoh, 1995; AAC Standing Committee, 1995; Ngwane, 1992; Tita, 1993; Njaah, 2001; Mbile, 2001; Nfor, 2002; Nkwi, 2004; Nkwi, 2007; Fanson, 1999; Jurg, 1999; Kah, 2012; Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997 and Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003). The Anglophone Question, Ngoh maintains is;

First and foremost, a minority problem; linguistic/language (Anglo-Saxon culture and values) minority as against linguistic/language (Gaullic culture and values) majority.... The problem is/was a “clash” between the majority Gaullic (French) culture and values and the minority Anglo-Saxon (British/English) culture and values (Ngoh, 2019: 382).

On his part, Fanso holds that it is the political, social, economic and linguistic marginalization of Anglophones and their consignment to a second-class status in Cameroon (Fanso, 2017: 385). It has also been defined as the Anglophone consciousness and the feeling (among Anglophones) of being “marginalized”, “exploited” and “assimilated” by the Francophone-dominated state and even by the Francophone population as a whole (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997: 207). According to a *Briefing Paper* of the United Kingdom House of Commons (2019), the Anglophone “Problem” is the rise of Anglophones against the denial to offer them the right to self-determination in 1961 and also their marginalization within the confines of the present State of Cameroon (Lunn and Brooke-Holland, 2019:5). However, another group of scholars are those who view the Anglophone “problem” as differences between the North West and South West Provinces/Regions of Cameroon (Jurg, 1999 and Kah, 2012: 71-103). To debunk this position, Ndi (2013b) has argued that there exist historical milestones in North West/South West nexus that have created an almost inseparable bond between the Anglophones in Cameroon to the extent that possibilities of intra-Anglophone conflicts are slim.

For the interest of this paper, what has been called the Anglophone “Problem” would be viewed as the Anglophone “Question”. This is because the appellation the “Anglophone Problem” could be subject to ambiguity and interpreted to mean either as Anglophones are a problem to Cameroon and/or the problem among Anglophones in Cameroon. The Anglophone Question is thus an identity issue. It is the feeling among the Anglophones that the manner in which the country has been managed in the post independent era poses a threat to their Anglo-Saxon identity as testified by the preponderant influence of the French language, culture, and systems of administration over the English language, culture and systems of administration. All these became evident after the rescinding of the federal system of government in 1972. The inevitable outcome of this monumental administrative change has been assimilationist tendencies, exploitation, marginalization, economic underdevelopment as well as the near administrative and socio-cultural neglect of the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

The concept of “everyday” resistance also requires an explanation for a clear understanding. Therefore;

Everyday resistance is a theoretical concept introduced [...] in order to cover a different kind of resistance; one that is not as dramatic and visible as rebellions, riots, demonstrations, revolutions, civil war or other such organized, collective or confrontational articulations of resistance [...]. ‘Everyday’ resistance is *quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise seemingly invisible*; something [referred to as] “infrapolitics”. [...] certain common behavior of subaltern groups (for example, foot-dragging, escape, sarcasm, passivity, laziness, misunderstandings, disloyalty, slander, avoidance or theft) is not always what it seems to be, but instead resistance. [...] these activities are tactics that exploited people use in order to both survive and undermine repressive domination; especially in contexts when rebellion is too risky (emphasis in the original) (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013: 4; Scott, 1985; 1989: 33-62 and 1990).

The concept of ‘everyday’ resistance is used in this paper to refer to the non-violent means adopted by the Anglophones in Cameroon since at least 1972 to call the attention of the government to their predicament within the context of The United Republic/ The Republic of Cameroon. These were manifested particularly through petitions, formation of pro-Anglophone pressure groups and every other means excepting violence and open confrontations.

Lastly, armed conflict is a slippery concept as well requiring contextual definition. Though it's been hard to have a consensual definition for armed conflict in International Law, it has been defined by the UNDP as; "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state results in at least twenty-five battle-related deaths in one calendar year" (Melander, 2015). Evidently, this definition captures the understanding of the concept's use within the present study. The arm conflict involved regular government forces and armed groups called "Amba" Boys operating in the North West and South West Regions supposedly defending the course of the Anglophones. These groups regularly clashed with government forces particularly in villages in these regions for a greater part of the period from 2017 to 2019. In many cases, innocent civilians were victims of the clashes.

## Context of Study

Following the vote for reunification by Southern Cameroons in the 1961 plebiscite, a series of conferences held with agenda to discuss the nature of the union between Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon. These included the Buea Tripartite Meeting, May 15-17, 1961, the Yaoundé Ahidjo-Foncha Meeting, May 22-24, 1961, The Buea Tripartite Meeting, June 14-19, 1961, Bamenda All-Party Conference of June 26-28, 1961, the Foumban Constitutional Conference of July 17-21, 1961 and the Yaoundé Tripartite Conference of August 2-7, 1961 (Ngho, 2019: 229-36). At the end of the Foumban Conference, a Federal system of government was adopted with the States of West (former Southern Cameroons) and East (former French Cameroon) led by Prime Ministers. During this Foumban Conference, in a statement in defense for the federal system of government, President Ahidjo intimated that;

Linguistic, administrative and economic differences do not permit us to envisage seriously and reasonably a state of the unitary and centralized type. It was because a confederal system on the other hand, being too loose, would not favour the close coming together and the intimate connection which we desire.<sup>2</sup>

At the same Conference, Foncha who led the twenty-five-man Southern Cameroons Delegation also submitted that;

In our previous discussions...we have kept in mind that in our desire to rebuild the Kamerun nation we must not however, forget the existence of the two cultures. We have, therefore, proposed a form of government which will keep the two cultures in the areas where they now operate and to blend them in the centre. The centre is, therefore, deliberately given only very limited subjects, while the States are left to continue largely as they are now.<sup>3</sup>

But as soon as the federal structure was put in place, President Ahidjo (who by background and upbringing was not a federalist) almost immediately began taking measures to rescind it. The first of these measures was taken on October 20, 1961 in Decree No. 61/DF/15 dividing the Federal Republic of Cameroon into six Administrative Inspectorates<sup>4</sup> with West Cameroon constituting one of these Inspectorates. This led to the appointment of Federal Inspectors over the Administrative Inspectorates and the West Cameroon

<sup>2</sup> NAB, Vc/b/1961/2, Foumban Conference 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1961. Cited in Ngho, *Cameroon 1884-Present* (2018). 233.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 234.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 385.

Federal Inspector, Jean Claude Ngoh was impulsive and lorded over the West Cameroon Prime Minister.

In 1962, the Nigerian pound sterling which was in use in West Cameroon was replaced by the *Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA)*<sup>5</sup> Franc which became legal tender in the entire nation. Similarly, in 1964, the West Cameroon imperial system of weights and measures was abandoned in favor of the East Cameroon metric system.<sup>6</sup> The ground breaking event took place in 1966 when President Ahmadou Ahidjo, taking advantage of the crisis within the ruling party in West Cameroon, the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP)<sup>7</sup> merged all the political parties in both the East and West Cameroon States to form the Cameroon National Union (CNU) as the lone political party in the country. The four parties that merged to form the CNU included the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) of J.N. Foncha, the Cameroon Peoples National Congress (CPNC) of E.M.L. Endeley, Cameroon United Congress (CUC) of S.T. Muna from the West Cameroon State and the *Union Camerounaise* (UC) of Ahmadou Ahidjo of the East Cameroon State (Ngoh, 1996: 240).

By 1968, the greatest obstacle to Ahidjo's bid for a unitary state was A.N. Jua, the P.M. of the West Cameroon State who was so strongly opposed to Ahidjo's program. He was immediately dismissed from his position and replaced by S.T. Muna who was seemingly a stooge and an uncritical supporter of Ahidjo's policies.<sup>8</sup> Two years later, that is in 1970 another stumbling block to Ahidjo was his Vice President, J.N. Foncha himself. Like Jua, Foncha too was anti-unitarist in character and opposed Ahidjo on that. Ahidjo did not also hesitate to sack him and replaced him with S.T. Muna, making the latter to cumulatively hold the positions of both the P.M. of the West Cameroon State and the Vice President of the Federation.<sup>9</sup>

It is evident that nothing could stop President Ahidjo from achieving his ultimate goal of dissolving the federation in Cameroon. The last decisive move which put an end to the Federal system of government was the May 20, 1972 Referendum. On this day, Cameroonians from both states turned up massively at the polls to vote on a question proposed by the Head of State. The question was; *"Do you approve with the view of consolidating National Unity and accelerating the economic, social and cultural development of the Nation, the draft constitution submitted to the people of Cameroon by the President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, instituting a Republic One and Indivisible to be styled The United Republic of Cameroon?"*<sup>10</sup> Cameroonians overwhelmingly voted "YES" in the polls and the results of the votes were as follows; at the national level, 3,236,280 people registered, out of this number, 3,177,846 voted "YES" and an insignificant 176 ballots were cast against the Unitary Constitution. 1,612 ballots were declared null and void and 56,646 voters did

<sup>5</sup> It should be mentioned that Bongfen Chem Langhee holds that the full meaning of the CFA is the *Communauté Française d'Afrique*. See Bongfen Chem Langhee, "The Road to the Unitary State of Cameroon, 1959-1972". In *Annals of the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, Volumes 1 and 2*, University of Yaoundé, January-July (1990): 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The KNDP crisis was a power tussle that rocked the party from 1963 to 1965 and was largely disagreement between A.N. Jua and S.T. Muna as to who between them would succeed J.N. Foncha as Prime Minister of the West Cameroon State since the later was to move to Yaoundé as the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The crisis had far reaching attendant repercussions on the politics of the West Cameroon State in particular and the Cameroon nation in general. At the end of the crisis, A.N. Jua emerged victorious as the P.M. of the West Cameroon State while his opponent, S.T. Muna who refused to accept defeat was dismissed from the party to form the CUC.

<sup>8</sup> It should be mentioned that, popular slogan of S.T. Muna's Cameroon United Congress (CUC) Party was "one country, one government, one flag, one currency". This slogan seemed to fit squarely in Ahidjo's program and made him to be appointed to replace A.N. Jua as P.M.

<sup>9</sup> Muna's appointment as the Vice President of the Federation in addition to his position as Prime Minister of the West Cameroon State was an utter violation of Article 9/3 of the Federal Constitution which stated that the post of the Federal President or Vice were incompatible with any other public position.

<sup>10</sup> CNU, "The People Massively Approve the Institution of the United Republic of Cameroon", *l'Unité*, No. 537, 1972. 4.

not bother to vote. At the level of the State of West Cameroon, 731,850 persons registered for the Referendum, 716,774 people voted in favor of the Unitary Constitution and 89 voted against it, 13,934 registered voters did not vote and 1053 ballots were declared null and void. In the East Cameroon State, of the 2,504,430 that registered to vote, 2,461,072 votes were cast in favor of unitary state and 87 against it. While 559 ballots were declared null and void, 42,712 persons did not vote.<sup>11</sup> These results automatically put an end to the Federal system of government in Cameroon and launched in the unitary state which had for reaching implications on the Anglophones.

The Rescinding of the Federal system of government in Cameroon formed the basis of the Anglophone Question. This was because, despite the evident weaknesses inherent in the federal structure, it still gave Anglophones some constitutional safeguards; the customary court systems were allowed to function in the West Cameroon State; the West Cameroon House of Chiefs was allowed; it had a Prime Minister; a separate budget and also controlled part of the Education and could also provide a President or at least Vice President of the FRC. Moreover, the State of West Cameroon controlled basic education, local government, social welfare, archives and antiquities, agriculture, internal trade, cooperatives, state public works and other minor issues (Chem-Langhee, 1990: 13) which assured the preservation of the Anglo-Saxon identity. However, these constitutional safeguards were removed in 1972, when the Federal constitution was finally abolished.

### **Southern Cameroons Independence that never was: International “Conspiracy”?**

Following the independence of French Cameroon on January 1, 1960 and plans by Britain to grant independence to British Nigeria on October 1, 1960, the question as to the political future of the sandwich territory that lay between them became topical. This ignited a period of hectic political maneuvers in Southern Cameroons particularly in the 1950s. As Southern Cameroonians disagreed on the political future of their territory, three shades of opinions emerged among the political leaders. These included the options of gaining independence either as an integral part of Nigeria (Integration); or as part of The Republic of Cameroon (Reunification); or as an independent territory in its own right (Secession). (Fanso, 2017: 324-7; Ngoh, 2019: 219-28 and Ndi, 2013a: 105-14). While integration and reunification options had some support from Southern Cameroonians, the option of secession was arguably the most popular and supported by a cross section of Southern Cameroonians including traditional rulers. For instance, Fon Achirimbi II of Bafut who doubled as Chairman of the Chiefs' Conference argued that;

We [traditional rulers] believed on two points during a conference in Bamenda in which Dr. Endeley and Mr. Foncha were present. I was Chairman of that conference. We rejected Dr. Endeley because he wanted to take us to Nigeria. If Mr. Foncha tries to take us to French Cameroon we shall also run away from him. To me French Cameroon is 'fire' and Nigeria is 'water'. ...I support secession without reunification (Kale, 1967: 69. Cited in Chem-Langhee, 2004: 119).

Evidently, Southern Cameroonians were caught between Scylla and Charybdis at this critical moment in its political evolution. In the midst of this political conundrum, the British, the Commonwealth, the French, the United Nations, other European powers and even Nigeria pushed through their interests in the territory.

<sup>11</sup> CNU, “Results of the Referendum of May 20 Announced”, *l'Unité*, No. 540, 1972, p.2. See also Bongfen Chem Langhee, “The Road to the Unitary State of Cameroon, 1959-1972”, 17.

Generally speaking, while the British expressed doubts on the possibility of Southern Cameroons to stand on its own as an independent state, the Commonwealth maintained a suspicious indifference while the French chose a reluctant posture (Torrent, 2012: 23-35). Very bluntly, these nations and organizations including Nigeria were opposed to Southern Cameroons gaining independence in its own right. Torrent has averred that, "Just as they opposed reunification, the Nigerian leaders contested any form of separate independence for the Southern Cameroons..." (Torrent, 2012: 24). Evidently, while the British and Nigerians favored integration, the French subscribed to the reunification option (though were more willing to be amenable to the British interest in the territory). Both powers thus influenced the decisions of the UN and other international organizations regarding the Southern Cameroons territory.

In fact, Britain was opposed to Southern Cameroons' independence as a separate state in its own right (Ndi, 2013b: 15-22). Apart from the fact that the British seriously retarded the socio-economic development of Southern Cameroons during the period of administration in the area, she also worked hard to ensure that Southern Cameroons remained part of Nigeria. Some British officials who served in different capacities in the Southern Cameroons territory during this period were to confess that the whole idea of the plebiscite in Southern Cameroons was a charade. One of them, Malcolm Milne who was Deputy Commissioner of the Southern Cameroons confesses that,

I had not come to terms with the conviction myself [...] we were doing the [Southern] Cameroons a wrong. We would have struggled harder to continue our trusteeship for several years longer. But the forces against us were strong and I judge now that had I, as Commissioner of the Cameroons taken this line in 1959-61, I should merely have made a great nuisance of myself and achieved nothing (Milne, 1999: 395).

Even John Percival, one of the plebiscite officials hired by the British to serve in the Cameroons has also indicted Britain and the UN on the fate of Southern Cameroons. He maintains that;

Many Southern Cameroonians continued to plead for colonial administration to be prolonged for a little longer, to give them a chance to make informed decision about the future, but both the UN and the [British] had refused to countenance this option...with Ian Macleod as colonial secretary, the British Government of the day was only too eager to wash its hands off the Cameroons.... as quickly and painlessly as possible (Percival, n.d.: 77-8. Cited in Ndi, 2013b: 17-8).

Meanwhile, the UN General Assembly was determined to grant independence to all aspiring nations around the world declaring in its Resolution 1514 (XV) of December 14, 1960 that, "inadequacy of political, economic, social and educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence".<sup>12</sup> In addition, Resolution 1541 (XV) of December 15, 1960 also stipulated that non-self-governing territories could attain independence either by; *Emerging as a Sovereign Independent State or Free Association with an Independent State or Integration with an Independent State* (Emphasis added) (Ngoh, 2019: 221). Since the interests of the European powers especially the British had to be protected and being opposed to the first option and skeptical of the second, they had to manipulate the UN to capitalize on the third, which was granting independence to Southern Cameroons as an integral part of the independent state of Nigeria. This

<sup>12</sup> UN Resolution 1514 (XV) "Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples". UNGA 947<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting, December 14, 1960.



was reflected in the plebiscite questions of February 11, 1961 which was the peak of the Southern Cameroons political evolution.

On this date, British Southern Cameroonians faced a bizarre situation in which they were left with no option than to submit to the UN-supervised plebiscite. The questions were tricky and hinged on the following options: *Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the Independent Federation of Nigeria? OR Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the Independent Republic of Cameroon?* (Ngho, 2019: 217). These questions reflected two of the three main political opinions in the Southern Cameroons, the third and of course the most popular option, that is “Independence without joining” (secession) having been consigned to obscurity/oblivion. The above questions, if properly interpreted actually meant; *“Do you wish to achieve Independence by being annexed to the Nigerian Federation?” OR “Do you wish to achieve Independence by being annexed to the Republic of Cameroon?”* The questions thus left Southern Cameroonians only with the option of achieving independence by losing it. Despite this, by the day of voting, John Ngu Foncha who championed the drive for reunification with the Republic of Cameroon had succeeded to charm Southern Cameroonians into believing that a vote for reunification was going to be the “better evil”. Thus by a total of **233,571 (70.5%) votes against 97,741 (29.5%)** Southern Cameroonians chose to achieve independence by reunifying with *La République du Cameroun* (Chem-Langhee, 2004: 167; Ndi, 2013b: 121; Fanzo, 2017: 326 and Ngho, 2019: 225). Southern Cameroons’ independence was thus clearly conditional though in line with UN Resolution 1541 (XV). However, though independence was granted to Southern Cameroons on condition of reunification, reunification was negotiated on the basis of Federalism.

## From “Everyday” Resistance to Armed Conflict

As indicated in the foregoing section, the reunification of the two Cameroons was negotiated on the basis of Federalism. In fact, it was assurances of the fact that the Southern Cameroons’ identity would be preserved in the union through a federation that the Southern Cameroonians overwhelmingly voted for reunification. As early as July 1960, President Ahidjo visiting Buea and Tiko assured Southern Cameroonians that, “Our desire is [re]unification not annexation...the time has come for Cameroonians to unite and form a nation...within a united Africa” (Ndi, 2013b: 129). Ahidjo further added that reunification would be on the basis of Federalism.<sup>13</sup> On the strength of these assurances, Southern Cameroonians (Anglophones) voted for Reunification with former French Cameroon (Francophones).<sup>14</sup> How Reunification eventually raised the Anglophone Question can thus only be explained by the fact that Ahidjo’s government (and later, Biya’s) did not sustain measures taken to safeguard the Anglophone identity.<sup>15</sup> This was clearly the origin/root cause of the Anglophone Question. Every other perceived causes including marginalization (in all its forms including linguistic, administrative, economic

<sup>13</sup> *Southern Cameroons Press Release No. 911*, July 19, 1960. Cited in Ndi, 2013: 130.

<sup>14</sup> At this time, events in Nigeria were also not favorable for Southern Cameroonians. The Nigerian Constitutions from 1922 (Clifford Constitution), 1947 (Richards Constitution), 1951 (Macpherson Constitution) and 1954 (Lyttelton Constitution) showed evidence of domination of the Southern Cameroonians. This was worsened by persistent attempts to political domination, economic exploitation and social suppression of the Southern Cameroonians by the Igbo. See R.N. Budi, “Southern Cameroons in Nigerian Politics, 1922-1961: Resistance to Political Domination”. *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences IX, No. III, Quarter III*. (2018): 1-20; R.N. Budi, “Colonial Administrative Integration of African Territories: Identity and Resistance in Nigeria’s Southern Cameroons, 1922-1961”. *The IAFOR Journal of Arts and the Humanities 6, Issue 1*. Spring (2019): 109-122. DOI: 10.22492/ijah.6.1.09; R.N., Budi, *Identity and Resistance in Nigeria’s Southern Cameroons, 1922-1961*. (Latvia, European Union: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> It should be mentioned that immediately after reunification, Ahidjo began taking measures to dismantle the federation which culminated in the 1972 Referendum.



and political) of Anglophones in Cameroon are mere manifestations of this monumental feature of post-independent Cameroon. That is why the dismantling of Federalism in 1972 almost immediately led to response from within the ranks of the Anglophones to create the Cameroon Action Movement (CAM) in 1979 calling for secession from the union. Many other pro-Anglophone movements and pressure groups emerged with time (Ngoh, 2019: 388).

While there have always been grievances among the Anglophones in Cameroon which became overt following the dismantling of the federal system in 1972, it has never escalated to a scale as witnessed as from 2017. It began with grievances of Common Law lawyers and later Cameroon Anglophone Teachers Trade Unions expressed in the form of strikes before degenerating into a socio-political crisis that has trapped the entire country till date. By 2017, the Anglophone Question became violent with the emergence of armed groups to defend the course of the Anglophones especially secession and independence and the creation of the State of Ambazonia. Consequently, the armed groups that emerged became known as "Amba" Boys and perpetuated attacks on military, government facilities especially schools, government officials and the blockading and destruction of roads and bridges linking the various towns and villages of the North West and South West Regions of the country. This also met with violent response from government forces defending the territorial integrity of the country (Budi, 2019c: 261-8).

As a corollary to the dissolution of the Federal system in Cameroon, the Anglophone Question became evident culminating in subtle resistance. In reaction to the dismantling of the federal system of government, a pro-Anglophone pressure group was created known as Cameroon Action Movement (CAM) in 1979 (Ngoh, 2019: 387) to defend the course of the Anglophones. In spite of this, the closed political atmosphere in the country made it difficult for more pressure groups and activism to be engaged by Anglophones to demonstrate their grievances. However, by Law No. 84-001 of February 4, 1984, President Biya abolished the name, "United Republic of Cameroon" and introduced the name the "Republic of Cameroon" (Ngoh, 2019: 388). The Anglophones greeted this change with aversion describing it as assimilationist and annexationist. With the passage of Liberty Laws in December 1990, more Anglophone pressure groups and Associations emerged either to reminisce relics of Anglophone identity or to defend the plight of same in Cameroon. These included, Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), Southern Cameroons Peoples' Organization (SCAPO), the Ambazonia Liberation Movement (ALIM), the Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM), the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), The Amabzonian Peoples' Emancipation Council (APEC) among others. Other associations that were created to reminisce the relics of Anglophone identity included the South West Elite Association (SWELA), the North West Elite Association (NOWELA), the South West Chiefs' Conference (SWECC) and the North West Fons' Union (NOWEFU) (Ngoh, 2019: 388).

While resistance had been engaged by Anglophones over the years, it had never reached a crescendo culminating in armed confrontation of the scale witnessed as from 2017. It should be noted that as the government engaged discussions with lawyers and teachers over their respective corporate concerns, both groups were bent on forcing the government to return to the two-state federation that formed the basis of the union. This led to the creation of a Consortium of Anglophone Teachers and Common Law Lawyers but which was eventually banned by government on grounds of illegality and subsequently arresting some of its members including Agbor Bala and Fontem Neba. However, the stage for armed confrontation was actually set with the popular demonstration on September 22, 2017 and events of October 1, 2017. Based on claims that the march was peaceful

but government reaction was violent and also the fact that events of October 1, 2017 led to the killing of some Anglophones, it became evident that the Anglophone regions were drifting towards an armed conflict. Under the command of many Anglophones in the diaspora, armed groups were created in the North West and South West Regions including the Ambazonia Defense Forces (ADF), the Southern Cameroons Defense Forces (SOCADEF), the Southern Cameroons Defense Forces (SCDF), the Lebialem Red Dragons, the Manyu Ghost Warriors, the Ambazonia Self-Defense Restoration Forces, the Tigers of Ambazonia,<sup>16</sup> Manyu Tigers, The Sword of Ambazonia (TSOA), Southern Cameroons Restoration Forces, Ten-Ten Group, Ambazonia Restoration Army, 'General' Obi's Group, 'General' Eugene's Group and 'General' Nyambere Group in the South West Region and The Vipers, Donga/Mantung Self-Defense Group, 'General' Satan's Group, Menchum Fall Warriors, White Tigers, Seven Kata, Ambaland Kwifor, Ambazonia Defense Forces (ADF) and the Warriors of Nso, among many other groups operating in the North West Region. This led to sporadic confrontations between these groups and regular government forces on the ground.

The existence of these groups has led to recurrent conflicts in the two regions with far reaching attendant repercussions on the civilian populations. But how did we get here? As indicated in the abstract, a conspiracy of factors was responsible for this twist in the Anglophone resistance in Cameroon. Undeniably, accumulated grievances evident in frustrations, gelled by the growth of 'Ambazonism', propagated as the twin phenomena of liberalism and nationalism through the social media steered by a cream of Anglophone Cameroon Diaspora enjoying immunity afforded them by geography and distance were responsible for the armed struggle in the Anglophone Regions since 2017.

## Accumulated Grievances

The Anglophone grievances against the government of Cameroon stemmed from the inability of the Ahidjo and Biya governments to sustain measures to safeguard their identity. This state of affairs has generally left Anglophones with a well-founded feeling of marginalization coupled with attempts to assimilate or annex the latter into the majority French. This has generally led to the treatment of Anglophones as second-class citizens in the country. Against this, the Anglophones have complained since the institution of the union. More and more, these grievances were further worsened by near socio-economic and administrative neglect and exploitation resulting in underdevelopment and economic hardship especially among the youths. This provides an understanding of the reactions of the youths during discussions between government ministers and the representatives of the teachers and lawyers in Bamenda in January 2017.<sup>17</sup> Besides the well-founded grievances among the Anglophones, there was also an outburst of emotions that steadily ruled over reason resulting in the escalation of conflict in the Anglophone regions. The youths saw the teachers' and lawyers' strikes as opportunities to reverse the situation they have suffered over the years.

<sup>16</sup> See The International Crisis Group Report, 2017 and Human Right Watch, "The Killings Can be Stopped: Government and Separatist Groups Abuses in Cameroon's Anglophone Regions". 2018. 20-21.

<sup>17</sup> Following intense discussions that took the whole day at the Governor's Office in Bamenda, rumors circulated that the representatives of the lawyers and teachers were being coerced to sign documents calling off the strikes. A huge mobilization of youths surrounded the Governor's Office demanding reassurance from their leaders that the discussions were free and fair.

## The Growth of Ambazonism

The name ‘Ambazonia’ was derived from *Ambass Bahia*. The Portuguese are said to have arrived the territory which later became Victoria on December 7, 1492, Feast Day of St. Ambrose. They named the Bay, *Ambass Bahia* which referred to an Island in the Bay which was named Victoria or Nicoll Island near Bimbila. The people of the area were called Ambous. They were said to be tall, well-built and cannibal. The British missionaries and traders later referred to the area as Ambass Bay. In reaction to President Biya’s Decree No. 84-001 of February 4, 1984 which changed the name of the country, Fon Gorji Dinka of Widikum coined the name ‘Ambazonia’ as the ‘independent’ name of the former Southern Cameroons territory (Ngoh, 2019: 398, Footnote 55). In the midst of frustrations caused by accrued grievances, secessionist activists revived the concept of ‘Ambazonia’ to provide a better alternative for the Republic of Cameroon. To enroll support of the disenchanting youths, these activists propagated the utopic Republic of Ambazonia where employment will be assured; resources fairly distributed; corruption sunk to the base; roads and railways constructed and above all, a better standard of education and legal services based on Anglo-Saxon ideals. This charmed many youths who took up arms to fight for the realization of this state.

## Social Media Nationalism

The contagion effect of the Crisis in the North West and South West Regions has largely been thanks to the phenomenon of Social Media Nationalism. The secessionist activists who for the most part were settled in foreign countries used the social media<sup>18</sup> to propagate their ideals in the most alluring manner, thereby endearing many youths whose hopes in the government had faded nearly beyond restitution. Through Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and even Instagram, the secessionists were radical, making pronouncements and declarations as well as promises enveloped in propagandist statements (largely baseless) which did not only expose the extent of the crisis but enrolled more sympathizers for the course. In fact, the accessibility of the youths to android gadgets exposed them to entreaties from secessionists and caused them to engage armed confrontation for the creation of the State of Ambazonia.<sup>19</sup>

## Initial Popular Support

At the exordium of the armed conflict in the Anglophone Regions, the populations were supportive of the armed groups styled “Amba Boys”. They were loved by the people and seen to be veritable Freedom Fighters. Perhaps, they had presented themselves as Freedom Fighters and Self-defense Movements emerging with the aim of protecting the populations against the invading forces of the government which many saw as the villain responsible for untold atrocities on the masses. At this point, “Amba Boys” were affectionately referred to as “Our Boys” by a cross section of the Anglophone population. They visited homes and requested material and financial support for the struggle which

<sup>18</sup> Social Media refers to web-based mobile technologies designed to turn communication into an interactive dialogue that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated contents. They are used for social interaction between communities, organizations and individuals. See N.K. Takor, “The Arab Spring: Interrogating the Historical Basis and Implications of Social-Media Nationalism in Africa”. Paper Presented at NOWEHCTA Seminar, December 2, 2011. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ambazonism is however quickly transforming into an ideology to which individuals and communities subscribe to express their grievances against the government. This explains why some individuals and communities are more active and committed to the ideology than others.

the populations willingly and generously offered them.<sup>20</sup> In some cases, the populations provided accommodation to the Boys and above all, gave them moral support besides painting a very positive image of them. On the basis of this, not only were the numbers of armed groups increasing but also public perception towards them was generally good. However, with the passage of time, when “Our Boys” began perpetuating atrocities on the populations including kidnappings for ransom, attacks on pupils and students, blockading of roads to some towns and villages in the North West and South West Regions as well as ‘arrest’, torture, killing and beheading of suspected ‘blacklegs’, public perception began changing though very slowly. They were more and more referred to as “Those Boys” rather than the affectionate appellation “Our Boys”. However, as the crisis persisted, the populations soon found themselves between Scylla and Charybdis and suffered hugely from both government forces and “Amba” Boys. Government’s mal-handling of the crisis also contributed to the armed conflict in the Anglophone regions.

### Role of Government

At the beginning of the crisis with the teachers’ and lawyers’ grievances, the government was generally lackluster in addressing the corporatist grievances upfront. For instance, Ngoh argues that in spite of the reasonable time span given by the Lawyers for their grievances to be addressed, the government dillydallied (Ngoh, 2019: 389. See also Fanzo, 2017: 397-400). Even the calling of government’s attention to the issues plaguing the educational sector by the Cameroon education Forum (CEF), SYNES/UB Chapter, CATTU among others, the government was slow in its response. This gave the impression that the government was not serious about resolving their legitimate grievances. Worse still, government’s reaction to demonstrations by the students of the University of Buea (UB) was violent. Military forces were dispatched to Buea and they inflicted untold sufferings on the students (Ngoh, 2019: 389. See also Fanzo, 2017: 397-400). Lawyers were also brutalized as they marched on streets in Bamenda and Buea peacefully. The high points of military brutality was however experienced on September 22, 2017 and October 1, 2017 when mass demonstrations were organized on the streets of the North West and South West Regions. The brutal response of government forces and the arrests and imprisonment of many people only added to the grievances and proved to Anglophones that their appurtenance with French Cameroon was bad. It is therefore a fact that, though some effort might have been made to resolve the issues of the Anglophones in Cameroon, the handling of the situation has been far from being satisfactory thereby radicalizing youth who were placed at the mercy of the entreaties of secessionist activists.

### Concluding Thought

Armed conflict is not a new phenomenon in Africa. If you don’t find it in Mali, you find it in Nigeria or Sudan or Somalia. It is usually caused by deep-seated frustrations in government pushing the masses to take arms against existing regimes. Armed conflicts in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon began being perceptible in mid-2017. The paper has demonstrated that it has been a concomitant feature of historical milestone events, accumulated grievances evident in frustrations, gelled by the growth of ‘Ambazonism’, propagated as the twin phenomena of liberalism and nationalism through the social media and steered by a cream of Anglophone Cameroon Diaspora. The Anglophone Crisis has

<sup>20</sup> Emmanuel Fai, (Medical Practitioner) in discussion with Author in Bamenda on August 22, 2018.

caused untold sufferings on the people of these regions. Apart from the burning of villages, destruction of public and private properties and innumerable deaths, the Norwegian Refugee Council (2018), argues that the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in neighboring towns and cities of Cameroon like Littoral and the West had reached 437,000 by 2018 while the International Crisis Group (2019) submits that after twenty months of fighting, some 530,000 persons are internally displaced and about 35,000 (or 40,000) others seeking refuge in Nigeria as a result of the Anglophone Crisis and living under perilous conditions. While efforts at seeking lasting solutions to the issues of these regions continue, the historical context must be revisited with the view of undoing the errors of the past with the view of establishing sustainable peace in Cameroon.

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