

# The Structure of the Post-Colonial State and the survival of the Anglophone Education at the origins of the Cameroon Civil War

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## Background


In 1916, Allied forces, principally dominated by French and British contingents that defeated Germany in Cameroon during the First World War, partitioned the German Protectorate of Kamerun into two unequal halves; the British occupying a fifth constituted as British Cameroons and the French assuming four-fifths referred to as French Cameroun. When the war ended, the international community recognised the partition and requested Britain and France to administer their respective portions as mandate territories of the League of Nations. The new international boundary came to be called the Oliphant-Picot line in honour of Lancelot Oliphant, a British diplomat and George Picot a French diplomat who in a meeting in London in February 1916, initiated the partition by drawing a line on the map of Cameroon from Lake Chad to the Mungo River. The partition was finalised by the Milner-Simon Agreement of July 10, 1919 (Elango, 1987).

The Anglo-French boundary in Cameroon gained additional international status when Britain further partitioned British Cameroons into British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons and integrated the two portions into Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria respectively. In fact from 1922, the Oliphant-Picot line, with some cosmetic modifications, became the boundary between British Nigeria and French Cameroun because British Southern and British Northern Cameroons were integral parts of the British colony of Nigeria.

During this period, the territory was administered as part of the British colony of Nigerian and the people adopted some aspects of the British system of education, the common law judicial system and the Anglo-Saxon culture (Ndi, 2005: 25). This greatly alienated them from their “brothers” in French Cameroun who were introduced to the Napoleonic code or civil law and the highly centralised French system of administration.

It was with this background that some Southern Cameroon nationalists wanted independence with Nigeria. This was the case with E M L Endeley and N N Mbile who merged their political parties in 1960 to create the Cameroon People’s National Convention (CPNC) a pro-Nigerian political party (Nfi, 2014a: 23). Others led by John Ngu Foncha advocated separation from Nigeria and eventual reunification with French Cameroun.

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They founded the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) in 1955 to champion the course of reunification. That same year, 1955, the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) a staunch pro-reunification party in French Cameroun moved its headquarters to Kumba in the Southern Cameroons following a ban placed on the party by the French authorities in July 1955. The KNDP and the UPC were therefore the political forces in favour of reunification in the Southern Cameroons. When the UPC was banned in 1957, its Southern Cameroon followers founded One Kamerun (OK), under Ndeh Ntumazah to continue with the struggle for reunification.

Another group led by PM Kale wanted a separate Cameroon State without links to either French Cameroons or Nigeria. It was due to this division among the nationalists that the United Nations organised a plebiscite in the British Southern Cameroons in February 1961. The electorates were to choose between independence by joining the independent Federation of Nigeria or independence by reunification with the independent Republic of Cameroun. Out of 332,665 votes cast, 233,571 voted for reunification with the Republic of Cameroun and 97,741 voted for union with Nigeria (Ebune, 1992: 102). The majority under the leadership of J N Foncha therefore opted for reunification with Cameroun. The reunified Cameroon was styled the Federal Republic of Cameroon. It was within this polity that the Anglophones agitated.

## Conceptual Issues

For a better understanding of the problem, it is appropriate to define the concepts used in the study. To begin with, the term Anglophone as used in Cameroon and especially by promoters of “Ambazonia” or the State of Southern Cameroon is not only focused on the linguistic identity. An Anglophone in Cameroon is not just someone who speaks English, not just someone whose parents lived in the former British Southern Cameroon or someone who has acquired Anglophone education or culture but precisely someone whose ancestry is in the Southern Cameroons, that portion of Cameroon administered by the British from 1922 to 1961 (Ndobegang, 2009: 8). It is therefore clear that the term Anglophone as used in Cameroon has an ethnic connotation. In this study therefore, Anglophones are those Cameroonians whose ancestral origins and ethnic bases are in the former British territory of the Southern Cameroons whether they speak the English language or not. This definition excludes some “linguistic Anglophones” especially those who migrated from the former French administered Cameroon and settled in the Southern Cameroons to acquire the Anglo-Saxon culture (Nfi, 2014b, 122).

While politicians in Cameroon may agree on the concept of Anglophone as used in Cameroon, politicians and scholars did not agree on the concept of the Anglophone problem until recently. Some Anglophone and Francophone scholars and politicians claim that there is nothing like the ‘Anglophone Problem’. Some narrow it down to the problem of ethnic minorities because Anglophones are in only two of the ten administrative regions of Cameroon with less than 30 % of the population. Those who claim to recognise the problem, differ in their conceptualisation of the problem. For example (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997: 207) hold that the problem is the self-perception of the former Southern Cameroon as a distinctive community defined by differences in official language and inherited colonial traditions of education, law and public administration. It is therefore the problem of a people in search of their identity—an identity blurred by constitutional and political reforms that departed from the spirit of the 1961 federal constitution. In other words, the Anglophone problem can be defined as a struggle by the ethnic Anglophones

(former Southern Cameroonians) to rescue their cultural identity threatened by the assimilation policies of the Francophone dominated governments since 1961.

### **The Structure of the Federation and Unitary State**

The structure the Cameroon Federation took in 1961 was in fact the outcome of negotiations and a compromise between the centralist ambitions of Ahidjo leader of the Republic of Cameroon and the federalists from the Southern Cameroons. Before the constitutional talks proper, Ahidjo had made several declarations in Tiko, Victoria and Buea (in the Southern Cameroon) in July 1960 insinuating that reunification will not be annexation or the assimilation of the Southern Cameroons by the Republic of Cameroon. According to him, reunification was to be undertaken in an atmosphere of equality between the representatives of the Republic of Cameroon and the Southern Cameroons (Nfi, 2014a: 267). It was with these promises in mind that the Southern Cameroon delegation after a preliminary or preparatory meeting in Bamenda in June 1961, travelled to Foumban for the Constitutional Conference of July 1961 scheduled by Ahidjo, President of the Republic of Cameroon. It was at this conference that the structure of federation was crafted.

Essentially, the Federal Republic of Cameroon was a centralised two-state federation (West and East Cameroon) under an executive President assisted by a Vice President. The President and his vice were elected by universal suffrage for a mandate of five years renewal indefinitely. The constitution reserved the President excessive powers which gave him the latitude to appoint and dismiss all federal and states officials including the Prime Ministers of West and East Cameroon. He unilaterally controlled all government actions. In fact his powers were not limited and the Vice President was not given any specific functions as the constitution merely stated that the Vice President's duty was to assist the President who might delegate responsibilities to him by decree. Yaounde was to serve as the Federal Capital and the headquarters of East Cameroon while Buea was the capital of the State of West Cameroon.

The legislature consisted of a Federal House of Assembly, the East Cameroon House of Assembly, the West Cameroon House of Assembly and the West Cameroon House of Chiefs. The constitution specified that a bill passed by the Federal House of Assembly would be adopted only when a majority of the deputies of each of the federated states assemblies voted for it. This measure was intended to obstruct any attempt to revise the Federal Constitution to the disadvantage of any of the states.

Although the Foumban compromise apparently satisfied both Ahidjo and Foncha, leaders of the two delegations, the grave of the federation was also dug at Foumban. Ahidjo knew very little about the functioning of the federal system of government. He accepted it just to please Foncha and his delegation who came to Foumban convinced that only a loose federation or a confederation under a ceremonial President with executive Prime Ministers heading the federated states was the best form of government (Williard, 1970: 178). Ahidjo like his French advisers at Foumban believed in a centralised form of government and was determined to move as rapidly as possible towards the creation of a unitary state. It was for this reason that he carefully added a paragraph to the French and authentic version of the constitution which indicated that the federation was an experiment and a temporary measure. Articles five and six which gave the central government broad powers were also already preparing the stage for the future abrogation of the Foumban accord.

Again, the conference did not settle on the nature of revenue allocation between the two states. West Cameroon was to give up its sources of customs and other revenue and was to be financed by the federal subvention until a formula could be fixed. Such a formula was

never fixed and West Cameroon continued to be economically dependent on the federal purse. This was not for nothing. Ahidjo wanted the economy of West Cameroon paralysed so that whenever his call for a unitary state was made, many people in West Cameroon may accept it out of frustration. The economic frustration was not long to come. In the 1966/67 financial year, West Cameroon obtained 70 percent of its budget from the Federal Government in the form of subventions (Nghoh, 2004: 147). In a confidential letter to President Ahidjo, Prime Minister Jua requested a loan of 500 million Francs (CFA) in September 1967. In 1968, the new Prime Minister S. T. Muna asked for another loan of 150 million, an indication that West Cameroon could not survive without the centre (Nghoh, 2004: 150).

Apart from the constitutional lapses that rendered the 1961 federation vulnerable, Ahidjo was interested in preserving power and could not tolerate rivalry from the Prime Ministers of the federated states or from the leaders of other political parties. In September 1966, he therefore used shrewd diplomacy to convince Foncha, Muna and Endeley to dissolve their political parties and accompany Ahidjo's *Union Camerounaise* (UC) to form a Grand National party, the Cameroon National Union (CNU). Still in 1966, he used the Bakossi-Bamileke War<sup>1</sup> in Tombel to buttress his argument in favour of the consolidation of national unity through the unitary state. Ahidjo also complained of the duplication of services between the institutions of the Federation and those of the Federated States and the high cost involved in running four assemblies and three governments by a country that was very underdeveloped. All these were seen as window dressing arguments by his detractors. The dismantling of the federation was certainly in his agenda since 1961 but the problem was how to achieve it unopposed. It was for this reason that he forced the federation into a one party system, dismissed A N Jua in 1968 and Foncha in 1970. Lastly, what precipitated the defederalisation scheme was the discovery of petroleum in West Cameroon and the probability that the Federal Government and East Cameroon may become financially dependent on the considered barren West Cameroon (Nfi, 2017). In May 1972, Ahidjo organised a referendum during which the majority of the people voted in favour of a unitary state. The Federated States of West and East Cameroon disappeared in favour of seven provinces. West or better still Southern Cameroon as an entity disappeared. West Cameroon was divided into the Northwest and Southwest Provinces and the two stars on the national flag symbolising the two Cameroons was replaced by one star. This marked the beginning of the crisis. In 1984, Ahidjo's successor Paul Biya added to be injury when he unilaterally and by decree changed the name of the country from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon, the name French Cameroun adopted at independence in 1960 (Nghoh, 1996: 287). To many Anglophone federalists and secessionists this was an attempt to ignore or assimilate the Anglophones or former British Cameroon component of the United Republic of Cameroon.

Like the federation, the unitary state instituted in 1972 and renamed by Paul Biya in 1984 also had structural lapses. It permitted the President to appoint governors, senior divisional officers and divisional officers in the provinces, divisions and subdivisions of Cameroon respectively. As a result, Ahidjo and later Biya appointed Francophones as administrators in the Anglophone provinces, divisions and subdivisions. Francophone magistrates trained under the civil law system were appointed in the courts in the Northwest and Southwest Provinces where the common law was applied. Worse still many of these civil administrators and magistrates could not speak the English Language.

<sup>1</sup> Bamileke people migrated from their ethnic base in East Cameroun and settled in Bakossiland, West Cameroon because of fertile agricultural land. They used orthodox and unorthodox means to acquire land and this resulted in land conflicts and war in 1965. This crisis threatened national unity.

All these were silent efforts to destroy the dignity and statehood of Anglophones. The greatest treasure that nearly survived this destruction was the Anglo-Saxon educational system and this explains why Anglophone teachers' trade unions led the violent phase of the Anglophone revolution from 2016.

### Education as a factor of Anglophone Secession

In November 2016, the Anglophone struggle took a revolutionary character when lawyers and teachers trade unions strikes initially perceived as motivated by legitimate professional grievances turned into political protest movements. The Teachers Association of Cameroon (TAC) led by Tameh Valentine and the Cameroon Teachers Trade Union (CATU) led by Tasang Wilfred mobilised their members calling for boycott of schools against the Francophonisation of Anglophone schools. Later a consortium of All Anglophone Pressure Groups called for civil disobedience and ghost towns. The radicals called for the 'restoration of the State of Southern Cameroon', Ambazonia<sup>2</sup>. It became an open secret that some Anglophones wanted the former Southern Cameroons to secede from la République du Cameroun. Attempts by the secessionists to "restore" the Southern Cameroons, Ambazonia nation on October 1, 2017 met with stiff resistance from the Cameroon army. The situation degenerated in January 2018 as the media reported that the secessionists ambushed and killed soldiers in their barracks and duty posts (Fai, 2018: 5). Many military wings of the secessionist movements emerged and with the support of activists in the diasporas, they attacked and killed both the military and civilians. Amongst their grievances was education in the English Language.

One of the policies of the Ahidjo (1961-1982) and Biya (1982-?) regimes that reinforced the sense of cultural identity amongst the Anglophones was the policy of official bilingualism and biculturalism. Although successive constitutions of Cameroon since independence always reiterated the policy of official bilingualism, there existed no well-defined language policy. French language had a *de facto* dominance over English language in the areas of administration, education and the media. The domination of French was due to the demographic factor, the fact that Francophones continued to occupy top ranking positions in government and the civil service, and also because there was no effective language policy that guaranteed the right of minorities (Echu, 2004). As a result, the English language became a symbol of in-group solidarity for Anglophones who could use the language or not in an environment perceived to be linguistically and socio-politically hostile to them. In line with the constitutional biculturalism of the state, government recognized two educational subsystems in 1961, the Anglophone and Francophone subsystems with two examination systems. The existence of two subsystems of education was confirmed in 1993 with the creation of the *BACCALAUREAT* and G. C. E. examinations boards (Ngoh, 1996: 325). Unfortunately schools and other institutions of learning in Anglophone Cameroon were later staffed with Francophones who taught lessons and set examinations in the French language and or in Pidgin English. This was the case with technical education which was never given the Anglo-Saxon character in government schools. Government Technical Colleges in Anglophone Cameroon therefore have operated under the Francophone subsystem of education since 1972. Such schools had Francophone examinations such as *CAP*, *PROBATOIRE* and *BACCALAUREAT* rather than the G. C. E. as their end-of-course examinations. Even after the creation of the G. C. E. Board in 1993, Anglophone

<sup>2</sup> Ambazonia come from Ambas Bay the name of the area along the coast of Cameroon acquired by the London Baptist Missionary Society as their settlement for evangelisation and named Victoria in honour of the then queen of England.

students from these Government Technical Colleges wrote G. C. E. Technical examinations organized by this board as an external examination and not as an obligatory end of course examination. These examinations did not very much promote values cherished by the Anglophones especially self-reliance, civility, moral probity and honesty (Ndi, 2005: 72). With the Francophone character of technical education in Anglophone Cameroon, Government Technical Colleges were therefore staffed with Francophone teachers with a good number of students coming from the neighbouring Bamileke, Duala and Bassa villages in French Cameroon (Tasang, 2012). There was no teacher training college or higher institution to train teachers for technical education for the Anglophone subsystem until 2009 when the Higher Technical Teachers Training Colleges, Bambili was created. At the beginning of the 2011-2012 academic year, Francophone teachers in Government Technical High Schools in Bamenda, Buea, Kumba and Ombe constituted more than 72 percent of the staff strength of these schools (CATTU, 2006). This was seen as attempts to eradicate the Anglophone culture through the adulteration or pollution of its subsystem of education. Products of these 'francophonised' Government Technical Colleges could not be identified with Anglophone values of moral probity, obedience and civility as these Colleges were known for vandalism and chaos.

The Anglophone culture characterized by honesty, obedience, tender consciences and moral probity were also products of religious subject and moral education. Religious knowledge and Moral Education were taught in all schools, public or confessional. The teaching of religious knowledge was a prerequisite for financial assistance from government for all schools. In 1926, the first Education Code for the Southern Cameroons officially introduced a graded course of religious instruction in all Government, Voluntary Agency and Native Authority Schools. The 1944 Education Act made it obligatory in all schools to begin every school assembly with a period of religious worship. Religious knowledge was a requirement in all teachers' professional examinations, the West African School Certificate and later on the G. C. E. (Ihim, 2003: 57).

Unfortunately after reunification and when the Federal Government Bilingual Grammar School was opened at Man o'War bay (Anglophone Cameroon) in 1963, Religious knowledge and moral education were excluded from its curriculum as was the case with colleges in East Cameroon. On September 3, 1976, a Presidential Decree n.º 1976/385 stipulated that a pass in Religious knowledge at the G. C. E. was not to be included among the passes for employment. All attempts by the Catholic, Presbyterian and Baptist authorities in Anglophone Cameroon to reverse the situation failed. Even a compelling memorandum in February 1977 by Jeremiah C. Kangsen of the Presbyterian Church, Pastor Samuel Ngum of the Cameroon Baptist Convention, and Bishops Pius Suh Awa and Paul Verdzekov of the Catholic Church in West Cameroon on this painful issue to the Minister of National Education did not change things (Ndi, 2005: 40). This position of the regimes in Yaounde on the study of religious knowledge in schools alienated the Anglophones and contributed to the birth of underground secessionists movements.

Even when the G. C. E. Board re-introduced religious knowledge in its examination in 1996 in order to promote the Anglo-Saxon character of this subsystem of education, government refused to consider a pass in religious knowledge at the G. C. E. for the admission of students in its universities and for employment. Religious knowledge which was the cornerstone of Anglophone cultural identity lost its value in schools and this accounted for the steady erosion of the Anglophone cultural identity and the near complete absence of professional consciousness amongst Anglophones especially in the public service.

One of the grievances of the ethnic Anglophone students in the lone bilingual university of Yaounde in 1980's was the predominance of the French language over the English



language as the language of instruction. In this university, the lecturers delivered their lectures in the official language he/she mastered better and students took down notes and did tests and examinations in the language of their choice. Studies carried out by Tambi (1973) and Njeck (1992) produced evidence to support the view that many Anglophone students failed examination in Yaounde because 80 percent of the lectures were delivered in the French language and only 20 percent in the English language. Important courses could not even be delivered in English. For example, in 1983, Francophone students in the department of economics protested against Dr. Bisong for teaching Accounting in English and he was replaced (Mukong, 1990: 26). This language problem and the university strikes of the 1980s and early 1990s convinced government to set up an Anglo-Saxon university in Buea in 1992 to serve the needs of the Anglophones.

In 2011, President Biya created another Anglo-Saxon university in Bambili-Bamenda because of the political imperative of meeting the demands of elites of the North West Region. Unfortunately government failed to respect the Anglo-Saxon character of these universities. For example, in 2011, more than 40 junior lecturers of Francophone background were appointed to teach in these Anglo-Saxon universities. Some Francophones without any Anglo-Saxon background were also appointed to top administrative posts in these Anglo-Saxon universities. Besides, the Higher Teachers Training College and the Higher Technical Teachers Training College, all of the University of Bamenda already had a reasonable number of lecturers of Francophone background before the creation of the University. These lecturers are known to teach in French or in approximate English (not to say Pidgin English) (CATTU, 2006). This was seen by Southern Cameroons National Council, a secessionist Anglophone group, as part of government policy to 'francophonise' Anglophone educational institutions, assimilate Anglophones and destroy the cultural identity of former Southern Cameroon Anglophones.

## Conclusion

The struggle for secession by the Anglophones of Cameroon resulted from long standing grievances that could be traced back to the nature of the federation established at independence and reunification. The Anglophones in the British administered Southern Cameroons accepted to gain independence by joining the Republic of Cameroon because Ahidjo had promised them a federation in which their identity and polity would be preserved. This promise was not respected as the 1961 Federal Constitution failed to grant the Anglophones dual nationality within the Federal Republic of Cameroon. In 1972 the Federation was rather scrapped and a unitary state created and the Anglophone identity eroded. The education sector suffered most as English as a language of instruction was relegated to the background, morals and religious knowledge dear to Anglophones ignored, technical education and university education "Francophonised". Anglophone Teacher's Trade Unions could not continue to tolerate these practices and the generalised marginalisation of the Anglophones in Cameroon. When they protested in 2016, political activists picked up the struggle asking for the 'restoration' of the State of Southern Cameroon. Today more than 2000 soldiers and civilians have been killed by the crisis and more than half a million displaced internally and externally. The conflict can better be solved by a federal system of government that can permit the Anglophone to safeguard their cultural identity especially their educational system, common law and English Language. By the time I was concluding this paper, government has announced a special status for the two Anglophone regions and it is expected that the content will respect the cultural realities of the people.

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