

A black and white photograph of a man, Obadiah MUA, sitting in a leather chair. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt. The background shows a gallery or museum setting with various art pieces, including a large sculpture and a potted plant.

Entrevista

OBADIAH MUA

The Southern Cameroons crisis is a socio-political crisis rooted in the colonial past – it is not simply a cultural or language issue

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Obadiah Mua

The Southern Cameroons crisis is a socio-political crisis rooted in the colonial past – it is not simply a cultural or language issue

Interview led by Roland Ngwatung Afungang and Maciel Santos
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Obadiah Mua is the Secretary General of the Ambazonia Governing Council. He has been active in the nationalist movement for over two decades. His late father had been sacked from his job after the plebiscite when he served as the personal assistant to Reverend J.C. Kangsen who campaigned for the Southern Cameroons to join Nigeria.

Mr. Mua has held several roles within the Ambazonia struggle. He was the first secretary general of the Anglophone Youth League, which was part of the Cameroon Anglophone Movement, and in 1995 became a founding member of the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL). He is a close aide to Dr. Ayaba Cho, leader of the Ambazonia Liberation since 2002.

Mr. Mua established the first coordination structure of Southern Cameroonians in Belgium in early 2002 and went on to set up the Southern Cameroons European Mission together with Dr. Lawrence Ayamba. He served as Chairperson of the Southern Cameroons Youth League in Belgium and in various capacities in the governments in exile of Professor Carlson Anyangwe and Ebenezer Akwanga. Since 2016, Mr. Mua has held several positions within the Ambazonia Governing Council.

He is holder of a M. A. in International Politics from the *Centre d'Etude des Relations Internationales et Strategiques* in Brussels.

Roland Ngwatung Afungang (RA)/Maciel Santos (MS): Who do you mean by Southern Cameroons people? The 1916 border demarcation between the British and French governments divided the Bamileke, the Mbo, the Bakossi, etc. Before and afterwards, people from East of the border migrated therein. Is there any cultural or language identity in today's Southern Cameroons?

Obadiah Mua (OM): Thank you for giving me this opportunity to highlight some key aspects of the origin of the current crisis between Cameroon and Ambazonia. To put things in perspective, the March 1916 border demarcation between British and French Cameroon, commonly known as the Picot Partition, was the result of the earlier

partition of the former German Cameroon into British and French protectorates in February 1916. The Milner-Simon agreement of July 10, 1919 officially confirmed the boundary between British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon. Consequently, during the UN sponsored plebiscite of February 11, 1961, the Southern Cameroons people were not given clear choices for the future. Instead they were left to be manipulated and used by the French and the British who ignored the fact that Southern Cameroons at the time was a parliamentary system and that the results of the plebiscite could only become law after ratification by parliament. It should be clearly stated that the crisis that oppose the Ambazonian people to Cameroon is a socio-political crisis rooted in the colonial past of the former British Cameroon

and French Cameroon. It is not simply a cultural or language issue as many have been misled to understand. The Ambazonian people are a distinct people who under international law and UN Charter have a right to aspire for external self-determination.

RNA/MS: Why was there a plebiscite in II February 1961 and why was the option of independence left out?

OM: At the end of World War II, there was this growing desire among African countries under colonial rule to become independent. The African continent had sacrificed and lost a lot during the war. Under the UN policy of decolonisation, European powers were obliged to relinquish control of territories they occupied. Then Southern Cameroons which was under British protection was denied outright independence through manipulation. The two options that were presented violated the very basis of the UN decolonisation policy which required that all protectorates be given the right to freely choose their path to independence.

Claims by the British that Southern Cameroons was not economically viable to be an independent state were completely false and contrary to the UN decolonisation policy which stated that the integration of the “Non Self-Governing Territories” in any State “should be the result of the freely expressed wishes of the territory’s people”. Therefore, by expressed design, the Southern Cameroons was offered a plebiscite with two options that did not meet the requirements of the United Nations and in variance with the aspirations of the people of the territory.

The end of the Cameroon Federation – the truth of the matter lay in the discovery of substantial oil wells off the coast of Southern Cameroons in the late 1960s

RNA/MS: Why did Southern Cameroons not leave Cameroon when Amadou Ahidjo (Cameroon’s president at the time) abolished the Federation in 1972?

OM: The historical failure by the international system to solve the Ambazonia problem dates to the early manipulations set up by the colonial forces and the Cameroon government. The Southern Cameroons politicians led by John Ngu Foncha and Simon Tandeng Muna had become corrupted by the Yaoundé regime of Ahmadou Ahidjo to endorse the annexation process. Dissenting voices were identified and eliminated. The talk of cutting cost on the federal structures was presented to the people as a reason for abolishing federalism and moving to a centralised structure. The truth of the matter lay in the discovery of substantial oil wells off the coast of Southern Cameroons in the late 1960s which meant that within a federal system, the control of proceeds would be in the hands of the federated state. Ahmadou Ahidjo with the help of France decided to abolish the federal structure and transfer all powers including control of natural resources from Southern Cameroons to Yaoundé. Such action was contrary to Article 47 of the 1961 Federal constitution which forbade any change to the form of state.

RNA/MS: The most important anti-colonial movement of Cameroon (UPC) had a large support in Southern Cameroons. It pledged for re-unification but it also fought the Ahido/Biya regime. Considering the increasing disaffection at this regime in whole Cameroon, would the chances of toppling it be greater if all the oppositionist movements gather to establish a new Republic?

OM: The idea of a ‘One-Cameroon’ being propagated as a panacea to the current crisis ignores the root causes and belittles the efforts of the Ambazonian people who have over the years sort to resolve the problem but have been ignored by Cameroon and

the international system. It should be noted that though both the Southern Cameroons and the *Republique du Cameroon* have coexisted for close to six decades, the trend has never been for a harmonious coexistence as French Cameroon has always sort to assimilate the Ambazonian people and completely root out the Anglo-Saxon culture that Ambazonia inherited from the British. Over the years attempt by Ambazonians to bring about a meaningful change has always been met with disdain and opposition. In April 1993, after the first All Anglophone Conference (AACI), the Buea Peace initiative was proposed to resolve the grievances of Ambazonians. This was ignored by the government of Cameroon. In May 1994, after the second All Anglophone Conference in Bamenda, the Bamenda Proclamation gave a reasonable time for which Cameroon had to act or face the 'Zero Option' (Independence). We are now at that stage.

RNA/MS: In 1961, many traditional authorities were not favourable either to integration (Nigeria) nor reunification (Cameroon). What do they think nowadays?

OM: Traditional authority in Ambazonia plays a very important role and Cameroon understands that very well. That is why after unconstitutionally getting rid of the federal structure, Yaoundé went ahead to abolish the House of Chiefs that played an important role in the state of Southern Cameroons. Over the decades, Cameroon has sort to undermine the traditional authorities in Ambazonia using corruption and blackmail. Since 2016, many traditional authorities have been killed by Cameroon military because they stand for the restoration of the statehood of Ambazonia. The missed opportunity of 1961 that was not offered to the Ambazonian people has now come to fruition and many traditional rulers are willing to lend their support.

RNA/MS: Trade Union officers, such as Nerius Namaso Mbile, were important in

earlier Southern Cameroons movements, even in those pledging for reunification. What do Trade Unions in Southern Cameroons say now?

OM: One of the entrenched Anglo-Saxon value that prevailed in then Southern Cameroons before Cameroon's occupation was the freedom of association. This gave birth to a strong trade union during the Southern Cameroons self-rule 1954-1961. It was during this period that trade unionists like N. N. Mbile emerged and became a force during the run up to the February 1961 Plebiscite. Over the years, due to the culture of intimidation and absence of freedom of association and speech, trade unionism has taken backstage in the socio-political life of the people. However, trade union leaders have never given up. It was in this light that the current crisis was born in October 2016 when the teachers' and lawyers' trade unions decided to call for protests on the evasion of the education and legal systems of 'Anglophones'. The reaction of the government of Cameroon was brutal. Attempts to corrupt trade unionists failed and in January 2017, some of the leaders were arrested while others managed to flee to exile. The trade unions that began by asking for internal reforms of the system have now moved on to call for an independent Ambazonia.

RNA/MS: Why did Southern Cameroons remained silent from 1972 until 2016?

OM: In the eyes of the international community which has paid little attention to the Ambazonia crisis, the period 1972 to 2016 may look silent. However, the current crisis has had the momentum build over this period. In 1984 Fon Gorji Dinka filed a case HCB/28/92 at the Bamenda High Court to protest the change of name from United Republic adopted in 1972 to *Republique du Cameroon*. This move was further enhanced by the birth of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia under the leadership of Fon Gorji Dinka. As earlier stated, two Anglophone

conferences took place in 1993 and 1994 producing the Buea Peace Initiative and Bamenda Proclamation, respectively. The Southern Cameroons National Council was born in Buea in 1993 after the first All Anglophone Conference. In 1995, the Southern Cameroons Youth League emerged with the youth becoming more involved and ready to take up the case of the Ambazonian people. In 2003 Kevin Gumne *et al.* representing Southern Cameroons filed Communication N.º 266/2003 against Cameroon at the African Court of Human and People's Rights in Banjul. In a verdict in May 2009, the ACHPR recognised the right of Ambazonians as a distinct people. During this very period, the Southern Cameroons National Council facilitated the admission of the Southern Cameroons into the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) in 2003 and the admission was reactivated in 2017 by the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC).

In 2013, members of different Ambazonia freedom movements including the Southern Cameroons National Council, The Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement, the Southern Cameroons Peoples Organisation, the Southern Cameroons Youth League and other civil, religious and political leaders met and established the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC). The AGovC in the years leading up to 2016, worked covertly and overtly in Ambazonia and the Ambazonia community in the diaspora to herald in a new approach to free Ambazonia from annexation and brutal occupation.

War and the international community – the historical perspective puts France at the centre of what is going on in Cameroon

RA/MS: Is there an international oil conspiracy fostering nationalism in Southern Cameroons? Or are oil interests better served with the present situation?

OM: The right of the Ambazonian people to external self-determination is a fundamental right based on fundamental international law and the UN Charter. The decolonisation policy of the United Nations was wrongly or manipulatively applied in the case of Ambazonia. The Ambazonian people have over the six decades following the April 21, 1961 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) vote granting independence to Ambazonia, asked for their rights to be restored and respected. It should however be noted that the reason behind the abolition of the federal structure in 1972 was influenced by the discovery of enormous oil wells offshore in Ambazonia. We are aware of the effect of natural resources on the numerous conflicts in Africa and the world. How the ongoing conflict between Cameroon and Ambazonia is handled by the international community will have serious ramifications on the peace and security in the Gulf of Guinea and beyond.

RNA/MS: Is this a Cameroon issue or is it still also a French issue? What are the French Government responsibilities in the present conflict?

OM: The ongoing conflict is an international conflict that deserves the intervention of the international system with Cameroon being the aggressor. The historical perspective puts France at the centre of what is going on in Cameroon and in extension of the conflict with Ambazonia. As the Ambazonian people continue to endure the use of brutal force and the ongoing genocide, we will continue to gather evidence of those involved in such crimes against our people. At the right moment, the evidence will be used to bring those responsible to justice.

RNA/MS: What has been the role of the United Nations in this conflict? Have they done enough to resolve it?

OM: It must be noted that the United Nation's failure to implement its UNGA Res-

olution 1608 (XV) of April 21, 1961 fully and correctly is at the root of the ongoing crisis. That is why in our communication to the office of the UN Secretary General, we have emphasized on the need for a negotiated settlement of the conflict by getting to the root causes. We have also called for neutrality in the venue for the negotiations mediated by a credible neutral party with a guarantor for implementation of the outcome. We look forward to the UN becoming more present and active in bringing about an end to decades of occupation.

RNA/MS: Why has the International community remained quiet and why is the conflict not aired by international media like in Syria, Yemen, Crimea, Nagorno Karabakh, etc?

OM: We are aware that geopolitics is driven by the game of interests. The mainstream media is driven by ratings. The occupying power, Cameroon is aware of this and it has done much because it has the financial means and friends within the international system to keep its record on genocide and crimes against humanity out of world view. However, efforts put in especially by the Ambazonia Governing Council to internationalise our cause is gaining traction. With targeted diplomacy, the Ambazonia Governing Council has brought the conflict to the corridors of power in Washington, London, Brussels, Berlin, etc.

Expectations and consensus – the Ambazonia Governing Council which is the biggest and vanguard liberation movement was formed by bringing together several liberation movements.

RNA/MS: What is the current state of the armed conflict? What are the possible solutions to the conflict?

OM: Since Cameroon declared war on the Ambazonian people on November 30, 2017, the Ambazonia people have adopted the right to self-defence as they battle to protect their women and children. There is ongoing genocide carried out by Cameroon with several massacres that have caught international attention, more than 400 villages and towns burnt down. The Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF) is the main liberation force which has been able to secure territory and facilitate the operation of Community Schools and Community Health Centres.

RNA/MS: Is there any kind of consensus among the (many) nationalist military and political movements?

OM: The Ambazonia Governing Council which is the biggest and vanguard liberation movement was formed by bringing together several liberation movements. The AGovC entertains very close working relations with other frontline movements. The ADF is the biggest self-defence group in Ambazonia and works in synergy with other friendly forces for the defence of the Homeland.

RNA/MS: What are the most expected outcomes if independence is achieved, according to the nationalist movements?

OM: The mission of the Ambazonia Governing Council is to liberate Ambazonia from illegal occupation from Cameroon, to achieve independence, sovereignty, and international recognition of Ambazonia as a country. And to bequeath to future generations of Ambazonians the foundations of a democratic, peaceful, and prosperous Ambazonia state in which all men and women are equal and the rule of law reigns. As we continue to defend our territory against Cameroon's occupation, we are also working on taking full control of the territory and deliver on our vision. Multiple projects are going on in the background to guarantee a smooth transition from occupation to self-rule.