

The Quest of a People to be heard: The Continuous Struggle of Anglophone Cameroonians from Nigeria to Cameroon

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INTRODUCTION

The general desire of any human being is to be heard and to have a say in matters that concern him/her, not to talk of a people who because of circumstances beyond their control, are being stigmatized and marginalized in a union or association they were forced to belong. So being silent and suppressed, no matter the length of time, will always end up in the people resisting such oppression either peacefully or violently which is the case of the Anglophones since its inception. An Anglophone Cameroonian is an indigene whose first foreign culture is Anglo-Saxon and whose first problem is that of identity within a cultural milieu which is 85 percent Gaullic; the second problem is that of language, and thirdly, equal opportunities with his/her fellow francophone counterpart. His problem is the fear of both cultural extinction and politico-economic marginalization (Nkwi 2004:186).

The current Anglophone problem dates back to the colonial era, where after the defeat of Germany in 1916 in Cameroon, Britain and francs divided the territory into two. In the period of their various colonial administration of Cameroon, both Britain and francs shaped their territories with reference to their own colonial policies. As a result, the territory witness major differences in language, education, monetary system, judicial and social norms. The British part of Cameroon was administered as part of Nigeria following the indirect rule system, which gave traditional rulers the power to administer their subjects directly. This led to the emergence of a self-rule type of system in southern Cameroon prior to independence, as the people where use to administering themselves at the local levels. (crisis group report 2017:2)

The German government and the traditional Douala chiefs signed a treaty in July 1884, establishing a protectorate called Kamerun. Its territories were shared out after the German defeat at the end of the First World War. It became a mandated territory of the League of Nations and later a trusteeship territory of the United Nations after the 2nd World war, under the control Britain and France. After brief joint control of the territory called the Condominium (Ndi, 2013, 74–76), the colonial powers could not agree on how to co-administer Cameroon due to their differences in colonial policies and state structures. This led to the partition of the

territory with Britain acquiring 1/5 (20%) while France took 4/5 (80%) of the territory respectively (Ndi, 2013, 74–76), under the supervision of the League of Nations.

Also, as Britain agreed to take a smaller portion of Cameroon, a line was rashly drawn on the War Office map by François Georges-Picot, who had very little knowledge of Africa. He 'chose a point to the east of Victoria and another to the south of Yola and "began to join these two points in a casual way with a blue pencil (Willis et al 2019:8-9). This in balance in the division of the territory, led to the population disparity in Cameroon today with French Cameroonians being the majority and English Cameroonians being the minority (IPSS Peace & Security Report 2020:2). As Willis, puts it, Sir Frederick Dealtry Lugard, the Governor General of Nigeria, reportedly described the area acceded to British control as 'an insignificant little strip that it was hardly worth reserving at all. However, the British still maintain control of this strip as they installed some governmental institutions such as law courts, local governmental institutions, schools, and more. (Willis et al 2019:8-9)

The institutions introduced by Britain in Southern Cameroon based on their colonial policies were largely different from those instituted by France in French Cameroon. Unlike Britain who neglected the economic development of its territory, as it administer it as part of Nigeria, France invested heavily in its own territory, resulting in infrastructural disparities between the two territories (Willis et al 2019:8-9). As such, the partition of Cameroon was disadvantageous to southern Cameroonians as it brought difficulties and misery to the people of the territory (Mukete, 2013, 33–36). However, as noted by Konings and Nyamnjoh, Southern Cameroons before 1958, was administered as part of the Eastern region of Nigeria before 1954, when it gained a quasi-regional status within Nigeria and a full regional status in 1958 (Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997:208-209).

However, the focus of this paper is to examine the persistence struggled and resistance of Anglophone Cameroonians, since its association by Britain with Nigeria and its current union through independence with the former Republic of Cameroon. That is, the continuous struggle by

these group of people for the respect and maintain ace of their identity and person, from domination and assimilation by Nigeria under colonial rule and former republic of Cameroon since independence. Also the paper aims to analyse the resistance mechanisms put forward by Anglophone Cameroonians with respect to their oppression and domination from Nigeria to the former republic of Cameroon.

The Nigerian experience and resistance

Britain because of reasons of convenience, decided to administer her portion of Cameroon as part of Nigeria. The southern part of Cameroon was administered as part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria while the northern part was administered as part of the Northern Region of Nigeria. This administration of British Cameroon as part of Nigeria which lasted for close to forty years left an indelible mark on southern Cameroonians which has shaped their political life till date. It should be noted that, within this period of administration through Nigeria, Cameroonians demonstrated their unwillingness to integration with Nigeria (Njingti 2019: 113). This linkage of Cameroon to Nigeria, constitutionally, administratively and judicially, meant any changes in the Nigerian political setup, invariably affects Southern Cameroonians as some of these changes were seen as unfair and designed to dominate them politically and obliterate their identity. Southern Cameroonians began witnessing political subjugation as far back as 1922 with the passage of the Clifford Constitution by Sir Hugh Clifford. This constitution abolished the old Nigerian Council and replaced it with a Legislative Council of 46 members. It also created an Executive Council that was essentially an advisory body to the Governor but unfortunately, there was no southern Cameroonian representation in this two councils leaving them frustrated and feeling marginalize (Ngoh, 2001, 10).

Also, the feeling of marginalization of southern Cameroonians by Nigerians, continued with the passing of the Richards Constitution of 1946 which replace the Clifford Constitution. Sir Arthur Richard the author of the constitution, believed in the full integration of Southern Cameroons with Nigerian. This Constitution divided Nigeria into the Northern, Eastern and Western Regions. Southern Cameroons was part of the Eastern Region, with its Capital at Enugu. But the central Legislative Council remained in Lagos, and Regional Assemblies were created in the three regions. British Southern Cameroons was granted two Native Authority seats in the Eastern Regional Assembly, which was occupied by Chief Manga Williams of Victoria and Fon Galega II of Bali. The granting of only two seats to southern Cameroonians in the Eastern Regional Assembly, show the continuous efforts of Britain and Nigeriansto Nigerianise the Southern Cameroons administration. (Njingti 2019: 115)

But, Southern Cameroonians continued to resisted all forms of political domination throughout the period of their attachment to the politics of Nigeria. This domination of southern Cameroons by Nigerians took many forms, both in Nigeria and in the Southern Cameroons territory, as seen in the influx of Nigerian administrators. Also, their domination as early as 1923, of different government departments in Southern Cameroons, including post and telegraphs, police, prisons, agriculture, medical, education, customs, marine, and public works, the appointment of a Nigerian in the 1940s, as the first African Assistant District Officer for the

Manyu Division in Southern Cameroon (Nfi, 2015, 33). However the non-appointment of Southern Cameroonians to top administrative positions between the 1920s and the 1940s was justified by the British stating the “Nigerians were already more acculturated with the British imperial system and the English language than their counterparts in Southern Cameroons” (Fanso, 1982, 475 cited in Nfi, 2014, 33). But most of the Nigerians, which the British depended for the administration of Southern Cameroons, were far less qualified to “deliver the goods” (Ibid.). Also, British Cameroonians before the 1940s did not strongly identify Britain as their colonial power that had to be kicked out of the British Cameroons. British Cameroonians instead saw the Nigerians especially the Ibos as their oppressor given their dominance in the political, social and economic spheres of southern Cameroons (Ngoh 1979:81).

This feeling of political domination by Nigerians made southern Cameroonians to resist and criticize the British system, through political pressure groups, political parties and parliamentary discourses, which was mounted as a resistance to the Nigerian ascendancy(Njingti 2019: 112). Thus the resistance to political domination within Nigerian politics by southern Cameroonians was an extention of the same spirit of resistance to the partition of their territory (Njingti 2019: 112). Ultimately, in 1961, their massive vote against integration with the Nigerian Federation (Nohlen, 1999, 167) was partly informed by the desire to steer clear from Nigerian politics – a sure way of escaping political domination and reasserting their identity. (Njingti 2019:110)

Another way in which southern Cameroonians resisted political domination within Nigerian politics was the formation of the Cameroon Welfare Union (CWU), founded in 1939 by G. J. Mbene in Victoria. with its objectives, as Chem-Langhee (2004:24) has submitted, as that of “... catering for the interests of Cameroonians which, at this point, included the assertion of a Cameroons identity”. The quest of a Southern Cameroonian identity remained strong throughout the period of their association with Nigeria. This was partly informed by their motivation and determination to resist all forms of political domination within Nigeria. As a result, in early 1940, the CWU petitioned the British administration against the non-representation of Southern Cameroons in the Legislative Council in Lagos (Chem-Langhee, 2004, 24). This move, even though delayed for two years, led to the appointment of Chief Manga Williams in 1942 as Southern Cameroons representative in the Legislative Council in Lagos (Njingti 2019: 115). Also, the founding of the Cameroon Youth League (CYL) in 1940 in Lagos by Southern Cameroonian students in Nigerian Schools and Colleges which included Paul M. Kale, Emmanuel M. L. Endeley and John N. Foncha, after the fall of the CWU was another tool of resistance to Nigerian domination by Southern Cameroonians. Its main objective to gain political status for southern Cameroons through the creation of a separate legislature for Southern Cameroons (Chem-Langhee, 2004, 25).

In reaction to the Richards Constitution, another pressure group, the Cameroon Federal Union (CFU)was formed in Southern Cameroons in 1947 under the leadership of E. M. L. Endeley. With objective to enable Southern Cameroons gained a separate Region from Nigeria (Rubin, 1971, 84,

cited in Chem-Langhee, 2004, 27). This is because the Richards Constitution had made southern Cameroon to lose its lone seat in the Legislative Council in Lagos while being granted only two Native Authority seats in the Eastern Regional Assembly. In 1949 the Cameroon National Federation (CNF) was formed and also led by E. M. L. Endeley. This pressure group main objective was to demand for the establishment of a separate administrative region for southern Cameroon with its own House of Assembly under a commissioner responsible to the Trusteeship Council. Furthermore, southern Cameroonians resisted their domination from Nigeria through the formation of political parties. (Njingti 2019: 116). This was portrayed after the dismissal and refusal of reinstatement of S. T. Muna the lone Southern Cameroonian Minister (Minister of Works) to the Eastern Regional Council following the crisis in the Eastern Regional Assembly. This crisis led to nine of the thirteen Southern Cameroonian representatives to the Eastern Regional Assembly to form the Benevolent Neutrality Bloc (BNB), with aim to steer clear of Nigerian politics (Ngho, 2001, 67-74). Their reasons to sever links with Nigeria was that there was "a deliberate disregard of the wishes and aspirations of the Southern Cameroons" and that within Nigeria, "they were unable to make the wishes of the Southern Cameroonians respected" (Ngho, 2001, 67-74).

As a result, Members of the BNB organized a Constitutional Conference in Mamfe from 22-24 May 1953, and after serious discussions, decided to form the first indigenous political party in British Southern Cameroons, called the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) led by E. M. L. Endeley and R. J. K. Dibongue (Fanso, 2017, 99-300). The main aim of the party was first to seek for a separate regional status for Southern Cameroons and then reunification with French Cameroon. (Chem-Langhee, 2004, 29). In 1955 Messrs. Foncha and 'Jua left the 'KNC because of its links with the Nigerian Action Group and founded the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) (Ngho 1979:84-85).

The desire to have a separate region for the British Cameroons was enhanced by the extreme backwardness of the territory with regards to French Cameroon or Nigeria who received direct aid from France and Britain respectively. Part of Southern Cameroons frustration with Nigeria was the fact that Britain's aid to southern Cameroon had to pass through Lagos because they had no separate budget, and at times, part of the aid designated for the British Cameroons ended up in Nigeria. Also, the Ibo domination of the economic and social life of southern Cameroons especially after the construction of the Kumba-Mamfe road further confounded the whole situation giving the massive influx of Nigerians to southern Cameroons. (Ngho 1979:89)

Southern Cameroon by 1954 was granted a Quasi Regional Status with the passing of the Lyttleton Constitution, with a limited degree of degree of autonomy and Dr E. M. L. Endeley became the Leader of Government Business. In 1958, the Quasi Regional status was dropped and 'Southern Cameroons was granted regional autonomy with a legislative Assembly and a House of Chiefs (Ngho 1979:80-81). However, this did not still satisfy southern Cameroonians desire to sever all connections with Nigeria and avoid the Ibo domination in their political life. With this and the desire by some Southern Cameroonians for reunification with French Cameroon, led to the United Nations

decision to organize a plebiscite in British Cameroon on February 11, 1961 with two 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?. These two questions though did not meet the total aspirations of Southern Cameroonians, as the call for a third option of independence as postulated by the house of chiefs was rejected by the UN. As a result, southern Cameroonians by a total of 233,571 votes against 97,741, chose to achieve independence from Britain by "being annexed" to La République du Cameroun. Because for them a vote for reunification with French Cameroon was a lesser evil to Nigeria following their unpleasant experience (Njingti 2019: 119)

The Cameroonian experience and resistance

The reunification issue with French Cameroon stated in 1949 following the meeting of seventeen groups in Kumba from the British and French Cameroons with ambition to booster the reunification movement and called for the teaching and learning of English and French in all schools in the Cameroons and the removal of frontier barriers between the two Cameroons. Following the formation of the Kamerun United National Congress (K.U.N.C.) in 1951, by Nerius N Mbile and R. K. Dibongue, with Jabea Dibongue as President-General and Nerius Mbile as its General Secretary, the KUNC worked closely with the U.P.C of French Cameroon whose aim was immediate reunification of the Two Cameroons. Furthermore, in 1952, with the continuous desire for reunification, Dibongue met Um Nyobe at Tiko and they accepted convening a meeting at Eseka. From discussions of the Eseka Conference, emerged the 'Eseka-Resolution' calling for The immediate reunification of the Cameroons, the establishment of a mixed cabinet, with 80 percent of its members Cameroonians and to establish a Five year time table before the granting of independence beginning January 1, 1952. (Ngho 1979:83-84)

Also the reunificationists exploited the economic disadvantages resulting from frontier barriers brought about by the custom checks between the two territories to explain their case for reunification. This checks had led to massive smuggling between the two Cameroons to which both colonial governments responded by confiscating the goods when they were seized. The case of Ewe-Togoland was a constant reminder of the need for reunification as Albert Pavéc said "Lideed'utiliserce theme (d'unification), promis a un sibrillantavenir ... fut sans doute inspiree par l'exemple du Togo. And added to the other aspects favouring reunification, was the British method of administration making it look like it was Nigeria not Britain who was the real colonial power of Southern Cameroons as some French Cameroonians Southern Cameroons as 'unecolonied'une region d'unecolonie' and "the generally favorable memory of German administration. (Ngho 1979:90-91)

The attainment of independence by French Cameroon on 1 January 1960, brought to light that of British Cameroon. This led to a UN organized plebiscites in both British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons in 1961. They were both presented with two options in order to attain independence; that is, 'to achieve independence by joining the independent Federation of Nigeria' or 'to achieve independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroon'. (IPSS Peace & Security Report 2020:2)

The result of the plebiscite showed 233,571 voting for reunification as against 97,741 integration with Nigeria (Willis et al 2019:10). The reunification of Southern Cameroons and La Republique du Cameroun was sealed with an agreement of a two state federation at the Fomuban constitutional conference of July 1961. This conference drafted the federal constitution which guaranteed the respect of the administrative cultural identities of the two states, with southern Cameroons to become West Cameroon while and the republic of Cameroon to become East Cameroon. English and French were to become the official languages of the Federation. However the grievances of Anglophone Cameroonians stated with the organization of an illegal referendum on the 20th of May 1972, changing the constitution from a federal state to a unitary state. It was further compounded in 1984 with a revision of the constitution to change the name to the Republic of Cameroon, the name of independent French Cameroon in 1960, in total disregard of the 1961 agreement between the two territories in Fomuban. (IPSS Peace & Security Report 2020:2)

Also, the inherited British culture of self-rule, freedom of press and association and rule of law which was maintain at Fomuban, only lasted for 10 years. Thereafter, the then President of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo began a series of actions leading to the complete erosion of the Southern Cameroons colonial heritage of autonomous self-rule. Ahidjo started with the introduction in 1966 of a one party rule reforms, followed by the destruction of the federal state in favour of a unitary state through an illegal referendum of 20th May 1972. In contrast to 1961 when on southern Cameroonians took part in the plebiscite to join the republic of Cameroon, the referendum of 1972 was open to everyone both in East and West Cameroon leading to the fusion of the territories to form the United Republic of Cameroon (Willis et al 2019:11). The loss of a west Cameroon identity who until 1972 was an equal state in the federation, created a political consciousness in the minds of West Cameroonians that they were being dominated and exploited by the French Cameroonians. Also the change in name of the country by the current President with his arrival in 1982 to the republic of Cameroon in 18984, coupled with the flag from two stars to one star and the constitution in 1996 to a unitary decentralized state, made Anglophone Cameroonians to have a feeling of a desire by the Francophone Cameroonians to wipe out their cultural and political identity. The result is the current crisis we have in the Anglophone regions today. (IPSS Peace & Security Report 2020:4)

Furthermore, the abolition of the two state federation was met with stiff protest. As since its abolition, there have been various protest and resistant movements to restore the two state federation and the Anglophone identity, for example, Albert Mukong protested the reforms, was imprisoned for six years by Ahidjo for talking with the BBC and also holding meetings on ways to reintroduce multipartism in Cameroon. The various resistant movements form by Anglophones to get the government address their grievances include amongst others, the Southern Cameroons National Council and its former Southern Cameroons Youth League (now the African People's Liberation Movement), the Free West Cameroon Movement, the Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement, the Cameroon Anglophone Movement, and the Ambazonia Movement. (Willis et al 2019:12)

For Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997:207), the Anglophone problem dates back to the poorly negotiated agreement in Fomuban which did not provide any functional guarantees of equality of both parties and the preservation of their cultural heritage and identity. It was just a transition of Southern Cameroon to be integrated into the centralized system of French Cameroon, in a unitary state. This just further buttressed the Anglophone feeling of assimilation by the francophone and the resultant resistance. The climax of the resistance started in the 1990 following the liberalization process in Cameroon, as most political elites of the Anglophone regions started protesting against the francophone domination with desires for self-rule and autonomy. But the continuous negligence and rejection of the issue by the government has led to claims of complete secession from the state of Cameroon as seen with proliferations of various independence movements across the world and the arm struggle in the two regions. The aim of the resistant movement is to present the case of the Anglophones to the international community, as an oppressed people whose territory has been 'annexed' by the francophone-dominated state. (Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997:208)

But these Anglophone problem saw the light in 2016, following the grievances of teachers and lawyers trade union, which not only brought to the limelight the bitterness of the Anglophones against their domination and subjugation, but also expose the weaknesses of the state apparatus to handle crisis situations. The Anglophones who make up about 20% of Cameroon's 25.88 million population, have been feeling marginalized and dominated by the Francophone-dominated government in the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres since independence. The government has been discriminating against the two English-speaking regions with regards to the other regions of French expression, with the under-representation of the Anglophone Cameroonians in key ministerial positions as well as other top government positions. For example, with 67 ministerial positions, Anglophones occupy only 3 high-level ministerial post. Also the disparity in the allocation of investment projects between the Anglophone regions and the francophone is very wide and glaring as there are no cross over roads in any of the Anglophone regions. (IPSS Peace & Security Report 2020:3)

Also looking at the 2017 public investment budget Cameroon, the disparity is vast as a small francophone region like the South region will have (over 570 projects with over \$225 million) while the two Anglophone regions has (more than 500 projects with over \$76 million) for the North West Region and (over 500 projects with over \$77 million) for the South West Region. In addition, educational and judicial Policies is one of the contributing factors to the Anglophone crisis because as at 2016, statistics of magistrates in Cameroon show 1,265 francophone magistrates and only 227 Anglophone magistrates and with 514 judicial officers, 499 were Francophone and only 15 were Anglophone. This present crisis in the two English regions, is therefore, a result of longstanding frustration by Anglophone Cameroonians against real and perceived discrimination and marginalization. (IPSS Peace & Security Report 2020:4)

Consequently, the Government in its normal attitude of neglect and denial of the existence of the Anglophone problem is still mapping out various strategies to maintain the unitary state, by creating divisions among the Anglophone elite, compensating some loyalist with

prestigious positions of government never held before by an Anglophone and taking all necessary actions to suppress the real wishes and demands of the Anglophone Cameroonians. (Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997:207-208)

Conclusion

The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon is a classic example of historic domination, suppression and oppression of a people because of differences which sometimes is not of their making. That is because, slight differences in culture, language and religion, makes some group of people feel superior to others and as such, the natural edge to dominate and transform those they feel superior to, in to their own ways. This can be traced as far back to the Israelites in Egypt, to Germany under Hitler, the people of Indian administered Kashmir, Kurds in Turkey, the Tatars of Crimea in Russia etc. All what this group of people want like the Anglophones in Cameroon, is to be treated equally, to have a say and to have their voices heard as the majority group within the state. And historically, such attempts to dominate and wipeout a people's identity have been met with stiff resistance which at times ends up in violence. (2019: 110)

Also, Ewane in an article on George flyods killing, says "The images are gruesome, the pain is cruciating, the experience harrowing, a big black man, both hands chained to the back and lying prostrate, a white man kneels on his neck with hands in his pocket, statistically enjoying the groaning of his victim from underneath his chin. His supervisor comes to inspect if the big black thing is still alive. George Floyd, the African American yells for help, I can't breathe, he groans, he cries out to his mother! Mama, seven minutes forty six seconds after, he is killed, he dies. Remorselessly, the same police officer Derrick Chuyen, puts Mr. Floyd lifeless body on a stretcher with hands still chain behind. Chuyen looks satisfied, heis a Whiteman and black lives don't matter! Principalities in high places. By extrapolation, the world today is replayed with persons like Derrick Chuyen and big nations with extreme powers whose knees are on every neck of every citizen and nations helplessly crying out I can't breathe. Come to think of it, it is 150 years this week since the abolition of slave trade in the USA, yet blacks are still treated as slave in spite of such disgusting and inhumane activity. Like Floyd, they can't breathe! Principalities in high places". (Ewane2020, Cameroon calling)

Such is the case with Anglophone Cameroonians, whose desire for a respectable place at the table of power and equality in all sphere with their francophone counterparts. Because since independence there have been well calculated scheme of marginalization, domination and erosion of the linguistic, judicial and cultural heritage by their francophone counterparts. Their attempt to resist such denigrating and inhumane treatment after many years of suffering was met with heavy handed repression by the security forces, leading to loss of lives by many Anglophone Cameroonians and the resulting conflict in the two Anglophone regions. The continuous neglect and look warm attitude towards the aspirations and wishes of the Anglophone Cameroonians, is like putting your knees on their neck! They can't breathe, principalities in high places.

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