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## Occupation of Public Space Anglophone Nationalism in Cameroon

In February 2002, we were sitting in a bar in Buea, the capital of the South West Province of Anglophone Cameroon, watching the Cameroon-Mali football semi-final in the African Cup of Nations that was being relayed in Cameroon by a French television channel. The winner of the match was to play Senegal, which had already qualified for the final by defeating Nigeria. What struck us most during the match was the sudden change in attitude of our fellow viewers. Initially, they appeared to identify strongly with the national team, as was manifest in their comments on the prowess of Cameroon's "Indomitable Lions". However, as soon as the French commentator noticed that, whatever the outcome of the match, "*la finale sera une affaire francophone*", almost reflexively and in unison, they shouted: "Cameroon is not a Francophone country!" Suddenly any identification with the national team seemed to have disappeared. Even a later remark by the commentator that one of the Cameroonian players was an Anglophone failed to change the mood and restore their enjoyment of the match.

The reaction of the Anglophone spectators reminded us of Hobsbawm's observation (1990: 143) that the "imagined communities of millions seem more real than a team of eleven named people" and demonstrates the importance of identity politics in Cameroon. It also makes for an interesting comparison with the disengagement of the extreme nationalist leader Jean-Marie le Pen from the French national team due to its multicultural character: "*Je ne me reconnais pas dans cette équipe.*" However, it clearly problematises Fardon's "football argument". With specific reference to the widespread identification in Africa with national football teams, he posits the development of national feelings "in all states that have been independent for more than thirty years... The annexation of a neighbouring state, no matter how modest, would soon show the reality of "national" identities' (Fardon 1996: 94). To a large extent, the Cameroonian situation reflects Cahen's thesis (1999) that African identification with national teams is simply an expression of the habit of living together in the same republic or, even

better, of “constitutional patriotism” (Habermas) rather than of a strongly crystallised national consciousness. The imagination of a nation (B. Anderson 1983) usually requires a much longer historical process than Fardon is willing to accept—a process that state policies can only reinforce but never entirely determine. Cahen cautions that it would be an “*erreur sénégalienne*” to assume that the state would precede the nation, in the sense of “producing” or at least “preparing” the nation. In his view, the state can only serve as a midwife for *nationisme*, the agenda of an ultra-minor elite to rapidly “fabricate” the nation. This is a project that is different from nationalism and opposed to existing ethnic and national identities (Cahen 1999: 153–155). That the Cameroonian post-colonial state’s nation-building project has failed is clearly evidenced by the fact that nationalist feelings are still rife in Anglophone territory more than forty years after reunification with Francophone Cameroon.

This study argues that the entry of Anglophone nationalism into public space during political liberalisation in the 1990s has posed a severe threat to the post-colonial nation-building project. Several Anglophone associations and pressure groups emerged that have protested against Anglophone marginalisation, assimilation and exploitation by the Francophone-dominated state in the post-colonial state. They proved capable of placing the “Anglophone problem” on the national and international agenda, laying claims to self-determination and autonomy in the form first of a return to the federal state and later the creation of an independent state.

Strikingly, both Francophone scholars and politicians have been inclined to perceive Anglophone nationalism as an unexpected, recent invention (Donfack 1998; Menthong 1998). They appear to have been convinced that the post-colonial state’s imposition of a project of *nationisme* upon the existing ethnic and national identities had effectively wiped out most traces of “Anglophoneness”, or what Edwin Ardener (1967: 292) referred to as a “distinctively British Cameroonian way of life”, from the public space. This is evidenced by a recent statement from the former vice-prime minister in charge of Housing and Town Planning, Hamadou Mustapha: “*À un moment donné effectivement, on a commencé à oublier que les Anglophones étaient là; on a eu l'impression que les Anglophones s'étaient déjà francophonisés*”<sup>1</sup>.

Francophone scholars and politicians also tend to attribute the emergence of Anglophone nationalism in the public space mainly to the mobilisation efforts of a few discontented elites who were denied a place at the “dining table” during political liberalisation (Sindjoun 1995; Nkoum-Menteny 1996; Menthong 1998). Their explanation in terms of opportunist entrepreneurs in search of a political market comes close to the government position on Anglophone nationalism. Probably on the assumption that government strategies of control, notably the frequent use of state violence, divide-and-rule tactics, and the co-optation of some Anglophone elites into

1. See *Jeune Afrique Économie*, 207, 20 November 1995, p. 3.

the regime, would be effective, they claim that Anglophone nationalism will never witness an exponential growth in the public arena (Sindjoun 1995: 114).

In sharp contrast to such views, the first part of this study attempts to show that Anglophone nationalism is neither a recent invention nor a mere elitist project. It is instead the result of a long historical process of identity formation, going back as far as the beginning of colonialism when two territorial communities were created each with its own distinct cultural legacy. As Susungi (1991) aptly observed, one of its immediate consequences has been that the reunification episode was far from being the reunion of two prodigal sons who had been unjustly separated at birth, but was more like a loveless marriage arranged by the United Nations between two people who hardly knew each other. The most decisive factor in the construction of an Anglophone identity, however, has turned out to be the post-colonial nation-state project that led Anglophones to imagine Cameroon as a prison rather than as a nation.

The second part of the article describes how, in the face of persistent attempts by the Francophone-dominated state to contain the Anglophone danger and control Anglophone organisation, Anglophones resorted to less visible and controllable forms of protest in the 1990s, creating space for Anglophone identity and nationhood in national history, the arts, the international courts, in everyday life and even on the Internet. In this section, particular attention is devoted to what Billig (1995) has called “banal nationalism” — the representations and symbols of nationhood that are taken for granted such as flags, names, dates and language. The latter are often overlooked in the orthodox conceptions of nationalism that tend to concentrate on more spectacular forms such as separatist and extreme nationalist movements (Azaryahu & Kook 2002).

### The Emergence of Anglophone Nationalism in Public Space

Several authors have tried to explain the emergence and development of what has come to be called the “Anglophone problem” (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997, 2000, 2003; Eyoh 1998; Jua 2003). Most agree that its roots may be traced back as far as the partitioning, after World War One, of the erstwhile German Kamerun Protectorate (1884–1916) between the French and English victors, first as mandates under the League of Nations and later as trusts under the United Nations. As a result of this partitioning, the British acquired two narrow and non-contiguous regions in the western part of the country, bordering Nigeria. The southern part and the focus of our study was christened Southern Cameroons, and the northern part became known as Northern Cameroons<sup>2</sup>. Significantly, the British territory was

2. During the 1961 UN-organised plebiscite, the Northern Cameroons voted for integration into Nigeria. For the history of the Northern Cameroons, see, for instance, LE VINE (1964) and WELCH (1966).

much smaller than the French one, comprising only about one fifth of the total area and population of the former German colony (Mbuagbaw *et al.* 1987: 78-79). The partitioning of the territory into English and French spheres had some significant consequences for future political developments. Importantly, it laid the historical and spatial foundation for the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities in the territory. The populations in each sphere came to see themselves as distinct communities, defined by differences in language and inherited colonial traditions of education, law, public administration and worldview. Second, while French Cameroon was incorporated into the French colonial empire as a distinct administrative unit, separate from neighbouring French Equatorial Africa, the British Cameroons was administered as part of Nigeria, leading to the blatant neglect of its socio-economic development and the increasing migration of Nigerians, notably the Igbo, to the Southern Cameroons where they came to dominate the regional economy.

With the approaching independence of Nigeria in 1960, the population of the British trust territory was to decide on its political future. It soon became evident that the majority of the Southern Cameroonians would opt for the creation of an independent state (Awasom 2000; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). That their expressed wish was eventually not honoured must be attributed to two main factors. First, internal divisions among the Anglophone political elite prevented them from rallying behind the majority option in the territory. Second, and even more importantly, the United Nations refused, with the complicity of the British, to put the option of an independent Southern Cameroons state to the voters in the UN-organised plebiscite of 11 February 1961, on the grounds that the creation of another tiny state was politically undesirable (and likely to contribute to a further "Balkanisation" of Africa) and economically unviable (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). Being deprived of this preferred option, Southern Cameroonians were given what amounted to Hobson's choice, that is a "choice" they had to accept whether they liked it or not: independence by joining Nigeria or reunification with Francophone Cameroon, which had become independent in 1960 under the new name of the Republic of Cameroon. In the end, they chose the lesser of the two evils. Their vote in favour of reunification appeared to be more a rejection of continuous ties with Nigeria, which had proved to be harmful to Southern Cameroonian development, than a vote for union with Francophone Cameroon, a territory with a different cultural heritage and at the time involved in a violent civil war (Joseph 1977).

By reuniting with the former French Cameroon, the Anglophone political elite had hoped to enter into a loose federal union as a way of protecting their territory's minority status and cultural heritage (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997, 2003). Instead, it soon became evident that the Francophone political elite preferred a highly centralised, unitary state as a means of promoting national unity and economic development. While the Francophone elite

received strong support from the French during the constitutional negotiations, the Anglophone elite was virtually abandoned by the British, who deeply resented the Southern Cameroons option for reunification with Francophone Cameroon (Awasom 2000). As a result, a rumour quickly spread through the region that Charles de Gaulle looked upon the Southern Cameroons as "a small gift of the Queen of England to France" (Milne 1999: 432-448; Gaillard 1994). In the end, during the constitutional talks at Fouban in July 1961, the Francophone elite was only prepared to accept a highly centralised federation, which was regarded merely as a transitional phase to a unitary state. Such a federation demanded relatively few amendments to the 1960 constitution of the Republic of Cameroon. Interestingly, Pierre Messmer (1998: 134-135), one of the last French high commissioners in Cameroon and a close advisor of President Ahmadou Ahidjo, pointed out that he and others knew at the time that the so-called federal constitution provided merely a "sham federation", which was "safe for appearance, an annexation of West Cameroon (the new name of the former Southern Cameroons)"<sup>3</sup>.

Under the new constitution, West Cameroon lost most of the limited autonomy it had enjoyed as part of the Nigerian federation (Ardener 1967; Stark 1976). Even worse, a few months after reunification, Ahidjo created a system of regional administration in which West Cameroon was designated as one of six regions, basically ignoring the political character of the country. These regions were headed by powerful federal inspectors who, in the case of West Cameroon, in effect overshadowed the prime minister with whom they were in frequent conflict concerning jurisdiction (Stark 1976). Besides, the West Cameroon government could barely function since it had to depend entirely on subventions from the federal government that controlled the major sources of revenue. When, in 1972, Ahidjo created a unitary state in blatant disregard of constitutional provisions, there was in reality little left of the federation, except perhaps in name (Benjamin 1972). What many regarded as one of the last visible symbols of the 1961 union was removed in 1984 when Ahidjo's successor, Paul Biya, abolished the appellation "United Republic of Cameroon" and replaced it with "Republic of Cameroon", which significantly was the name of the Francophone part of the country when it became independent in 1960.

An even more decisive factor for the development of the Anglophone problem, however, was the nation-state project after reunification. For the Anglophone population, nation-building has been driven by the firm determination of the Francophone political elite to dominate the Anglophone minority in the post-colonial state and to erase the cultural and institutional foundations of Anglophone identity (Eyoh 1998). Several studies have

3. Following reunification, the Federal Republic of Cameroon consisted of the federated state of East Cameroon (former French Cameroon) and the federated state of West Cameroon (former Southern Cameroons).

shown that Anglophones have regularly been relegated to inferior positions in the national decision-making process and have been constantly underrepresented in ministerial as well as senior- and middle-level positions in the administration, the military and parastatals (Kofele-Kale 1986; Takougang & Krieger 1998). A few recent examples seem to substantiate Anglophone allegations of systematic discrimination in the recruitment for government posts. In February 2003 it was announced that there were only 57 Anglophone youths among the more than five thousand new recruits joining the police academies<sup>4</sup>. The next month records show that there were only 12 Anglophones among the 172 new recruits into the Customs Department. And, even more significantly, these Anglophones were only given junior staff positions while all the senior staff positions went to Francophones<sup>5</sup>. There is also general agreement that Anglophones have been exposed to a carefully considered policy aimed at eroding their language and institutions even though Francophone political leaders had assured their Anglophone counterparts during the constitutional talks on reunification that the inherited colonial differences in language and institutions were to be respected in the bilingual union. And, last but not least, the relative underdevelopment of the Anglophone region shows that it has not benefited sufficiently from its rich resources, particularly oil. Gradually, this created an Anglophone consciousness: the feeling of being recolonised and marginalised in all spheres of public life and thus of being second-class citizens in their own country.

While there is a general tendency among Anglophones to blame the Francophone elite for the entire Anglophone problem, it cannot be denied that Anglophone political leaders bear an important share of the responsibility for the Anglophone predicament. Apparently, when they realised that their influence within the federated state of West Cameroon was beginning to be whittled down, the federal arrangements no longer suited their designs. They started competing for Ahidjo's favours and aspiring to positions of power within the single party and the federal government and eventually within the unitary state, thus blatantly neglecting the defence of West Cameroon's autonomy and interests (Kofele-Kale 1986; Eyoh 1998).

The co-optation of the Anglophone elite into the "hegemonic alliance" (Bayart 1979) and the autocratic nature of the post-colonial regimes prevented Anglophones from openly organising in defence of their interests until the political liberalisation process in the early 1990s. The newly created Anglophone movements were then able to place the Anglophone problem on the national and international agenda<sup>6</sup>. While the Buea Declaration, issued after the historic First All Anglophone Conference (AAC I) in April

4. *The Herald*, 17 February 2003.

5. *The Herald*, 22 March 2003.

6. For the various Anglophone movements, see KONINGS & NYAMNJOH (2003).

1993, still called for a return to a two-state federation, the Biya government's persistent refusal to enter into any negotiations caused a growing radicalisation of Anglophone movements. In the so-called Bamenda Proclamation, adopted by the Second All Anglophone Conference (AAC II) held in Bamenda from 29 April to 1 May 1994, it was stipulated that "should the government either persist in its refusal to engage in meaningful constitutional talks or fail to engage in such talks *within a reasonable time*, the Anglophone leadership would proclaim the revival of the independence and sovereignty of the Anglophone territory and take all measures necessary to secure, defend and preserve the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the said country" (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: 218-220).

Following the AAC II, the Anglophone movements provocatively re-introduced the name of Southern Cameroons to refer to the Anglophone territory so as to "make it clear that our struggles are neither of an essentially linguistic character nor in defence of an alien colonial culture... but are aimed at the restoration of the autonomy of the former Southern Cameroons which has been annexed by the Republic of Cameroon"<sup>7</sup>. The umbrella organisation of all the Anglophone movements was subsequently named the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC). The SCNC leadership soon adopted a secessionist stand, striving for an independent Southern Cameroons state through peaceful negotiation with the regime, the "sensitisation" of the regional population and a diplomatic offensive. Widespread euphoria could be felt in Anglophone Cameroon when a SCNC delegation returned from a mission to the United Nations in 1995. During rallies attended by huge crowds in several Anglophone towns, the delegation displayed a large UN flag, claiming it had received it from the UN to show that the Southern Cameroons was still a UN trust territory and that independence was only a matter of time<sup>8</sup>.

From 1996 onwards, however, Anglophone movements appeared to rapidly lose their initial momentum. Two factors were mainly responsible for this unfortunate development. First, the Biya government proved capable of neutralising the Anglophone movements to a large extent by employing a number of long-standing tactics including divide-and-rule, co-opting Anglophone leaders into the regime, and severe repression. Second, there was the problem of leadership. With the resignation of the founding fathers from the leadership, the SCNC lacked competent and committed leadership.

7. SCNC press release reprinted in the *Cameroon Post*, 16-23 August 1994, p. 3.
8. The SCNC leaders alleged (i) that the proper procedures for the enactment and amendment of the federal constitution had not been followed by Ahidjo; and (ii) that Francophone Cameroon had seceded from the union in 1984 when the Biya government unilaterally changed the country's name from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon — the name of independent Francophone Cameroon prior to reunification. From this perspective, they often claimed that the Trust Territory of Southern Cameroons had never really ceased to exist or had been revived. They therefore still believed in continued UN responsibility for the Southern Cameroons. See KONINGS & NYAMNJOH (2003).

Given the leadership problem and the government's persistent reluctance to enter into any negotiations, a conflict developed within the Anglophone movements between the doves—those who continued to adhere to a negotiated separation from *La République du Cameroun*<sup>9</sup>—and the hawks—those who had come to the conclusion that the independence of Southern Cameroons would only be achieved through armed struggle. The Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) in particular opted for the latter strategy (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000).

However, it would be a grave error to assume that the Anglophone movements became fully paralysed or even defeated by divisive and repressive government tactics and their own organisational and strategic shortcomings. Of late, Anglophone struggles appear to have acquired a new impetus. On 30 December 1999, Justice Frederick Alobwede Ebong, a SCNC activist with close ties to the SCYL, took over the Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) station in Buea, proclaiming the restoration of the independence of the Ex-British Southern Cameroons. This was followed by the nomination of a provisional government and the announcement of a coat of arms, a flag and a national anthem (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003).

Significantly, owing to these and previous events, an increasing number of pro-government Anglophone and Francophone elite now acknowledge, after long years of public denial, that there is indeed an Anglophone problem. In January 1999, President Paul Biya for the first time admitted, albeit in a dismissive fashion, that such a problem existed, even if he perceived it as one created by a handful of hotheads and vandals. Still, he has not yet shown any interest in negotiating with Anglophone movements in spite of regular appeals by Anglophone, Francophone and international dignitaries to solve the Anglophone problem through dialogue<sup>10</sup>.

Faced with determined attempts by the Biya government to control Anglophone organisations and deconstruct the Anglophone identity, Anglophone nationalists have increasingly adopted less visible and less controllable strategies to place the Anglophone problem in the public space.

### Bringing Back Anglophone Identity into Historical Space

The regime and organic scholars (Ahidjo 1968; Forje 1981; Fogui 1990) have often attempted to historicise Cameroon only in terms of its present

9. Reference to the incumbent regime as the government of *La République du Cameroun*, the name adopted by Francophone Cameroon at independence, has become a key signifier in the replotting of the country's constitutional history as a progressive consolidation of the recolonisation and annexation of Anglophone Cameroon by the post-colonial Francophone-dominated state. See EYOH (1998: 264).
10. For example, during his visit to Cameroon in May 2000, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan pleaded for dialogue between the Anglophone and Francophone leaders.

mobilisation needs, in particular the construction of a national consciousness as part of the nation-building project<sup>11</sup>. They are, therefore, engaged in an impressive dose of historical amnesia—willed acts of selective remembrance of the past so as to erase Anglophone identity and heritage from national history. Anglophone nationalist leaders and scholars, in turn, have quickly recognised the importance of rediscovering Anglophone history as an invaluable political resource in combating the regime and raising the consciousness of the Anglophone population. They have therefore attempted to bring back Anglophone identity into the historical space, strongly contesting some of the myths created by the regime and organic scholars. We have only room here for a few examples.

One myth is that "Cameroon has always been one and no more"<sup>12</sup>. In creating this myth, the regime and organic scholars attempt to dismiss the role of the colonial state in "inventing" Cameroon itself and in creating two distinct communities on Cameroonian territory. Unlike Ardener (1967), they are arguing that Cameroon was already in existence before colonial rule and that colonialism only fostered a rupture in the pre-colonial conviviality and cordiality traditions that were "determining ancestral values". Consequently, Anglophones should "transcend historical barriers" and return to the original situation in which all people in Cameroon lived together amicably and peacefully (Nkoum-Me-Ntseny 1996). Anglophone nationalists have instead constantly argued that the colonial state was far more important than the (largely mythical) pre-colonial state in mapping out the historical trajectory of the post-colonial state (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003).

A second myth is that reunification signified a long-awaited reunion of people separated for many years by arbitrarily imposed colonial borders and thus was warm-heartedly and freely embraced by both parties (Donfack 1998: 35). Anglophone nationalists have instead provided sufficient evidence that the people in both territories were reluctant to reunite. Not only had the two communities gone through two completely different colonial experiences prior to reunification but they had also lived longer apart than together in a body politic. The idea of reunification, which had been mainly propagated by the radical nationalist party in Francophone Cameroon, the *Union des populations du Cameroun* (UPC), and Francophone immigrants

11. MONGA (1996: 89) noted that the Council of Higher Education and the National Council on Cultural Affairs in Cameroon stipulated that the role of the intellectual was to contribute in a concrete way to the formation of a national consciousness.
12. This claim was once again made by the Minister of Defence, Ahmadou Ali, in his address to the National Assembly in April 2000. See *The Herald*, 7 April 2000, p. 3. Recently, a renowned Cameroonian political scientist and member of cabinet, Elvis Ngolle Ngolle, argued in *The Post* (22 January 2001) that "Cameroon came into existence before the colonial master split us into two. Thank God, in 1961, we came together again because what God has put together, man was not supposed to put asunder". Though the concepts of nation and state are confounded in this argument, it has good political purchase among those who argue that Cameroon predated the colonial state.

in Anglophone Cameroon (Joseph 1977; Awasom 2000), had for a long time remained a mere slogan in Anglophone Cameroon and had simply been rejected by the French colonial administration and the majority of the Francophone political elite. Many Anglophones did eventually vote for reunification but only after they had been forced by external forces to abandon their preferred option of creating an independent state. The idea of unification was not debated in Francophone governmental circles until February 1958 when the French High Commissioner, Jean Ramadier, assured Alcam, the territory's parliament, of "independence as well as the union of the two Cameroons"—most probably a tactical strategy to appropriate the cherished slogans of the UPC rebels and deprive them of their ideological platform. His caution that these issues fell within the reserved competence of the French government was superfluous because Anglophone Cameroon was *terra incognita* to the parliamentarians. Even when Ahmadou Ahidjo replaced André-Marie Mbida as prime minister in the course of that year, reunification was still seen as "*un ajout du haut commissaire*" (Gaillard 1994: 84-89). Even on the eve of the UN-organised plebiscite in Anglophone Cameroon in February 1961, reunification remained low on Ahidjo's list of political preferences which, according to a United States intelligence report, were as follows: (i) to lose in both the Southern and Northern Cameroons; (ii) to win in the Northern Cameroons where his ethnic and religious brothers, the Fulbe Muslims, were in power, and to lose in the Southern Cameroons ruled by an elite with close ethnic ties to his opponents in the southwestern part of Francophone Cameroon; (iii) to win in both regions; or (iv) to win in the Southern Cameroons and lose in the Northern Cameroons<sup>13</sup>. This shows that Ahidjo, whose power position was still weak in Francophone Cameroon in the time preceding reunification, was more concerned with reinforcing his electoral base than with reunification *per se* (Awasom 2000; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). He did not want to upset the current situation and thereby cause a shift in power relations.

A third myth is that the 1961 Foumban Conference was a historic event where estranged brothers mutually agreed upon a federal constitution for a reunified Cameroon. However, for Anglophone nationalists, the conference was an occasion where the Francophone majority used its superior bargaining strength to control negotiations and enforce a form of federation far below Anglophone expectations. Lack of respect by Francophones for even the minimal "consensus" arrived at in Foumban has been traumatic for Anglophones and has come to play an essential role in their collective identity and psychopathology.

A fourth myth is that the unitary state was the outcome of the massive vote by the Cameroonian people as voluntarily expressed in the 1972 referendum. Anglophone nationalists have instead pointed out that, given growing Anglophone disillusionment with the union, the referendum results were

13. us State Department, *Intelligence Report*, 8423, 10 March 1961.

more likely a manifestation of the regime's autocratic nature than of the Anglophone population's support. In other words, fear prevented Anglophones from expressing their objective interests. The ballot box was far from secret, election results were fixed beforehand, and it was neither politically wise nor politically safe to hold and express views different from those of the president, let alone oppose in word or deed any of his plans or actions. In 1991, Solomon Tandeng Muna, who was prime minister of the federated state of West Cameroon and vice-president of the federal republic at the time of the referendum, admitted in a radio interview that he had not dared to reveal to Ahidjo the true feelings of Anglophones about the referendum because it would have been tantamount to signing his own death warrant (Boh & Ofegbe 1991: 16).

Strikingly, Anglophone nationalists have also been deeply concerned with naming and the removal of historical documents by the government. Although such issues may initially appear somewhat "banal", they turn out to be closely connected with the symbolic construction and preservation of Anglophone identity and heritage.

Anglophone nationalists refuse to recognise the government's designation of 20 May, the date of the inauguration of the unitary state in 1972, as the country's National Day. Since the early 1990s, they have continued to boycott celebrations, declaring it a "Day of Mourning" and a "Day of Shame". They also indict the regime for declaring 11 February, the day of the 1961 plebiscite, as Youth Day. They see the persistent failure of the government to highlight the historical significance of this day as a conscious attempt to reconfigure the nation's history. They have thus called upon the Anglophone population to mark 11 February as the "Day of the Plebiscite" and 1 October as the "Day of Independence" as alternative days of national celebration. On these days, Anglophone activists have frequently attempted to hoist the federation, the United Nations or independent Southern Cameroons flags—attempts that were often brutally challenged by the security forces.

Anglophones have also continuously resisted government attempts to change the historical names of localities in their territory. They have particularly opposed the change of name of Victoria, a coastal town named after Queen Victoria (Courade 1976), into Limbe, the name of a river that flows through the town. This renaming of localities in Anglophone Cameroon has often been presented as a government attempt to promote what Mobutu has referred to in Zaire as "*authenticité*". Government failure to implement a similar policy in Francophone Cameroon is clear proof that its avowed goal was to erase the Anglophone identity and history<sup>14</sup>. Anglophone nationalists have re-introduced the name of Victoria during political liberalisation. Even Anglophones who tend to support the government's

14. It is quite revealing that memories of French colonisation are carefully preserved, manifest in names like Avenue Général de Gaulle in Douala.

project of *nationisme* seem to be ambivalent in their attitude towards renaming. While they usually attempt to erase the name Victoria from the public space, they sometimes appear to align with the "subversives" by respecting the name of the local football club, Victoria United, and maintaining the name of their own local college network, the Victoria Old Boys' Association (VOBA).

Whatever the motivation, the removal of certain documents by the central government from the archives in Buea was also seen by Anglophones as an attempt to erase the institutional memory of Anglophone Cameroon. Anglophone perception was strengthened by the belief that the archives were a repository for documents that could give the regional population an insight into what really transpired before, during and after the Founban Conference. It was even rumoured that one of these documents envisaged secession should Anglophones be discontent with the outcome of the conference after a stipulated period of time. Remarkably, in the wake of the death in 1999 of John Ngu Foncha, the Anglophone architect of reunification, another rumour rapidly spread in Anglophone Cameroon that this particular document, almost the holy grail of Anglophone nationalism, which the government wanted to remove from the Buea archives, had actually been in the custody of Foncha after reunification. He was said to have handed it over to Augustine Ngom Jua, his successor as prime minister in 1965. Following Jua's dismissal in 1967, it would have been recovered from his office, sealed, and returned to Foncha who had hidden it in a relative's grave in the Mankon Catholic cemetery in Bamenda. Ambassador (retired) Henry Fossung, a leader of one of the SCNC factions, claimed that Foncha had given it to him shortly before his death. Arguably, this is a variant of "grave digging" by a leader in quest of legitimacy. However, it acquires some respectability when it is placed in the perspective of a deep Anglophone concern with its past and identity.

#### Creating Space for Anglophone Identity in Arts

Art forms, as Karin Barber (1987: 4) has observed, "do not merely reflect an already constituted consciousness, giving us a window to something already fully present, they are themselves important means through which consciousness is articulated and communicated". Confronted with severe state repression, Anglophone nationalists have resorted to the arts to create public space for the Anglophone problem and raise Anglophone consciousness and action. In this section, we focus on Anglophone dramatists and performers who have played a major role in this respect (Lyonga *et al.* 1993; Ako 2001).

Among the growing number of Anglophone playwrights<sup>15</sup>, two in particular have identified with the Anglophone struggles: Bate Besong and Epie

15. For a discussion of the role of Anglophone writers and dramatists in the post-reunification Cameroonian literature, see, for instance, LYONGA *et al.* (1993).

Ngome. Bate Besong, Anglophone Cameroon's most versatile and charismatic playwright and poet, has always maintained that the Anglophone creative writer "must arouse his Anglophone constituency from the apathy and despair into which it has 'sunk' and transform his writing into 'hand grenades' to be used against Francophone oppressors" (Ngwane 1993: 35). A cursory overview of his own writing leaves one in no doubt that Bate Besong has lived up to his own prescriptions. His *Beasts of No Nation* (1990) is a bitter indictment of the Francophone exploitation of the Anglophones who are reduced to "night soilmen" (a metaphor for slavery). Throughout the play, the Francophones are presented as reckless destroyers of the nation because of their unbridled appetites and moral insensitivity. They are "ravenous wolves" or "roaring lions" seeking to devour all that crosses their path. They are "locusts" who "eat tons of green". They are "thieves of no nation" who belong to a secret cult of "greed, grab and graft". The exploited "Anglos", however, are going to demand their full civil rights or, what the dramatist calls, their "identification papers". The narrator, a kind of priest who will lead the down-trodden Anglos to the New Jerusalem, makes it clear that they will have their freedom—perhaps a nation of their own—or death. And the leitmotiv that runs through the play is: "A hero goes to war to die" (Ako 2001).

For his part, Epie Ngome in *What God Has Put Asunder* (1992) uses an extended marriage metaphor to denounce the union between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon and the unitary state. It is the story of Weka, a child brought up in an orphanage run by Reverend Gordon and Sister Sabeth. When Weka reaches marriageable age, two suitors ask for her hand in marriage. One is Miché Garba and the other Emeka, who grew up in the orphanage with Weka. Despite Emeka's solid claims over Weka as a childhood friend, Garba has his way although Weka accepts him reluctantly. Weka soon discovers that Garba is no good: he maltreats and neglects her and cannot tolerate her questioning attitude. He exploits the rich cocoa farms left by her father and squanders the money on his concubines. When she can stand him no longer, Weka escapes with her children to her father's compound to rebuild his dilapidated house and their shattered lives. Garba pursues her there, threatening to forcefully take them back to his house.

Clearly, the marriage metaphor relates to the political union between Anglophone Cameroon and its Francophone counterpart, with Weka standing for the former West Cameroon, Emeka for Nigeria, and Garba for *La République du Cameroun*. Weka's parents represent the British government that relinquished responsibility over the Southern Cameroons. Reverend Gordon and the orphanage stand for the United Nations trusteeship mandate over Southern Cameroons. Garba's neglectful but exploitative attitude towards Weka represents the attitude of the Francophone leadership towards Anglophone Cameroon, behaviour that has come to represent the central grievance in what Anglophones have identified as the Anglophone problem in Cameroon (Ambanasom 1996: 218-222). The major suffering inflicted

by Miché Garba on Weka symbolises the creation of the unitary state in 1972:

“Once the festivities were over, he brought a fleet of trucks and bundled all my children and me out of our house. His drivers gathered all our staff trampling and damaging many things and so he forced me to settle in with him. Since then, he has been forcing my children to learn his own mother tongue and to forget mine with which they grew up; I must abide by the customs of his clan, not mine, and...in short he has simply been breathing down my neck since then” (Ngome 1992: 53).

Both playwrights have contributed in no small way to the overall education of Anglophones, which will only be achieved, as Bate Besong highlights in his *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* (1991), when Anglophones “will break the chains that hold them in bondage” and “choose the side of the long suffering people of Agidigi (Anglophone Cameroon)”.

Anglophone plays by these and other writers have been made accessible to ordinary Cameroonians by various theatre groups including the Yaoundé Theater Troupe and the Flame Players (Doho 1996). They have not only played in Yaoundé and other Francophone towns, but have also toured both Anglophone provinces and some groups have even performed in Europe. Plays staged by the Mountain Mourners in Germany have contributed inordinately to bringing the Anglophone plight to international attention.

### Placing Anglophone Identity in Virtual Space

Following political liberalisation, the Anglophone private press served for some time as the standard bearer of Anglophone nationalism (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000). Unsurprisingly, the government quickly sought to muzzle it as part of its strategy to erase Anglophone identity from public space. In reaction, “new creoles” have emerged among Anglophone nationalists—men who have access to virtual space, enabling them to contest the state’s power of policing speech (J. Anderson 1995). The Anglophone youth in the diaspora, notably in the United States, have underscored the importance of the Internet. The SCNC-North America (NA) has actually played a vanguard role in creating websites on the Internet<sup>16</sup>. The name of the main site was changed<sup>17</sup> in July 2001 as “part of its ongoing strategy to unite the forces of Southern Cameroons’ liberation in the diaspora and on the home front”, providing them as well as visitors with “a one-stop-source to learn and update themselves about Southern Cameroons, one of the only African countries still under colonialism and seeking for ways to effect its independence”<sup>18</sup>. It is considered to be the largest Cameroonian

16. <http://www.southerncameroons.org> or [scncforum@yahoo.groups.com](mailto:scncforum@yahoo.groups.com).

17. It was changed to <http://www.yahoo.groups.com/group/BSCNation>.

18. Cited in <http://www.yahoo.groups.com/group/BSCNation/messages/975> and 5977.

site, receiving, at its peak, more than 500 hits a day. It registered more than 700 members in its first month of existence<sup>19</sup>.

Since its members were regularly engaged in ideological and strategic warfare, the management of the site decided to introduce gate keeping, seeking to orient discussions towards the achievement of the independence of Southern Cameroons. To this end, it became more and more preoccupied with fostering political correctness, going to the extent of “unsubscribing” members with alternative views.

The site’s new policy is to raise Anglophone consciousness and to promote the visibility of the Anglophone cause inside and outside Cameroon. One of its most successful activities has been the posting of declassified documents from the British archives, which provide ample evidence of the alleged British betrayal of the Southern Cameroons in the pre-reunification era. It aimed to make the Cameroonian and British people aware of the refusal of the British government to protect Southern Cameroonian interests against the Ahidjo regime supported by the French and to solicit their support for the renewed struggle for the independence of Southern Cameroons.

Interestingly, the raising of consciousness is often combined with action. For example, the site reported extensively on what happened during and after the SCNC-organised celebrations of “Independence Day” on 1 October 2001, thus frustrating the government’s attempts to control information to the outside world and cover up certain activities. Despite government orders banning all demonstrations throughout the Anglophone region, a considerable number of SCNC activists decided to march in the North West Province of Anglophone Cameroon on that day, defying the massive police and army presence. At Kumbo, five peaceful demonstrators were killed and many more were injured. Over 200 SCNC activists were arrested in Bamenda and elsewhere, including the new SCNC leaders. Significantly, when Anglophone magistrates eventually ordered the release of the detainees, court orders were flouted by the regime. The BSCNation site sent this information to other websites as a form of e-protest. Pressure for the release of the detainees was reinforced by its management’s organisation of a protest march on the Cameroon Embassy in Washington. This combination of virtual and real modes of protest eventually caused the Cameroonian government to release the activists.

Another example of cooperation between the site management and the SCYL in May 2002 was a spectacular action called “Operation Stamp Your Identity”. Eighteen thousand bumper stickers calling for the creation of a federal republic in Anglophone Cameroon were printed in the United States and sent to Anglophone Cameroon. They were symbolically flagged in Anglophone towns on 20 May 2002, the day that Cameroon celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the unitary state.

19. Interview with the moderator on 23 May 2002.



These examples show how cooperation between the new creoles and activists has proved to be successful in advancing the Anglophone cause and raising the consciousness of the national and international community.

### Expansion of Anglophone Identity into Legal Space

Anglophone nationalism still lacks international recognition. This has prevented Anglophone nationalists from presenting their case before international courts. Several attempts to sue Britain in British courts for its "treacherous" role during the decolonisation process have been to no avail. However, the decision of the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments to submit their dispute over the oil-rich peninsula of Bakassi to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague for adjudication in 1994 offered Anglophone nationalists an opportunity to access legal space (Weiss 1996). They claimed that Bakassi was neither a part of Cameroon nor of Nigeria but instead belonged to the Southern Cameroons.

In 2001, the Ex-British Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration created a new body, the Southern Cameroons People's Organisation (SCAPO), for the specific purpose of pursuing legal avenues to address "the claims of the peoples of Southern Cameroons to self-determination and independence from *La République du Cameroun*". SCAPO, led by the SCNC chairman and chancellor of the provisional administration Dr Martin Luma, and Dr Kevin Gumne, rapidly filed a lawsuit against the Nigerian government in the Federal High Court in Abuja "for the purpose of obtaining judicial relief to restrain the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from treating or continuing to treat or regard the Southern Cameroons or the people of that territory as an integral part of *La République du Cameroun*"<sup>20</sup>. SCAPO had two reasons for taking Nigeria to court in its legal battles for the recognition of an independent Southern Cameroons state. First, the trust territory of Southern Cameroons had been administered by Britain as an integral part of Nigeria. Consequently, SCAPO was inclined to regard Nigeria as a co-conspirator with Britain in the process that led to the annexation of the Southern Cameroons by *La République du Cameroun*. Second, Nigeria had ratified the OAU Banjul Charter of Human Rights that lays down in Article 20 the right of all colonised or oppressed people to free themselves from the bonds of domination by resorting to any means recognised by the international community.

In the end, SCAPO scored a landmark victory when, in March 2002, the Nigerian Federal High Court ruled that "the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be compelled to place before the ICJ and the UN General Assembly and ensure diligent persecution to the conclusion the claims of the peoples

20. Cited in <http://yahoo.groups.com/group/BSCNation/message/6830>.

of Southern Cameroons to self-determination and their declaration of independence". It also placed a perpetual injunction, restraining "the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from treating the Southern Cameroons and all the peoples of the territory as an integral part of *La République du Cameroun*"<sup>21</sup>.

This ruling may pave the way for international recognition of the Anglophone struggle for the creation of an independent state. Yet, it cannot be overlooked that Nigeria had an interest in the court's ruling if one takes into account the ongoing hearings in the Bakassi case at the ICJ. This was clearly recognised by the Nigerian Federal High Court when it ordered the Nigerian government to submit to the ICJ the question of whether it is the Southern Cameroons and not *La République du Cameroun* that ought to share a maritime boundary with the Federal Republic of Nigeria?

### Experiencing Anglophone Identity in Everyday Space

Anglophones are daily reminded of their national identity and homeland in language, in individual and collective experiences, and in stereotyping. They tend to perceive themselves as different from Francophones and are equally categorised and treated as "others" by Francophones, manifest already in the constant use of "we" and "they" in everyday speech for designating or delineating each other's homeland (Billig 1995: 93-95). Undoubtedly, feelings of being different tend to raise the individual and collective consciousness of Anglophones in everyday space and to create open or secret support for Anglophone movements.

Given the widespread belief in the country that Anglophones have become the greatest danger to the regime's nation-building project and even to the regime itself during political liberalisation, it is not surprising that the Francophone political elites are inclined to exclude them from the homeland and incite the Francophone population against them. The Lord Mayor of Yaoundé, Emah Basile, referred to Anglophones as "enemies in the house". As such, they should either voluntarily "go across our borders" as Mbombo Njoya, the former minister of territorial administration and present Sultan of Foumban, once remarked or be chased away (Ngniman 1993: 51). Francophones tend to refer to Anglophones as "Anglo-fools", Biafrans or Nigerians. By using the term Biafran, they are expressing their strong belief that Anglophones are inclined to be secessionists. By using the term Nigerian, they point to the colonial link between the Southern Cameroons and Nigeria. We recently heard the story that when told by a visitor that he hailed from Kumba, the economic capital of the South West Province in Anglophone Cameroon, the Cameroonian Ambassador to Belgium, Isabelle

21. *West Africa*, 31 March 2002, p. 19.

Bassong, exclaimed: "*Oh, Kumba, donc vous êtes moitié Nigérien et moitié Camerounais.*"

Even Anglophones who speak impeccable French and have lived in Francophone Cameroon for a long time are constantly reminded of the fact that they are different. A young, well-educated Anglophone woman interviewed by Eyoh (1998: 263) expressed her frustration with the situation as follows:

"No matter how bilingual you are, if you enter an office and demand something in French, because of your accent, the messenger may announce your arrival simply as 'une Anglo' or respond in a manner to mock. You know that stereotypes are a normal part of life in Cameroon and the world over. But the constant reminder that as an Anglophone you are different creates the impression that we are second-class citizens. That is what irritates Anglophone elites. You can imagine the frustration of older and less educated Anglophones who have to deal with a bureaucracy which operates mostly in French and state officials who are so rude to the people they are supposed to serve."

In a column of a well-known Cameroonian paper, *Le Messager*, a French journalist reports the experience of a young Anglophone who had just returned to Cameroon after a five-year stay in South Africa and was made to feel like a stranger in his own so-called bilingual country. When he came to pay in a large bakery in Douala, he received a cool reception from one of the Francophone cashiers: "What do you want? Stop speaking English. We don't speak that language here. Return to where you come from, John Fru Ndi"<sup>22</sup>.

Anglophone identity and consciousness are raised by almost daily confrontations with overbearing Francophone government officials and oppressive Francophone gendarmes and structures both in the Francophone region and in their own region. Francophone prefects and sub-prefects posted in Anglophone Cameroon often do not speak a word of English and tend to behave like *chefs de terre* or part of *commandement* (Mbembe 2001: 106-117), relegating, just as in the colonial era, the Anglophone population to the position of subjects rather than citizens (Mamdani 1996). Moreover, Anglophone "subversives" are regularly tried in Francophone rather than in Anglophone courts and are subjected to different treatment in Francophone cells than Francophone prisoners. Following a conflict over a love affair between a villager and a Francophone gendarme officer in the North West Province of Anglophone Cameroon, he and several other villagers were arrested by gendarmes and subsequently charged with being SCNC activists. In clear violation of Cameroon's Penal Code, they were neither imprisoned on Anglophone territory where the arrests had taken place nor tried under

22. John Fru Ndi is the charismatic Anglophone founder and chairman of the largest opposition party in Cameroon, the Social Democratic Front (SDF). See *Le Messager*, 30 November 2001, p. 6.

common law. They were instead transferred to a prison in Bafoussam, a town in Francophone Cameroon. The gendarmes told them: "You will be judged in Bafoussam. You say you hate France and anything French, but you have no choice." They were instantly and provocatively reminded of their otherness in prison when the Francophone authorities told them that "Anglophones can never receive the same treatment as Francophones, even in hell" (Jua 2003: 103).

Unsurprisingly, stereotypes are commonplace in Cameroon to mark the assumed differences in values and attitudes between Anglophones and Francophones. In an article on Francophone "Anglophobia", Ngome (1993: 28) provided some striking examples of such stereotyping:

"Anglophones see Francophones as fundamentally fraudulent, superficial and given to bending rules: cheating of exams, jumping queues, rigging elections and so on... The Francophones are irked by what they see as the Anglophone air of self-righteousness and intellectual superiority."

In his pamphlet *The Path to Social Justice*, Ngam Chia (1990: 2) stresses the Francophone "neo-colonial" mentality that compares most unfavourably with Anglophone independent-mindedness:

"The Francophone psycho-social background is neo-colonised and as such one must not expect them to be as independent-minded as the Anglophones. For instance, Anglophones see themselves as people who can live without depending on Britain and France for aid, but the Francophones do not even believe that they can run a simple administration in the civil service without the so-called expert direction from France. To blame them, nevertheless, is to condemn the deep French cultural alienation of Francophone Cameroon."

Anglophone leaders have made use of such stereotypes to rally the Anglophone population behind them in their pursuit of autonomy, either in the form of a return to the federal state or outright secession. For example, the 1993 Buea Declaration tended to blame the "wicked" Francophones as a whole for the plight of the "poor" Anglophones, and compared both in rather idealised terms: the former, in full solidarity, were seen to agree among themselves about oppressing the latter who, by their very nature, were considered peace-loving, open to dialogue, and committed to freedom (All Anglophone Conference 1993: 29-30). Of course, such a demagogic approach—which is commonplace in ethno-regional discourse—seems to highlight the seemingly insurmountable gap between Anglophones and Francophones that allegedly prevents both parties from living together peacefully in the union. This approach may be efficient in mobilising Anglophones but has hardly helped their struggles against their real enemy, the Francophone-dominated unitary state that has allies and opponents in all parts of the country. In addition, it tends to project a frozen and geographically restricted idea of being Anglophone, denies the existence of various

ethnic links between Francophones and Anglophones, and creates serious obstacles to any Francophone sympathy for the Anglophone cause (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003).

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In this study, it has been argued that the entry of Anglophone nationalism into the public space during political liberalisation has posed a major challenge to the post-colonial state's nation-building project. More than anything else, it has questioned whether Cameroon has indeed progressed from a state of national unity to one of national integration (Biya 1987). Little wonder that it has formed the start of a vehement collision course with the government in power whose head, Paul Biya, has repeatedly remarked "*Le Cameroun sera uni ou ne sera pas*" ("Cameroon is one and must remain united").

One has, however, to be extremely careful when claiming that Anglophone nationalism, which has been crucial to the course of democratisation in Cameroon and has placed Anglophones at the centre of the political debate, is a recent invention by some disgruntled Anglophone elites. Ample evidence has instead been provided here to show that Anglophone nationalism is, in fact, the result of a long process of Anglophone identity formation and is currently feeding on the multiple grievances of Anglophones in the post-reunification era.

Although Anglophone resistance has been a permanent feature of Cameroon's post-colonial biography (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003), it was not until political liberalisation that the Anglophone elite started mobilising and organising the regional population. Capitalising on traumatic Anglophone experiences of "otherness" and second-class citizenship in the Francophone-dominated post-colonial state, they began to lay claims to autonomy and self-determination, in the form first of a return to a federal state and later in the creation of an independent state. Confronted with persistent government attempts to deconstruct Anglophone identity and to suppress Anglophone organisation, Anglophone nationalists have increasingly resorted to less obtrusive forms of resistance, creating public space for Anglophone identity and nationhood in the historical, artistic, virtual, legal and everyday domains.

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## ABSTRACT

The article examines the historical process leading to the emergence of Anglophone nationalism in public space during the current liberalisation process in Cameroon. Anglophone nationalism poses a severe threat to the post-colonial state's nation-building project that has been driven by the firm determination of the Francophone political elite to dominate the Anglophone minority and to erase the cultural and

institutional foundations of Anglophone identity. Persistent attempts by the Franco-phone-dominated state to control the newly created Anglophone movements have made Anglophone nationalists resort to less obtrusive forms of resistance, creating public space for an Anglophone identity and nationhood in historical, artistic, virtual, legal and everyday domains.

## RÉSUMÉ

*Occupation de l'espace public. Le nationalisme anglophone au Cameroun.* — Cet article examine le processus historique qui a abouti à l'émergence d'un nationalisme anglophone dans l'espace public au cours du processus actuel de libéralisation au Cameroun. Le nationalisme anglophone représente une sérieuse menace pour le projet de construction de la nation entrepris par l'État post-colonial, projet motivé par la ferme résolution de l'élite politique francophone de dominer la minorité anglophone et d'effacer les fondements culturels et institutionnels de l'identité anglophone. Les tentatives récurrentes de l'État, dominé par des francophones, visant à contrôler les mouvements anglophones récemment créés ont incité les nationalistes anglophones à recourir à des formes de résistance moins ostentatoires en créant un espace public pour une identité et un nationalisme anglophones dans les domaines historique, artistique, virtuel, légal et dans la vie de tous les jours.

Keywords/Mots-clés: Cameroon, nation-building, Anglophone identity, Anglophone nationalism, public space/Cameroun, construction de la nation, identité anglophone, nationalisme anglophone, espace public.