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Review

Investigating the origin, elements and motivations of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon

Clotilde Asangna

Department of Healthcare Administration, Faculty of Healthcare Management, Franklin University, Ohio, USA.

Over the last five decades, the status of Anglophones in Cameroon as marginalized has surfaced in political and religious spaces, illustrating the politics of oppression that has persisted since the amalgamation of East and West Cameroon into the United Republic of Cameroon on May 20, 1972. Anglophone marginalization operates at various levels in the unitary state, with varying impacts. The purpose of this study is to depict how decades of marginalization have eventually resulted in incessant civilian unrest in a country that was once deemed "peaceful." This study adopts the narrative model and maintains that the effective method of sustaining the status quo has been to control the conduct of Anglophone Cameroonians by suppressing Anglophone identity in a way that ensures the survival of the politics of oppression existing within the unitary state.

Key words: Democratization, cultural and linguistic identity, self-determination, regional conflict, decentralization.

INTRODUCTION

The year 1972 marked a pivotal moment in the democratic governance and political advancement of Cameroon, signifying a period of constitutional, legislative, political, and institutional change. It was the year Cameroon transitioned from a federal system of government to a unitary state (Stark, 1976). The unitary state merged East and West Cameroon under one centralized government, with Yaoundé as the nation's capital. These developments were purportedly intended, among other things, to introduce a paradigm shift from a colonial heritage of autocracy to a contextualized, progressive system of democratic governance (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997). The creation of the unitary system of government was projected by President Ahidjo as the ultimate solution to foster socio-economic growth and

prevent administrative disarray. However, reunification led to an extreme centralization of political power in East Cameroon and subsequent authoritarianism, at the expense of liberal democracy. First, it endorsed the design of an authoritarian social contract in which the head of state extended welfare and bribes, and in exchange, the denizens settled for a reduced role in politics. Second, the unitary state evaded the necessity to build administrative capacity because of the absence of accountability, financial transparency and legal limits on state officials. Besides the adoption of multiparty politics in 1990, the unitary state rendered little overall growth for the former British territory of Cameroon (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003).

Why then has the state not returned to the federal

system of government seeing as the unitary state has failed to live up to its promises of greatness through unity? This study argues that the effective method of enabling the prevailing order has been to control the conduct of West Cameroon by suppressing Anglophone identity in a way that sustains the status quo; hence, the survival of the politics of oppression. Having been faced with endless roadblocks in the quest for federalism, the Anglophone community appears to be adopting a more radical stance and pushing for complete secession/independence from East Cameroon.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout the years, scholars of African politics and history have advanced theories that define nation states. However, such theories have only multiplied for countries that have undergone civil wars like Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Sudan. According to Collier (2000) conflicts are more likely to be perpetuated because of the lack of suitable economic opportunities[1]. Then, there are other scholars who argue that post-independent governments under African rulers were inherited from the colonial masters. This argument suggests that the colonial legacy that was passed down to the African elites was porous and incomplete (Rodney, 1972). For instance, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) until 1907 was governed as King Leopold's personal property (Meredith, 2005; Shillington, 1989). As the argument goes, after the DRC gained independence, President Mobutu Sese Seko continued to rule the state just like his Belgian predecessor (Young, 1986).

There are hardly any works of such eminent scholars which discuss the question of the "peaceful" states in Africa unless we take claims by Huntington (1991) about democratization into account. Huntington (1991) uses GNP statistics and the correlation between economy and democracy to define transitioning states. However, even Huntington's analyses are not relevant to Cameroon because the GNP has either declined or remained unchanged for decades. Changes in the economy of the transitioning nation are important for the democratization process because economic development (among other variables) brings about and sustains democracy. In this light, Przeworki et al. (2000) argues that the probabilities of transitions change depending on developmental levels. Therefore, liberalism (multi-partism and free press) only marked the first stage of the democratic transition for Cameroon.

Also, there is Johan Galtung's neo-Marxist concept of dependence or structural theory of imperialism. For Galtung (1972), the international system consists of center nations (industrial West) and periphery nations.

Per this model, the periphery nations supply "value" to the center nations. This dominance/dependence relationship fosters repression and disharmony of interest in periphery states.

Furthermore, neo-Marxist concepts maintain that the source of economic stagnation and repression in the "third" world is in exogenous factors, the product of capitalism. In recent years, exogenous accounts for underdevelopment and marginalization, like Rodney's (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,* have lost much of their attraction because several former Asian colonies have demonstrated that identity formation/ preservation coupled with a vibrant market economy support democratic institutions. Thus, exogenous accounts for slow growth and marginalization are no longer popular.

Other authors have looked for answers pertaining to the failure of post-colonial states in the extraction and distribution of raw material. According to Vandewalle (1998) distributive states are prone to economic collapse.[2] Also, Holm and Sorensen (1995) maintain that there are core and periphery states. But unlike Galtung (1972), do not blame exogenous factors for the status of the marginalized and failing states. However, per Holm and Sorensen (1995), periphery states are that way due to pre-modern political systems. Holm and Sorensen (1995) concept only account for less than half of the problem in Cameroon. These scholars do not analyze the role of identity (or lack thereof) as an endogenous factor in the underdevelopment of the "third' world. In its holistic form, the literature on "third" state politics does not address the idea that identity conditions the survival of the status quo in post independent states. Opposed to interacting with values like premodernity, performance dilemma/corruption, neocolonialism and poverty, this study aims to fill the literary gap.

Scholars of Cameroon's History and politics like Eyoh (1998); Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997, 2003); Achankeng (2015); Ngoh (1979); Takougang (1998); Krieger (2008) etc., have all covered the Anglophone problem extensively. Some of these scholars like Ngoh (1979) discussed the History of Cameroon, from before the German colonial era until independence. While others like Achankeng (2015) investigate the "false negotiations" at the Foumban constitutional conference of 1961 that set in motion the path for future Anglophone manipulation by the Francophone-led government. He also argues that the current nationalist conflict in British Southern Cameroons is a direct result of the political developments following the Foumban Conference. Meanwhile, Le Vine (1964) and Benjamin (1972) hold that the Anglophone problem is a direct result of the partition of German Kamerun between the British and the French.

Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997) do a deep dive into the

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[1] Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue in a later study that the risk of civil war outbreak is most likely when the following conditions are present: low GDP per capita, large diaspora, low growth rate and a rising population.

[2] Distributive states are "states that do not rely on local extraction of revenue and that spend inflows of capital generated by commodity sales as their primary economic activity" (Vandewalle 1998, p. 7).

intricacies of the Anglophone problem. In so doing, they examine the socio-economic and political factors and implications of the crisis. Furthermore, Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003) examine the deconstruction of Anglophone identity by the Biya government by means of adopted colonial policy such as divide and rule tactics.

Similarly, Eyoh (1998) discusses the effect of ethnonationalism in sustaining the Anglophone crisis. Ethnonational identities play a fundamental role in influencing the 'us versus them' dichotomy that has now sustained the political struggles. In his analysis of the Anglophone minority in Quebec, Stevenson (1999) also draws attention to the role of ethnonationalism and argues that a new sense of Anglophone identity was born out of conflicts with the Francophones. Despite this rich and seemingly well-rounded research, none of these scholars discuss why and how Anglophone identity is a threat to the Francophone-led government and why the latter seeks to suppress it.

Since the 2016 uprisings, Cameroon has witnessed a profound transformation of its socio-political structure, with substantial economic changes on society. As the current state of events remains fluid, comprehending the new Cameroonian reality and political economy is burdened with hurdles and uncertainty. In its current state, Cameroon is unstable and divisive: political fragmentation seems to be the dominant dynamic based on differences of opinion, loyalties, interests and identities. The coercive power and manipulation of the state can suffice for socio-political marginalization of an entire group within a nation-state. The Anglophone society has come to see itself within the governing structure as inferior and powerless, hence not deserving of increased political participation and developmental resources. In addition, the unitary state continually exploits West Cameroon and pits the elites of the southwestern region against their northwestern counterparts to further demolish a unified Anglophone identity.

IDENTIFYING THE DRIVING FACTORS OF THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS

To what extent has the Biya administration contributed to the perpetuation of Anglophone marginalization and the subsequent Anglophone crisis? Following the dissolution of the federal system, the unitary state began to utilize repressive politics as a tool to marginalize the Anglophone minority. Marginalization encompasses social inequality, the core of the Anglophone problem. Unlike the Marxian concept which focuses on the ruling class and subjects, marginalization in Cameroon is politically stratified.

Political power stems from the state in a top-down fashion and is dominated by the president, who in turn governs along patrimonial/patron-client lines (Gabriel, 1999). In Cameroon, diversity between ethnic groups has been evident since the German exit. Both Ahmadou

Ahidjo (1960-82) and Paul Biya (1982-present), have been skillful at exploiting ethnic diversity for their political gain (this system leaves ethnic groups fighting each other for political favor, opposed to banding together against the broken system).[3] Upon independence, the government was formed on a multi-ethnic ruling class, which has prevented the rise to power by any one ethnic group over the other. Although Ahidjo was Fulbe, and Biya is Catholic of the Beti ethnic group, they both established a diverse ruling class along neo-patrimonial/ patron-client lines that rendered monopolization by one ethnic group practically impossible. Power is decentralized such that a false sense of peace can be maintained and all regions appear to enjoy the same amount of resources.[4]

According to Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003), Ahidjo emphasized the need for "ethnic balance and national unity" (p. 6), however, both authors agree that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that three elite ethnic groups enjoyed positions of privilege during Ahidjo's administration. "There were, first of all, the Muslim Fulbe elite, especially those who originated from Garoua, Ahidjo's hometown, the so-called 'Garoua barons'. Second, there were the members of the Christian Beti elite from the southern part of Francophone Cameroon who formed the core of the bureaucratic-administrative faction of the hegemonic alliance on the basis of their high educational qualifications. The Fulbe-Beti axis constituted the regime's major ethnic underpinning. And thirdly, there were the members of the Bamileke elite from the Francophone part of the Grassfields, the present-day West Province" Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003, p. 6). Favoritism towards certain groups (mostly in Francophone Cameroon regions) over others was not at all subtle and has persisted into Paul Biya's regime. These ethnic partialities have gone a long way in solidifying proof of blatant Anglophone marginalization.

To the average Cameroonian, Anglophone marginalization is visible in all domains of life. In the political sphere, members of Anglophone political parties such as the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and the Alliance of Progressive Forces (APF) are treated by the government as political dissidents.[5] Francophones occupy almost all key positions in government, while

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[3] Gabriel (1999, p. 3) maintains that these presidents have been able to prevent the ethnically diverse country "from joining the ranks of failing states" and preventing the rise to power by a single ethnic or regional group.

[4] From the vantage point of many critics, the problem in Cameroon is not that one group "has its hand in the public till" - but rather that all of them do!" (Gabriel 1999, p.7).

[5] "Cameroonian security forces have repeatedly used violence, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detentions to prevent political activists who belong to opposition political parties from holding public or private meetings. Those targeted include members of the Front des forces alternatives (FFA, Alternative Forces Front), some of whose leaders were briefly detained in October 2003 and in January 2004, including its president, Jean-Jacques Ekindi; members of the Alliance of Progressive Forces; members of the Social Democratic Front (SDF); and members of the SCNC." "Cameroon: Impunity underpins persistent

qualified Anglophone candidates are excluded from holding top political senatorial and ministerial positions even in their regions (the Northwest and Southwest regions).

Economically, Anglophone marginalization "has taken the form of discrimination against Anglophones in employment within the state and parastatal sectors and the private corporate sector, which is predominantly French or located in French-speaking areas, and discrimination in the allocation of public investment" Eyoh (1998, 351). In the social domain, marginalization is marked by the daily treatment of Anglophone denizens as unequal partners of the unitary state. The poor treatment of Anglophones by their Francophone counterparts resulted in John Ngu Foncha's resignation from his post as VP of the CPDM. In his resignation letter, Foncha wrote: "The Anglophone Cameroonians whom I brought into the union have been ridiculed and referred to as 'les Biafrais', 'les ennemies dans la maison', 'les traîtres' etc., and the constitutional provisions which protected this Anglophone minority have been suppressed, their voice drowned while the rule of the gun replaced the dialogue which the Anglophones cherish very much."[6]

The 1991 Tripartite conference, that called together government representatives, members of political parties and civil society, was the first attempt by the Francophone-led government to resolve the Anglophone problem. Francophone representatives proposed decentralization, while their Anglophone counterparts sought complete dismantlement of the unitary state and a return to the federal system of government (Takougang and Krieger, 1998). Although the Anglophone delegation's request for a return to the federal state was not granted, President Paul Biya expressed his desire for constitutional reform. As a result, a constitutional committee was formed – the Technical Committee on Constitutional Matters (TCCM). According to Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003), the TCCM comprised of seven Francophones and four Anglophones, chaired by then Secretary General, Joseph Owona. Efforts at federalism were still the objective of the Anglophones as the four Anglophone representatives (Benjamin Itoe, Simon Munzu, Sam Ekontang Elad and Carlson Anyangwe) presented a draft proposal for a new federal structure. This proposal, code named EMIA, was rejected by Biya and soon after the committee was suspended, and Benjamin Itoe was discharged from his ministerial position. Two weeks prior to the October 1992 presidential elections, the chairman of the TCCM, Joseph Owona, "presented a draft constitution to the Anglophone Prime Minister Simon Achidi Achu, which preserved the essential features of the unitary state, making no

concession to the Anglophone members' federalist demands" (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003, p.83). The 1991 Tripartite conference was the first and last attempt, of its kind, to resolve the Anglophone crisis. The Biya government has been persistent with trivializing the Anglophone problem by maintaining the need to unify the country as it was during German colonial rule. During his 1991 visit to Bamenda, Biya had this to say with regards to the Anglophone problem

Let us not oppose Anglophones and Francophones... The language barrier is not and should not be a political problem in our country. Mind you, at the start of this century Cameroonians were neither Anglophones nor Francophones. Why should the wars of others and the culture of others divide Cameroonians at the dawn of the third millennium?[7]

The Biya administration has since asserted that the regionalized construct of the country that was instituted with the constitution that was drawn up in 1996, encompasses the only satisfactory tactic which underlines the state's strategy with respect to a unified identity for all Cameroonians and to assure regard for divergence diversity through limited regional sovereignty (Enonchong, 2021). This strategy has been fundamentally ineffective as was witnessed in 2016 when peaceful protests by Anglophone teachers and lawyers against oppressive institutions deteriorated into ongoing armed conflicts between military forces, civilians and extremist groups.

FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF ANGLOPHONE IDENTITY

What is Anglophone identity? How does Anglophone identity threaten the Francophone-led government and why does the latter seek to suppress it? Anglophone identity is evidenced by the formation of historical ties and ethno-regional cultures of the Northwest and Southwest regions. The present sense of Anglophone identity has evolved in the last sixty years, having been influenced by a variety of endogenous and exogenous factors. The basis of Anglophone identity "is the conception of former West Cameroon as a distinct community defined by differences in official language and inherited colonial traditions of politics, law, education and public administration" (Eyoh, 1998a, p. 351). Maintaining that identity as a concept is subject to interpretation depending on specific linkages, one could argue that Anglophone identity changed fundamentally after West and East Cameroon merged under the unitary state. The reproduction of Anglophone identity after 1972 has been facilitated by attempts of the Francophone élites to

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abuse." *Amnesty International* https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/001/2009/en/
[6] John Ngu Foncha's letter of resignation as national VP of the CPDM, cited by Piet Konings and Francis. B Nyamnjoh in *Negotiating An Anglophone Identity*. Afrika-Studiecentrum Series, vol. 1. London: Brill, 2003.

[7] Speech by President Biya in Bamenda on 13 September 1991, in *Playdoyer pour une Vraie Démocratie.* Yaoundé: Imprimerie Saint Paul, 1991, 68.

extend French administrative systems to Anglophone communities in the postcolonial era. This extension would mean a complete annihilation of Anglophone legal, linguistic, institutional and cultural distinctiveness.

In a draft essay, Fearon (1999, p. 10) holds that "Identity is a new concept and not something that people have eternally needed or sought as such." However, an argument can be made that identity was recently contextualized, not that the term itself is a new concept. People have had identities for as long as history can remember; these identities helped communities form and defined the differences between people. Several factors, like culture, interests, geographic location etc., have over time contributed to identity formation. Maintaining that identity is "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" Hogg and Abrams (1988, p. 2), one can see how identity is not simply a result of people sharing similar norms when it is in their best interest but also when those norms are internalized in their identities. This would explain the desire by Anglophone Cameroon to maintain its identity, free of Francophone influence.

It stands to reason that Anglophone identity in its broadest sense is a linguistic and cultural identity of English-speaking Cameroonians, who consist of roughly 20% of the country's population; an identity that was formed as a result of a shared culture, tradition and language. The question of Anglophone identity pivots on the subject of how the English-speaking Cameroonians have upheld decades of tradition and culture. Anglophone cultural norms are perceived as rich, steeped in tradition, and authentic; hence their shared responsibility to preserve their cultural heritage irrespective of the odds, the odds being the birth of a 'new' identity that was cultivated following the institutionalization of the unitary state. The 'new' identity has redefined the interests of the Anglophones; Anglophone identity is now defined by communal marginalization and political oppression. The recreation of Anglophone identity by the Francophone-led government has over the years modified the individual interests of Anglophones and heightened the desire for some to push for the creation of a loose federation while others demand secession from Francophone Cameroon. The impacts of marginalization on the Anglophone community are far-reaching and encompassing of hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of Anglophones in the Northwest and Southwest regions. As French Cameroon enjoyed cultural, economic and political growth, the Anglophone regions have deteriorated under oppressive policies. Ahidjo, and subsequently Biya, utilized hegemonic control to manage ethnic diversity by centralizing political and economic power in the presidential office. This strategy was effortlessly enforced by the creation of the unitary state in 1972. The institution of the unitary state meant that executive policymaking was centered in the capital city and the constitution served as a tool to focus authority on the office of the president (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003). As a result,

socio-economic and political decisions were strategically designed to favor the Francophone regions.

Historically, Anglophone identity has been perceived as a threat to Francophone Cameroon for several reasons. Firstly, a unified Anglophone Cameroon is viewed as a symbol of resistance against the Francophone-dominated government. Anglophones have arguably been more politically forthright and passionate in their demands for socio-political growth. This sort of vocal approach by Anglophones has often resulted in armed confrontations with military forces.[8] The government has come to interpret these political efforts by Anglophones as a threat to its power and centralized authority, thus fears that Anglophone identity could potentially result in complete secession which would destabilize the country. As a result, has sought to subdue any form of political dissent.

Over the years, economic discrimination has resulted in a sense of disenfranchisement among Anglophones, which has fueled calls for increased autonomy. Anglophone autonomy has been perceived as a threat to the government's centralized power and unopposed control. According to Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997), Ahidjo's justification for the 'glorious revolution of 20 May 1972' was that federalism fostered regionalism and impeded economic Development (p. 210). However, Anglophones maintained that Ahidjo's justification was false, and attributed the emergence of regionalism and slow economic growth to the state's hegemonic policies (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997). The Anglophone regions are rich in natural resources like rubber, timber, cocoa, coffee, gas and oil and its mountainous regions are home to strategic economic sectors comprising forestry, fishing and agriculture. One would argue that an autonomous British Southern Cameroons would mean a loss of control over these natural resources and subsequent loss of revenue for the government.

Finally, Anglophone identity is viewed as a threat to the linguistic, educational and cultural hegemony of the government and national unity. Since independence, the government has upheld Francophone culture, language, legal and educational systems over Anglo-Saxon educational and legal structures. Upon reunification, under the guise of synchronizing the educational systems, the government rather took measures to suppress Anglophone educational autonomy. Anglophones "became increasingly worried when harmonisation turned out to be an ill-concealed Francophone attempt at assimilation and even dismantlement of their educational system" (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003, p. 163). It is important to stress that there are considerable cultural differences between Anglophones and Francophones due to their different colonial legacies, strengthening the argument that federalism is the best political system for

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[8] "Cameroon: New Attacks on Civilians By Troops, Separatists: At Least 170 Killed; Hundreds of Homes Burned," Human Rights Watch, accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/28/cameroon-new-attacks-civilians-troops-separatists

the two very different linguistic groups. To the Francophone government, Anglophone identity is perceived as a threat to the status quo. The Francophone-led government has sought to suppress Anglophone identity because of the threat it poses to the centralized power of the state. The government perceives Anglophone identity as an indication of defiance, a threat to its singular authority and a challenge to the linguistic, educational and cultural supremacy of the Francophone majority. The government has used strategies such as censoring free speech, repressive policies and intimidation to asphyxiate any appearance of opposition or calls for greater autonomy. A repeated effort by the government to suppress Anglophone identity has further exacerbated tensions between both linguistic entities.

In studying the Anglophone cultural construct, one will easily notice a divergence between Anglophones in favor of complete autonomy and those in favor of a return to federalism. At the core of this divergence is the dire need for the preservation of a sense of Anglophone culture and individuality; Anglophones want territorial/economic and linguistic autonomy. The divergence became apparent with the creation of political parties like the Social Democratic Front (SDF) that has since its formation in 1991, sought decentralization within the unitary state. The birth of the SDF in 1991 and multiple Anglophone political parties thereafter increased Anglophone consciousness. Meanwhile, political parties like the Free West Cameroon Movement and Ambazonian Movement of Fon Gorji Dinka pushed for the creation of an Ambazonian State or West Cameroon state (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019). The creation of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) in 1994, sought "to restore, within a newly restructured Federal Republic of Cameroon, the autonomy of a territory – Southern Cameroons – and of a people – Southern Cameroonians – and to put an end to their annexation by La République du Cameroun" (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003, p. 91).

The ongoing unrest in the Anglophone regions is a result of economic and political discrimination against the Anglophones that has culminated in ethnic and cultural tensions between the government and the Anglophone minority. Begging the question, what sort of federalism is Anglophone Cameroon agitating for and how does this conflict with the unitary system? Federalism for a vast number of Anglophones was the ideal form of government. Due to the shared feeling of communal disadvantage among Anglophones, the Anglophone élites sought a loose federalism, one with less centralized executive powers. Like Foncha argued, a loose federation would protect the minority status of the Anglophones and guarantee the protection of their unique identity, explicitly in the linguistic, cultural, educational and judicial spheres.

Even now, it is unclear what percentage of the electorate is either in favor of creating a loose federation or self-determination/complete secession. A referendum has yet to be organized to help determine an answer to this question; in the meantime, Anglophone Cameroon remains split. While a voluntary referendum is not the deciding factor of either federalism or secession, it will determine if the Anglophone movement has the support it requires to make either federalist or separatist demands to the government. Despite the divergence in political preference, majority of the English-speaking faction seek the conservation of Anglophone culture and identity.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

It is useless to spend any more time identifying the democratic shortfalls that have contributed to the Anglophone crisis; however, it is worth noting that the fundamental dispute between the government and the separatists is the question of self-determination for the Anglophone regions. Stabilizing Southern Cameroon will require an intentional solution for sustaining democracy, human rights and transparent government. These recommendations speak to the Biya administration, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the international community. If all these groups plus stakeholders' work as a cohesive unit to level set and problem solve, the Anglophone crisis will be resolved quickly.

Form a united front

All Anglophone political factions (either in favor of separatism, federalism or maintaining the unitary state as is) should compromise on a single coherent and unanimous stance to address the political economy of marginalization, hence begin efforts towards restoring peace. There is no room for divisiveness on such crucial matters to determine the future of all Anglophones in Cameroon or abroad. It will be important to consider how policies and agendas directly influence institutionalization and social cohesion. This recommendation will be successful through inclusive participation of all Anglophone political groups in objective and transparent discussions to determine the path to peace.

National dialogue/peace negotiations

A second national dialogue that includes key government officials, civil society actors, separatist factions and the public to discuss a path forward for stabilizing conflict-affected regions would be a useful first step towards meaningful participation of stakeholders. The September 30 to October 4, 2019, national dialogue between Anglophone and Francophone representatives that was held in Yaoundé did not result in an end to the Anglophone crisis, as was anticipated. The 2019 national dialogue failed because the Biya administration

attempted to resolve the grievances of the Anglophones without engaging in negotiations with civil society leaders and separatist leaders. The government did not make any efforts at compromising on the release of Anglophone separatist leaders.[9] A follow-up to the 2019 national dialogue should be organized, only this time, the national priority should be social cohesion, given that premature desertion of peacebuilding activities would destabilize an exit from instability. Efforts towards conflict mitigation should be discussed and enforced with special consideration to historic fault lines and to dimensions of peace processes that were previously overlooked, such as disarmament, and truth and reconciliation processes. If successful, the crisis would be quelled and efforts to disarm rebel groups and reincorporate them into society will begin. Historically, such channels for dialogue have been successful at bringing about peace and laying the path for democratic transitions (in other war-torn countries).

Constitutional and institutional reform

The government on September 7, 2020 authorized the country's first regional council elections. Arguably, this decentralization attempt by President Biya was a way to save face in the midst of an already four-yearlong crisis with no end in sight. In addition to decentralization efforts, the constitution should be amended to clearly articulate the demands of the Anglophones to help towards securing long-term peace. If Anglophones were to be guaranteed some amount of autonomy over their legal and educational systems, then demands for secession will certainly recede. The central focus should be on democracy and good governance as the democratic deficit is the underlying cause of the broader crisis. Any policy to stabilize Cameroon must account for the democratic shortfalls and employ strategies to directly resolve them. In this light, the Biya regime should clearly elucidate how it proposes to peacefully transfer executive power and how government officials and party affiliated politicians should be held accountable for enabling patron/client politics. One of the arguments for the underdevelopment of the African continent is the prevalent patron/client system that in itself is antidemocratic and corrupt. The absence of checks and balances in patron-client systems results in gross mismanagement of foreign aid/loans. The Biya administration has in recent years detained several ministers for such alleged financial mismanagements of public funds.[10] However, the problem has persisted,

mostly due to the absence of financial transparency; while this policy may appear risky to the government whose highest priority is maintaining the territorial integrity of Cameroon opposed to implementing democratic measures. It is worth noting some considerations to counter any reservations. Firstly, amending the constitution to allow Anglophones certain privileges will result in an end to the crisis, as warring factions will no longer have grounds for disgruntlement. Secondly, instituting democratic practices to curb patron/client politics will mean equal growth opportunities for all people, hence improved economic conditions. Finally, ensuring the peaceful transfer of executive power by means of free and fair elections will show the international community that Cameroon is finally turning away from autocracy and embracing modern forms of government. Cameroon has undergone several constitutional amendments since 1972 none of which have materialized in the democratic transition of executive power. Instead, the country wallows in sustained poverty, absence of basic human rights and overall institutional weakness. One of the effective ways to resolve the question of secession will be via constitutional amendments that directly result in the democratic transfer of power and subsequent institutional reform to help rebuild the private sector and overall economy.

Prioritize regional growth

Some of the systemic and institutional problems in Cameroon can be resolved by CSOs and development actors. Civil society actors should develop regional networks to participate in advocacy, information/ knowledge exchange, monitor local governmental policies and strategy advancement including collaboration between CSOs and locally elected officials. They should engage in efforts to address instability in warring regions and take into account regional resources in their policy development and design. Borrowing democratic tenets from other African countries like Kenya can help CSOs problem-solve bureaucratic obstructions and proactively ensure a consistent path towards regional growth. The success of this policy recommendation lies in cultivating efforts for CSOs to be nonpartisan and to be granted immunity from suffering unjust punishments for holding elected officials accountable. As earlier mentioned, Cameroon has a history of persecuting right-based civic groups and individuals who challenge the abuse of power by the government and government officials. This is a human rights violation and democratic deficit that can be curbed if the Biya administration institutionalizes free speech and political protection for right-based groups.

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[9] Separatist leaders like Sisiku Ayuk Tabe, self-proclaimed president of Ambazonia was arrested in Abuja, Nigeria for "engaging in a clandestine meeting against Cameroonian authorities" and was handed a life sentence, shortly after. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42603610

[10] See "Cameroon Investigates Missing $335 Million in COVID Funds" by Moki Edwin Kindzeka, May 31, 2021. https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_cameroon-investigates-missing-335-million-covid-funds/6206445.html

Support from the international community

The French and British governments should make deliberate short-term ventures to expand citizen involvement in local governance especially in conflict-affected regions, while encouraging long-lasting stabilization and recompense of political, economic and security injustices. In addition, it will help for international organizations like the United Nations to continue voicing support for CSOs and providing financial assistance to apolitical welfare groups that provide aid to internally displaced persons. In the event that peace is restored, these social welfare groups will be the frontrunners for resettling displaced communities and restoring a sense of normalcy in the interior/villages. Organizations like the African Union should publicly condemn the abuse of political power in Cameroon, and take steps to encourage the institutionalization of due democratic process such as a limitation on the presidential term/power and fair elections etc. Finally, organizations like the World Bank and international NGOs should withdraw financial aid/loans and foreign investments to the Biya government until the Anglophone problem is peacefully resolved. Stopping these foreign monies from flowing into the country until democratic tenets are employed would force government officials to look into resolving the Anglophone problem and finally take steps to incorporate democratic tools in administering the state.

To increase the likelihood of success, these recommendations must be driven by a policy for stabilization. A negotiated resolution between armed militia and the government is the only clear path to sustainable peace, however, immediate financial and technical support to build regional governance infrastructure will enable municipal councils to carry on with day-to-day functions of serving their regional communities. Anglophone pressure groups like the Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement (SCARM) have maintained that children and youths constitute at least two-thirds of the population of Anglophone Cameroon. For an area that produces critical sources of regional wealth, the rate of unemployment, illiteracy and underemployment among this group is staggering. The state has failed for several years to provide basic services, and the repressive nature of the state has rendered formal complaints impossible, if not suicidal. If we are to accept that societies comprised of human beings are in a state of steady growth and social change, then we are also to accept that the civilian uprisings indicate that the status quo is unsustainable.

CONCLUSION

Present-day Cameroon is arguably plagued by its checkered past. A valuable discussion to analyze the factors that account for the many political and civil issues befuddling the country's overall development remains to

be had between government officials, opposition party representatives, civil society and sectarian groups. As aforementioned, the efforts of the colonial administrations to prepare the territories for self-determination lacked genuine effort as was reflected by the problems that plagued the country shortly after. While British rationale for appending Southern Cameroons to Nigeria was not completely irrational, it unavoidably meant that its socio-political and economic growth was forfeited for administrative convenience. Nevertheless, one could argue that a considerable focus on developing the region would have potentially placed it in an irrepressible position; better prepared to confront the challenges of building a modern state. The myriad of governance issues and absence of steady economic and political advancement of Cameroon can be credited to the country's colonial past. Be that as it may, federalism (even though highly centralized) was a significant cusp for the decentralization of Cameroon, seeing as it established fundamental components for representative democracy. Nevertheless, the imposition of the unitary state hampered constitutional and democratic advancement, leaving the Anglophone minority to suffer oppressive government policies and economic challenges.

To unsuspecting visitors, Cameroon was once perceived as a "peaceful" country; diverse but inclusive.[11] The official discourse made use of all necessary means to maintain the fiction of a society devoid of conflict (Mbembe, 1992, 5). To a developing country like Cameroon, identifying as a peaceful nation is imperative because it allows accessibility to monetary, medical, and military support from the international community. While Cameroon's foreign policy has been geared towards portraying a peaceful façade within Africa and the international community, it has however, failed to retain stable political institutions and socio-economic structures. Contrary to popular belief, and by all standards and definitions, this study argues that Cameroon is a fragmented, divisive, politically stunted, and repressive.

Even though it is difficult to predict the future of Cameroon's democracy or the outcome of the ongoing civilian unrests (seeing as Cameroon has yet to readopt federal status, and President Paul Biya won the 2018 elections with 2022 marking his fortieth anniversary as president), this study is relevant to 21st century scholarship for two reasons. First, it makes a methodological contribution to the discussion of "peaceful" state governmentality. Second, it serves as a framework for analyzing the legality of the unitary state versus the implementation of a loose federation. Several Anglophone political parties and civil society groups are increasingly referring to the Anglophone region as Southern Cameroons or Ambazonia, their way of challenging the unitary government and pushing for

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[11] Scholars like Jurg Martin Gabriel maintain that Cameroon's "main achievement is that the peace has been kept" (Gabriel 1999, p. 9).

secession. Despite its violent resurgence, the creation of statehood for the Anglophone minority will in reality prove to be extremely costly with an uncertain future and possibly low success rate.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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