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SOMMAIRE

N'Zué Koffi Arsène GNA

Analyse comparative des facteurs socio-économiques influençant les parcours thérapeutiques des réfugiées centrafricaines et communautés hôtes congolaises 9-30

Fidèle Wendegouidi OUEDRAOGO

Compétition et représentativité culturelle à la Semaine Nationale de la Culture au Burkina Faso 31-47

Mlan Kouakou Pierre ANZIAN

Entre tradition ancestrale et modernité numérique : l'écartèlement identitaire du chrétien Agni moronou 48-65

Innocent Atehghang AFUHINGHANG

The grievances theory versus transnationalism and the Cameroon anglophone question: from 1961 to 2017 66-84

Sasso Sidonie Calice YAPI, Noël Jean Charles Abel YAPO

Médias Sociaux et Construction Identitaire des Étudiants à l'Université Virtuelle de Côte d'Ivoire : Entre Socialisation Numérique et Stress Académique 85-97

Bodji Georges Duvalier N'DRÉ, Nibé Dramane SILUÉ, Gahoun Brice Aubain GBODJÉ

Construction identitaire et médiatisation de la fête de Pâques par SOLIBRA 98-111

Soumaïla MARE

État, entre collaboration, concurrence et recentralisation : repenser la gouvernance de la culture et du tourisme au Burkina Faso 112-124

Adoté Akué AKPABIE

Précarités socioéconomiques et culturelles, stratégies politiques et déficit de consolidation démocratique au Togo 125-146

Sidiki COULIBALY, Lassana NASSOKO

La réception de la poésie française dans l'enseignement secondaire au Mali 147-158

Bi Naga Landry BOTTY

Nos sociétés contemporaines à l'épreuve des technologies émergentes : la révolution numérique, une nouvelle ère 159-170

Dié Octave MANIGA

Les transports collectifs urbains à Abidjan face aux effets de la crise socio-politique de 2002 171-183

Boubacar Bamba KEITA, Lassana TOURE, Sékou Amadou TRAORE, Brehima KEITA

Modélisation et prévision des tendances des dépenses de santé au Mali (2008–2022) à partir des séries temporelles 184-199

Michel EONE, Nicéphore Assoua ELAT, Jean Marie Obourou EBERE

Revivre de *Maât* : une solution africaine aux crises frontalières et migratoires entre le Cameroun et la Guinée Équatoriale (1968-2020) 200-217

Faustin GUEI, Philbert Kouadio KONAN, Karidia DIOMANDE, Jean-Aimée Assué YAO

Gestion des déchets solides, indicateurs environnementaux et risques sanitaires dans la ville de Bondoukou 218-234

Privat Sylvain BADELO, Guy Éric Anicet Quassy KOUAKOU

Pratiques agricoles des cotonculteurs et durabilité agroécologique dans le département de Korhogo 235-246

- MITAN, NGUEABAYE, NOUMBISSIE, FONKOUA**
Rôle des entrepreneurs tchadiens dans l'offre éducative : acteurs, stratégies et enjeux pour la gouvernance du système éducatif 247-265
- GANAME, KOUDOUGOU, OUEDRAOGO,**
Accès au foncier rural des femmes Mossé dans la province du Zoundwéogo région du Nazinon au Burkina Faso : entre normes sociales et réalités socio-économiques 266-284
- Rebecca Paule Jacqueline DO**
Conditions de détention et ses conséquences sur les détenus au pôle pénitentiaire d'Abidjan (PPA) 285-299
- Alfred Romuald GAMBOU, Yvette BAKINGU BAKIBANGOU**
L'éthique enseignante et les enjeux de la compréhension des ontologies plurielles des cultures 300-313
- Kouakou Daniel KOUAME, Kpassigué Gilbert KONE**
L'Église Confessante dans l'Allemagne Nazie : analyse historique et éthique d'une confrontation entre totalitarisme et conscience chrétienne 314-328
- Narcisse Rostand MIAFO YANOU**
Gouvernance militaire au Mali, au Burkina-Faso et au Niger et sens du présent 329-344
- Ibrahim POUNTOUGNIGNI**
L'hétérogénéité langagière comme facteur de la variation linguistique dans la francophonie négro-africaine : le cas de *Le fils-de-la-femme-mâle* de Maurice Bandaman et *La vie et demie* de Sony Labou Tansi 345-360
- Armel-Valéry TOGBO, Zana Moussa OUATTARA**
La démocratie à l'épreuve de la souveraineté : universalisme, particularisme et légitimation du pouvoir dans le discours politique de Teodoro Obiang Nguema 361-372
- Konan Chekinaël KONAN, Tinindia Kariatou YÉO**
La crise contemporaine des droits humains à l'épreuve de la responsabilité éthique : analyse philosophique d'Emmanuel Levinas 373-385
- Théodore HONBA**
La question de l'être comme urgence dans la philosophie contemporaine 386-397
- Nadine Carole NGON**
Mémoire, héritage et résistance culturelle bantu au Brésil 398-409
- Yao Célestin KOUAKOU**
La citation dans *quand on refuse, on dit non*, d'Ahmadou Kourouma : entre citation d'autorité et citation référentielle, un artifice pour une appropriation discursive 410-426
- Kobéna Fiéni Jean-Jacques KRA, Guikahué Daniel BISSOU**
De l'enclavement à l'attractivité : repenser le développement touristique du district du Zanzan par une approche systémique 427-442
- Yao Dieudonne KOUASSI, N'dri Yann Cedric KOUADIO, Yves Ayereby AYEREBY**
Analyse des impacts environnementaux de la dynamique récente du climat dans le département d'Adiaka 443-458
- Abras Rahama HAMIDE**
Alphabétisation fonctionnelle et réinsertion socioprofessionnelle des femmes en situation de prostitution dans la ville de N'Djamena 459-478

The grievances theory versus transnationalism and the Cameroon anglophone question: from 1961 to 2017

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Abstract

The internationalization of the Anglophone Question in Cameroon is likely a common feature of the advent of the social media. The Anglophone Question in Cameroon has been a problem of poor constitutional arrangements that can be traced to 1961 when the former French Cameroon reunified with former British Southern Cameroons following a plebiscite in which the latter overwhelmingly voted to reunify with the former. Though Southern/Anglophone Cameroons complained of perceived marginalization and an attempt by the majority French section to assimilate them, the manifestation was subtle and took place only through protests, petitions, strike movements and demonstrations. However, with the advent of the social media, a new cream of leaders emerged in the diaspora, including the US, Canada, Europe, Asia and the Middle East to champion the manifestations leading to violence and conflicts that have bedeviled the regions since 2017. The feeling of political subjugation, economic exploitation, social suppression and cultural assimilation among a cross section of Anglophone Cameroonians united them under diaspora leaders against the government of Cameroon, calling for the creation of a separate state for Anglophones. The Grievances Theory Versus Transnationalism and the Cameroon Anglophone Question: From 1961 to 2017, analyzes the current Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon within the light of the Grievance Theory and Transnationalism. The paper makes appeal to field experience, interviews, official sources, documentation and the internet to succor its central thesis. From the fertility of its sources, the paper submits that social media is a potent source of conflicts and makes nonsense of the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity by its capacity to promote transnational manifestation of grievances.

Keywords: Anglophone, Cameroon, Crisis, Francophone, Grievance Theory and Transnationalism

La théorie des griefs face au transnationalisme et la question anglophone au Cameroun : de 1961 à 2017

Résumé

L'internationalisation de la question anglophone au Cameroun est sans doute l'une des conséquences de l'avènement des réseaux sociaux. La question anglophone au Cameroun est le résultat d'un dispositif constitutionnel défaillant dont les origines remontent à 1961, lorsque l'ancien Cameroun français a été réuni avec l'ancien Cameroun méridional britannique à la suite d'un référendum au cours duquel ce dernier s'était prononcé à une écrasante majorité en faveur de la réunification. Bien que les Camerounais du Sud/anglophones se plaignaient d'une marginalisation perçue et d'une tentative d'assimilation de la part de la majorité francophone, ces manifestations étaient subtiles et se limitaient à des protestations, des pétitions, des mouvements de grève et des manifestations. Cependant, avec l'avènement des réseaux sociaux, une nouvelle élite de dirigeants a émergé au sein de la diaspora, notamment aux États-Unis, au Canada, en Europe, en Asie et au Moyen-Orient, pour mener les manifestations qui ont conduit à la violence et aux conflits qui ravagent les régions depuis 2017. Le sentiment d'asservissement politique, d'exploitation économique, de répression sociale et d'assimilation culturelle partagé par un large éventail de Camerounais anglophones les a unis sous la bannière des leaders de la diaspora contre le gouvernement du Cameroun, appelant à la création d'un État distinct pour les anglophones. La théorie des griefs face au transnationalisme et la question anglophone au Cameroun : de 1961 à 2017 analyse la crise anglophone actuelle au Cameroun à la lumière de la théorie des griefs et du

transnationalisme. Cet article s'appuie sur des expériences de terrain, des entretiens, des sources officielles, de la documentation et Internet pour étayer sa thèse centrale. S'appuyant sur la richesse de ses sources, l'article soutient que les réseaux sociaux constituent une source puissante de conflits et remettent en cause le principe de souveraineté et d'intégrité territoriale par leur capacité à favoriser l'expression transnationale des griefs.

Mots-clés : anglophone, Cameroun, crise, francophone, théorie des griefs et transnationalisme

Introduction

The Anglophone problem in Cameroon is a vestige of colonial and post independence legacy. The marriage that sanctioned the union between British Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon in 1961, laid the foundation for grievances that evolved into tension and culminated into a crisis in 1917. Since independence and reunification, English speaking Cameroonians have consistently cited economic, socio-cultural and political inequalities as vivid indicators of marginalization. In clear terms, for about ten years that the deathly armed conflict in the North and South West regions of Cameroon has been ongoing, over 35.000 Cameroonian citizens have been killed and over hundreds of thousands have become people of concern by the UNHCR and hundreds of villages have been razed to nothing, using the “Scorch Earth Policy”.¹ Though the existence of the Anglophone-Cameroonian problem had been refuted over decades by the government, it gained universal acceptance by 2017, marked by protests, violence, calls for secession and a declaration of war. It now became an existential threat to the Unity of the Republic of Cameroon with resultant effects, which undermined Cameroon's national stability as well as that of the Central and West African Sub-Regions, thus necessitating as research objective, a scrupulous examination of the grievances theory and transnationalism so as to understand the dynamics underlying the Anglophone crisis. It is based on these aforementioned articulations that this paper takes its course with the following as the research question; how do grievances and transnationalism intersect to fuel the Anglophone problem in Cameroon. To this principal research question, we have a subsidiary question that runs thus; to what extent has transnationalism accentuated the Anglophone grievances and what are the implications of the grievances theory and transnationalism for attaining a sustainable solution to the crisis.

The outline of this article runs thus; it starts with an abstract and an introduction as elementary aspects. We then enter the heart of the study where we examine the characteristics of the grievance

¹ Human Right Watch : Anglophone crisis reviewed, 2023, Available at <https://WWW.hrw.org>, Retrieved on October 17, 2025.

theory and transnationalism concepts and their contributions to the understanding of the outbreak of the Anglophone armed conflict in Cameroon. A mastery of the theory and concept takes us to handle the historical foundation (colonial legacies and roots of the division) of the Anglophone crisis. Applying the Grievance Theory and Transnationalism to the Anglophone issue constitute another major part of the paper. A conclusion summarises the academic endeavour and opens room for further research on the subject.

1. The Grievance Theory and Transnationalism as Foundational Variables to Understanding the Outbreak of the Anglophone Crisis

1.1 Grievance Theory

Generally believed to be the fathers of the Grievance theory, Collier, Hoeffler (2004) argues that civil wars and violent conflicts are caused by collective grievances such as ethnic, religious or political marginalization, rather than solely by economic incentives. It posits that when groups experience high inequality, social injustice, or horizontal inequality, they are more likely to rebel to secure rights or redress, with key drivers including systemic inequality and political repression. According to the grievance argument, all civil wars bear two common characteristics. First, the perception by a cross section of the population, that a rebellion could ameliorate the unfair socio-political statusquo. Secondly, the civil war has the goal to replace the exploitation, abusive and greedy political elite, privileged class, or ruling ethnic group (P.Pizzolo, 2020). Thus, the grievance theory is linked to the claim of overcoming an injustice or an unfortunate circumstance that produces great sorrow, mental distress, sense of oppression, and a perception of injustice among a segment of the population. (Collier, Hoeffler 2004) Emphasizing on the grievance theory, they stated that the motivations that generate grievance are four; ethnic hatred, political repression, political exclusion and economic inequality.

1.2 Transnationalism

Considered the conceptual father of transnationalism, R. Bourne (1916) introduced the term in 1916 through his essay “Transnational America” where he argued against the assimilationist “melting pot” theory and for a more cosmopolitan American identity. The term however benefitted from common academic usage in the early 1990’s through the seminal work of sociologist N.Schiller et al.(1992), where in a clear and authoritative tone, they posit that transnationalism is the process by which migrants from social, economic, and political ties connect their host countries with their homeland, often bridging multiple nations simultaneously. It refers to the blurring of national borders

through interconnectedness, enabling individuals to maintain ongoing engagements with their culture of origin while living elsewhere.

1.3 Points of Divergence and Convergence between the Grievance Theory and Transnationalism

It is important at this juncture to establish the borders that separate and unite the grievance theory and transnationalism. Concerning the point of divergence, the grievance theory focuses on internal, localized grievances driving conflicts, while transnationalism lays emphasis on external influences and cross border connections. Also, grievance theory attributes conflict to domestic marginalization, whereas transnationalism highlights international factors like Diaspora support or international human rights outcry. At the level of convergence, both acknowledge that local or transnational grievances have the capacity to mobilize groups to a course. Furthermore, grievances can attract transnational attention and transnational connections can intensify local grievances. Finally, both frameworks recognize that local and international factors can shape the direction of conflict (P, Pizzolo, 2020)

In connection to the Anglophone crises in Cameroon and following a vivid analysis and understanding of the Grievance theory, it suggests that, Anglophones in Cameroon based on concerns raised, easily mobilize around shared grievances in the economic, social, cultural and political domain to challenge the statusquo. This is exactly what has been happening in Cameroon over the decades since the abolition of the Federal structure. Every 1st October constitutes a day of tension in Cameroon where the military and forces of law and order are seen at dagger's drawn with Anglophone activist resulting to street demonstration, hoisting of the ambazonian flag in some towns in the predominantly English regions and the arrest of activist .² The grievances kept mounting as years went by until 2016 when it burst into open confrontation as a result of lack of consensus between the Cameroon government and the Anglophone consortium of common law lawyers and teachers trade union with the Diaspora playing a determining role.

Transnationalism becomes the fuel that amplified, supported and sustained the Anglophone crises through international connections. It should be clearly stated, even if the exact amount cannot be determined, that the Diaspora community, besides media sensitization, provided financial support to the ambazonian course including political and diplomatic push to the separatists.³ Also, the

² Interview with Shu Martin, 06/09/2025, Bamenda, Peace and Human Rights Advocate, 55 years.

³ Interview with Fru Nobert, 14/09/2025, Yaounde, lecturer, 48years.

Diaspora succeeded to draw the attention of International Human Right Organizations like Human Right Watch and Doctors Without Borders to decry the humanitarian situation in Cameroon. Many have credited the Diaspora to have played an important role in pressing for the holding of the major national dialogue even though the organizers of the dialogue, considered by some as a monologue, have been accused of not giving the main Anglophone activist the possibility to attend, which radicalized them more and intensified the crisis. We must state here that some of the most dreaded attacks resulting to both human and material damages occurred after the major national dialogue.⁴ The Diaspora community has also been associated with the global media coverage of the crisis and its consequences which changed the perception of the conflict at home and abroad.

In sum the interplay between grievances and transnationalism on the Anglophone crisis include the fact that both mobilized local activism, attracted international attention, conditioned and reconditioned the Cameroon government into miscalculations and misjudgments on one unproductive strategy (domination) of resolving the crisis to another that had a counter effect of exacerbating the crisis.⁵

2. Historical Foundation of the Anglophone Question 1961-2017

2.1 Colonial legacies and the roots of division

By the 19th century, the main European powers that were interested over Cameroon were Britain, France and Germany. On Saturday 12th of July 1884, the territory was finally annexed by Germany (S. Takang, 2017 : 55). This was to the detriment of the British and the French. German rule lasted from 1884 to 1916 when she was expelled by the Anglo-French forces. During this era, there were six German Colonial Governors. The first was Julius Baron Von Soden (1885-1891) and the last was Karl Ebermaier (1912-1916) (S. Takang, 2017 : 97).

The 1914-1918 war broke out in Europe in August 1914 between the allies and members of the Central Powers. Since Cameroon was a German protectorate, the war was extended to German Kamerun (J.Ngoh, 2005, p 123). During the war in Cameroon, the French, the British and the Belgians fought against the Germans. The war started in German *Kamerun* in August 1914 and ended in February 1916 with the ousting of the Germans by the Anglo-French forces (J.Ngoh, 2005 : 123). This resulted to the temporal division of German *Kamerun* in 1916 between the French and the British

⁴ Interview with Ndeh Godlove, 02/08/2025, Bamenda, Former secessionist, fighter, 42years.

⁵ Interview with Verkijika Fanso, 01/12/2025, yaounde, Historian/Lecturer, 75years.

(J.Ngoh, 2005 : 136), which became final in 1919 with the signing of the Milner and Simon declaration (J.Ngoh 1999 : 165-185). We must understand that this temporal division was the beginning of problems. Placed under category “B” Mandate, which started in 1922 under the auspices of the League of Nations, formed in 1919, it lasted up to 1945 when the 1939-1945 war came to an end with the replacement of the League of Nations by the United Nations Organization (UNO). The status of the British and French portions of Cameroon as a mandate, changed from 1945 to a trust territory, under the newly created UNO, which lasted up to 1st January 1960 in French portion of Cameroon and 1st October 1961 in British portion of German Cameroon (G.Eno, 2015 : 230).

2.2 Constitutional Arrangements, Representative Politics in Nigeria and the Quest for Identity by Southern Cameroonians: an expression of rising grievances

The aborigines of British Southern Cameroons had an interesting political carrier after 1945. Before 1945, they were still attached to Nigeria under the Clifford Constitution of 1922, where they were represented at Lagos from 1942 by Jesko William Manga Bell from Victoria (T. Tazifor, T.Ndip: 111). Due to the short comings of Governor General Clifford, he was replaced in 1947 by Governor Richard. His constitutional amendments divided Nigeria into three regions, namely; the Yoruba western zone, the Igbo eastern zone and the Hausa Northern zone. Secondly, British Southern Cameroons became an integral part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, represented by Native Authorities (Jesko William and Fon Galega of Bali) at the level of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, with capital Enugu (T.Tazifor, T.Ndip : 111). Under this same constitution, British Northern Cameroons was ruled as an integral part of the Hausa Northern Region of Nigeria (T.Tazifor, T.Ndip : 114).

Due to the clamoring voices from British Southern Cameroons for an identity and pressure from Nigerians for their dissatisfaction of the 1947 constitution, Governor Richard was replaced by Governor Macpherson and the results were that:

- British Southern Cameroons was to remain under the Eastern Region of Nigeria.
- British Southern Cameroons was to be represented by thirteen elected members out of the eighty with a ministerial post at the Eastern Executive Council.
- British Southern Cameroons was to have six members out of the thirty four delegates from the Eastern Regional House to the Central Legislature at Lagos and one Ministerial seat at the Federal Council in Lagos.

Following the aforementioned 1951 constitutional recommendations, thirteen⁶ Southern Cameroonians were chosen to represent the territory at the Eastern Region of Nigeria (J.Ngoh: 222).

⁶From Bamenda division, J. N Foncha, S. T Muna and V. T. Lainjo were chosen. From Nkambe, J. T. Ndze and A. J. Ngala were elected. From Wum division, J. C. Kangsen and S. C. Ndi were elected. From Mamfe Division, S. A. George

Consequently, S. T. Muna was made Minister of Works at the level of the Eastern Region of Nigeria and Dr. E. M. L. Endeley was appointed Minister of Labour at the Legislative Council in Lagos.(G.Eno: 173) Unfortunately, the fruitful 1951 constitution did not last long as a result of a crisis that broke out in the Eastern Region of Nigeria within the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) concerning the national chairman of NCNC (Dr. Nnamdie Azikiwe) and his Deputy (Prof. Eyo-Ita), which affected British Southern Cameroons.(G.Eno : 176) The causes were insubordination and power struggle which undermined the interest of British Southern Cameroonians in the Eastern Region of Nigeria. This was manifested with the dismissal and refusal to re-instate S.T.Muna as Minister of Works. As a result, Dr. E. M. L. Endeley abandoned his Federal Ministerial post and led a movement constituting of nine out of the thirteen Southern Cameroonian plenipotentiaries to Nigeria, called “the Benevolent Neutrality Bloc” (G.Eno : 176).

The mission of this bloc was to stay neutral from any political entanglement with the Eastern Region of Nigeria. At this point, we see the grievances theory into play. The effect of their withdrawal was the calling of the Memfe conference of 1953 (G.Eno, p 176). All Southern Cameroonian delegates agreed and a petition was sent to Lord Oliver Lyttleton, the Secretary of State for colonies. The agreement among southern Cameroonians signaled a clear message of a desire for divorce with Nigeria resulting from the grievances identified. By 1954 under the governorship of Lyttleton, British Southern Cameroons was granted a Semi or Quasi Regional Status with Dr. E. M. L. Endeley as the Leader of Government Business. By 1958 British Southern Cameroons was granted a Full Region with Dr. E. M. L. Endeley as the first Prime Minister of British Southern Cameroons. By 1959, J. N. Foncha replaced Endeley as the second Prime Minister of British Southern Cameroons under the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) formed in 1955 with reunification tendency (B. Takang, 2017 : 191) Thus, to southern Cameroonians, resistance became an instrument to fight against grievances.

2.3 UN Plebiscite and Reunification by Federation: 1961-1972

By 1961 due to different political platforms concerning the fate of British Southern Cameroons (B.Takang : 192), the UNO organized a plebiscite on the 11th of February 1961. The framed questions were integration with Nigeria verses reunification with the independent Republic of Cameroon. Endeley under Cameroon People National Congress (CPNC) (J.Fanso: 324) stood for integration while Foncha under KNDP stood for reunification. Consequently, reunification won in British

and M. N. Forju were selected. In Kumba Division, N. N. Mbile and R. N. Charley were elected and finally in the Victoria Division, E. M. L. Endeley and P. N. Metomby Woleta.

Southern Cameroonians while integration won in British Northern Cameroonians (J.Fanso : 325). It should be noted that the absence of the third option during the plebiscite, constituted a grievance that divided southern Cameroonians and resurfaced when the federation started developing cracks. Today, there are still southern Cameroonians who believe in that option, no wonder it was put on the table when the problem turned into an armed conflict from 2016.

The modalities for the coming together of French Cameroon and British Southern Cameroonians were through series of constitutional conferences. The most important was the Foumban constitutional conference that held from 17th to the 21st of July, where a federal system of government was chosen.(J.Fanso, p 325) The final reunification day was on 1st of October 1961 which wasn't materialized legally. With the birth of the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961, West of the territory to the Mungo, became West Cameroon who were termed Anglophone-Cameroonians (former inhabitants of the British Portion of German *Kamerun*) and the portion of the land East of the Mungo, was occupied by Francophone-Cameroonians (former inhabitants of French portion of German *Kamerun*).

2.4 Abolition of the Federation and the widening of Grievances

The Federation lasted up to 20th of May 1972 when the name was changed into United Republic of Cameroon by President Ahmadou Ahidjo. By 1984 President Paul Biya re-named the territory “the Republic of Cameroon”. These moves considered a betrayal by southern Cameroonians, has remained an issue of debate on television channels and radio and a subject of academic reflection, with the effect that it widened the gap between Cameroonians as it touched on the identity of a people.

Another effect of the 1972 referendum was that: the country was divided into eight provinces with former West-Cameroon broken into two provinces, namely the North and the South West Provinces which constitute the two English speaking zones of Cameroon. This further move by the government sent a vivid message to the southern Cameroonians. By 1996, the Northern Provinces were sub divided. From October 1961 till date, the Anglophone-Cameroonians have expressed issues of being discriminated by the Francophone-Cameroonian majority. They also expressed issues of poor governance which were poorly handled and managed by the government majority Francophone-Cameroonians. By 2017, the Anglophone problem that had been neglected, and termed “non-existent”, turned into a deathly armed conflict in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon with effects that went beyond the frontiers of the two region and the country.



Map showing north and south west regions of Cameroon: The two English speaking (Anglophone) regions of Cameroon. Source: Adapted from the Administrative Map of Cameroon by International Crisis Group

3. Applying the Grievances Theory to the Anglophone crisis

3.1 Political Grievances

One of the main problems that brought about the crisis is colonial legacy. Cameroon became a German protectorate on Saturday the 12 of July 1884. By the end of the First World War, Germany was defeated by the Anglo-French Forces and the territory was divided by the belligerents. The division brought about a minority issue which emerged with its problems as from 1961 (E.Lohkoko, 2013: 29).

Secondly, the usurped Independence of British Cameroons and the eventual reunification of Southern Cameroons with the Republic of Cameroon was another outstanding factor that contributed to this crisis. The philosophical process behind the reunification of the British Southern Cameroons and

French Cameroon is at the heart of the Anglophone problem that started surfacing from 1961. By 1961 there were three main platforms concerning the fate of British Cameroon. The reunificationist led by John Ngu Foncha, the Independentists led by P.M Kale and the integrationist led by Dr. E. M. L. Endeley. On the 11th of February 1961 plebiscite, the independentists' option was excluded by the UN. The right to self-determination, the third option, was deprived from British Southern Cameroonians.

In addition bad Governance and Centralization of Power is another fundamental cause of the outbreak of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon. Since 1961, unification and centralization have been the political dogmas of President Ahmadou Ahidjo. At the time of reunification, Ahidjo already had a near political monopoly in East Cameroon. In 1961, he set about bringing West Cameroon under control through a mixture of repression and exploitation of divisions among Anglophone-Cameroonians. At the federal level, despite the constitutional guarantee that English and French would be official languages, the French language was the administration's language of preference (E.Ako, 2001 : 8). On 20th of October 1961, President Ahmadou Ahidjo signed a Presidential Decree, totally reorganizing the federal territory into six administrative regions, including West Cameroon, and appointed a federal inspector for each region, who was to report to the federal president. The appointment of a Francophone to serve as a federal inspector in West Cameroon, provoked discontent among Anglophone-Cameroonians because West Cameroon could not at the same time be a federated state according to the Federal constitution of 1961 and an administrative region by decree. In 1966 Ahidjo transformed multi-party politics into mono-party system in Cameroon which was not welcomed especially among English speaking Cameroonians as it was a negative move against democracy that southern Cameroonians were already use to (E.Ardener, 1967: 22). By 1972 he organized a referendum in Cameroon with the name of the country changed from Federal into United Republic. This was an eventual assimilation of West Cameroon by the Francophone majority (NF. Awasom, 2000, P 42). Beside political grievances, economic problems also contributed in galvanizing southern Cameroonians against the establish order.

3.1 Economic Grievances

Concerning economic grievances, the oil factor was an important driving force behind the Anglophone grievances that led to a demand for an independent statehood. Geopolitically, the Republic of Cameroon is part of the Gulf of Guinea. It is blessed with crude petroleum, oil, natural resources like forest and abundant minerals. It is also blessed with *Societe Nationale de Raffinage* (SONARA). The zone is also blessed with a number of plantations controlled by the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) founded in 1946 by the British to take care of the enemy's

property and to enhance socio-economic development in the concessions. These endowments greatly accounted for the emergence of the Anglophone-Cameroonian grievances due to bad faith in governance matters and in the management of resources and development projects in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon. This feeling of marginalization among Southern Cameroonians culminated in the demand for an independent state by the independentists. The 2017 armed conflict was the outcome of so many piled up grievances, among them economic.

3.2 Socio-Cultural Grievances

Significant size of population allows a state to be granted the status of a player in the international political field due to the fact that the population provides manpower for economic development and military strength. This is also because one of the characteristic of a state is the notion of population apart from the traditional characteristic of territorial delimitation, security and government. (V. Bezverbnny, p 6) Looking at Nigeria for example, we see a political giant as far as the African continent is concerned due to its population size. Cameroon has a total population of over 25.000.000 inhabitants, occupying the 52nd position in the world population ranking, 17th most populous country in Africa⁷ and the most populous country within the CEMAC sub-region. Thus, Cameroon's leading role in the CEMAC is partly due to the fact that it is the most populous nation within the sub-region. Furthermore, because of its French and English colonial history, Cameroon is a bilingual country with its population speaking both English and French. The activities of the separatists remained a threat to Cameroon's demographic status quo (D. Eyoh, 1998: 16).

Even though no official figure currently exists on the exact population size of the English speaking regions of Cameroon, according to the Anglophone separatists, the current population of North and South West (Ambazonia) is more than 8.000.000 inhabitants. Based on this figure, they claim the right to independence, since to them, it makes Ambazonia to be more populous than 60 United Nations (UN) member state and 18 African Union (AU) member states, and with a land size of 43,000 sqkm larger than that of 30 UN member states and 12 AU member states.⁸ From the above analysis, it can be argued that the quest for secession is not all about meeting up with historical blunders or the mere fighting for autonomy. The geopolitical undertones cannot be undermined

⁷World Population Review, *World Population Review: Cameroon Population 2019*, 2019, Available at <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/Cameroon-population/>, Retrieved August 15 2019,

⁸Federal Republic of Ambazonia, "Position Statement of the People of Former British Southern Cameroons/ Ambazonia". Presented to the Former African Heads of state Regarding Africa Constitutive Act 4(b) for Security, during their Proposed Symposium on 'the Crisis in Cameroon', 2019, Addis Ababa, July 16, 2019. p. 5.

because this drive is equally encouraged by the presence of natural resources, the geography and demography of the restive zones. The resources endowed in these regions and in the entire nation have equally influence to a great deal, Cameroon's diplomatic and economic relations with the great powers, and hence, their positions as far as resolving the crisis is concerned (J.Ngoh 2019 :7).

4. Failed AAC 1 and 2 Conferences, Fuel to Anglophone Radicalism

The separatists describe themselves as a movement for the restoration of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia.⁹ The name Ambazonia was derived from Ambas Bay, located on the Gulf of Guinea near the South-West town of Limbe. (J.F.Bayart, 1979) It was coined in the mid-1980s by an Anglophone dissident lawyer called Fon Gorji Dinka.¹⁰ By the 1990s, Anglophone elite activism had crystallized into deliberations called the All Anglophone Conferences in Buea (AAC I 1992) and Bamenda (AAC II 1993). These yielded resolutions aimed at advancing Anglophone interests in Cameroon. However, subsequent differences among the Anglophone elite and the government's dismissive response to many of the Anglophone demands following the AACs prompted the establishment of a dissident, radical separatist movement called the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) in 1995.¹¹ Thus, there has been a long, complex genealogy to Anglophone nationalism, which fuelled the current armed conflict (P.Konings, F.Nyanjoh, 2003). However, its immediate origins can be traced to the government's violent repression of protests by the unions of Anglophone lawyers and teachers in late 2016.

In October 2016, Anglophone teachers' and lawyers' unions launched peaceful protests against the vehement neglect and marginalization of the two English-speaking regions. Large groups of people took part in the year-long protests, which focused on the appointment of Francophone teachers,

⁹See Government of Ambazonia, 'interim Government: Official Site Federal Republic of Ambazonia,' <https://ambagov.org/>.

¹⁰UN High Commission for Human Rights, 'Gorji-Dinka v Cameroon, Merits,' Human Rights Committee [CCPR] Communication No. 1134/2002, UN Doc CCPR/C/83/D/1134/2002, (2005) 12 IHRR 628, IHRL 1824, UNHRC 2005, March 17, 2005, <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPrICAqhKb7yhsuXfSngwAQecUmCVwpZQk3PZklbvStw2QcoeIEUKohrBRq7CJ6zT7XW0K6DaeDdogroBQR4rkfr0aBokambOq4tW%2BJkciGP01JEaKusYnWsWFbcnnAxPZpBxgmCavvRWw%3D%3D>,

¹¹Following the AACs in 1992 and 1993, the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) and its more militant wing, the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), have been at the center of Anglophone separatist claims. Both organizations have long thrived among the Anglophone Cameroonian diaspora. For a long time, the SCYL was led by Ayaba Cho Lucas who now leads the Ambazonian Governing Council (AGC) and its military arm, the Ambazonian Defense Force (ADF). A number of splinter organizations, such as the Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement (SCARM) and the Southern Cameroons Peoples Organization (SCAPO), also emerged in pursuit of the nationalist/autonomist project between the late 1990s and 2000s.

prosecutors and judges in Anglophone areas. The union leadership denounced these appointments as part of the government's gradual but steady process of "Francophonisation" of a nominally bilingual (English and French) state, which had been in evidence since the reunification of British and French Cameroons in 1961.

In the Francophone regions, such as the Littoral, Center, North, Far North, East and Yaounde, which host large communities of Anglophones-Cameroonians, French is often the domineering language used when accessing vital public services. Disaffected Anglophones were/are resentful of the chasm between the official, yet hollow claim that, Cameroon is a "Bilingual State" (A.G.Asuagbor,1998) and the reality of Anglophones' *de facto* second-class citizenship, P.Konings, F.Nyamjoh (2003 :83) evidenced in how they are treated by public officials and security agencies. Within the public and private sectors, "Anglophone-Cameroonians are easily recognized by their names and are believed to be treated as second-class citizens with regards to employment, processing of official documents, and appointments".¹² Anglophone Cameroonians have long complained about the almost total domination of public life by the Francophone elite. These elite have also leveraged its power to marginalized Anglophone regions¹³ when allocating resources for economic development.

5 The Birth of Transnationalism in Cameroon

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 the 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" (C Ngam, R. Njingti, 2020 : 17-31). The umbrella organization 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 "sensitization" of the regional population and a diplomatic offensive. Widespread euphoria was felt in Anglophone Cameroon when an 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

¹²Human Rights Council, "Written Statement Submitted by First Modern Agro. Tools – Common Initiative Group (FLMO.AT.C.I.G), a Non-Governmental Organization in Special Consultative Status, 8 May 2018"m Thirty-eighth Session, Agenda Item 4 (18 June–6 July 2018), <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/HRC/38/NGO/3>.

¹³Here we imply to the North and the South West Regions of Cameroon.

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 (E.R.Ekah, 2019 : 141).

The co-optation of the Anglophone elite into the “hegemonic alliance” and the autocratic nature of the post-colonial regimes prevented Anglophones from openly organizing in defense of their interests until the political liberalization process in the early 1990s. The newly created Anglophone movements were then able to place the Anglophone problem on the national and international agenda. While the Buea Declaration, issued after the historic First All Anglophone Conference (AAC I) in April 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 radicalization of Anglophone movements. In the so-called Bamenda Proclamation, adopted by the Second All Anglophone Conference (AAC II) held in Bamenda from 29th of April to 1st 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”.¹⁴

From 1996 onwards, Anglophone movements appeared to rapidly lose their initial momentum. Two factors were mainly responsible for this unfortunate development. First, the government of Paul Biya proved capable of neutralizing the Anglophone movements to a large extent by employing a number of long-standing tactics including divide-and-rule, co-opting of Anglophone leaders into the regime, and severe repression. Secondly, there was the problem of leadership (Konings, Nyamjoh, 1997 : 30). With the resignation of the founding fathers from the leadership, the SCNC lacked competent and committed leadership. Given the leadership problem and the government’s persistent reluctance to enter into any negotiations, a conflict developed within the Anglophone movements between the doves¹⁵ and the hawks.¹⁶ The Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) in particular opted for the latter strategy.

¹⁴E. E. Elong, Sovereignty in the making: the case of Anglophone Cameroon, ReserachGate. Retrieved July 27, 2019, from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269575409>, on 11th of May 2023.

¹⁵Those who continued to adhere to a negotiated separation from *La République du Cameroun*

¹⁶Those who had come to the conclusion that the independence of Southern Cameroons would only be achieved through armed struggle.

However, it would be a grave error to assume that the Anglophone movements became fully paralyzed or even defeated by divisive and repressive government tactics and their own organizational and strategic shortcomings. Of late, Anglophone struggles for nationalism appear to have acquired a new impetus. On 30th December 1999, Justice Frederick Alobwede Ebong, an SCNC activist with close ties to the SCYL, took over the Cameroon Radio and Television (C RTV) 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, Nyamjoh, 1997 : 39).

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 (E Eong, 1919 : 33). 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. Faced with determined attempts by the Biya government to control Anglophone organizations 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, also called social media nationalism.

The contagion effect of the crisis in the North West and South West regions has largely been thanks to the phenomenon of social media nationalism. The secessionist activists who for the most part were settled in foreign countries used the social media to propagate their ideal in the most alluring manner, thereby endearing many youths whose hopes in the government had faded nearly beyond recovery (E Pommerolle, M Heungoup, 2017: 23-34).

Through Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and even Instagram, the secessionists were radical, making pronouncements and declarations as well as promises enveloped in propagandist statements (largely baseless) which did not only expose the extent of the crisis but enrolled more sympathizers for the cause. In fact, the accessibility of the youths to

android gadgets exposed them to entreaties from secessionists and caused them to engage armed confrontation for the creation of the State of Ambazonia.¹⁷

6 Declaration of Independence by Ambazonian Activist and Government's Response

The neglect or the refute of an Anglophone problem in Cameroon by top government officials and majority Francophone Cameroonians in Cameroon, resulted to the poor management of the Teachers and Lawyers peaceful manifestation of 1916 (N.Mafany : 234-250). By early 2017, it took the form of an armed conflict in the two English Speaking regions of Cameroon. This was caused by the declaration of war against the claimed existential Ambasonian Federal Republic. The government, in what a cross section of the population believed was a miscalculated move, responded with arbitrary arrest, detention and extra-judicial killings of the peaceful protesters. As usual, the radicalism increased and on the 1st of October 2017 some Southern Cameroonians decided to symbolically declare the independence of the so called "Ambasonian Federal Republic" (E.Elong, 2019 : 10) The government led by His Excellency President Paul Biya, increased his clamp down on the political activists, with arbitrary arrest, detention, allege burning of villages and extra-judicial killings.

As a result, different separatists' groups emerged in the two English speaking Regions of Cameroon and decided to take up arms for self-defense¹⁸ and for the restoration of their independence. In response, President Paul Biya declared war against the independent Restoration fighters. The armed confrontation from 2017 was characterized by recurrent attacks, maiming, kidnappings, arbitrary arrest, detention, rapping, killings of children, pregnant women, attacks on non-combatants, the burning of towns, villages, cut of electricity, the cut of internet network, declaration of Ghost Town, imposition of curfew, decapitation of bodies of kidnapped persons, just to name a few. The population was caught within the whims and caprices of the separatists and the military, which resulted to over 35.000 deaths, over 360 villages burnt, over 437.000 displaced internally and over 35.000 as refugees in Nigeria. This armed conflict that has made the two English speaking zones to be ungovernable has lasted up to 2025 due to lack of a genuine dialogue and peace building process aimed at addressing the root causes of the armed conflicts.

¹⁷International Crisis Group, Cameroon's Anglophone Dialogue: A work in progress. International Crisis Group, 26September 2019, retrieved from <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/26-sept-19-cameroon-anglophone-dialogue.pdf>, on the 30th of March 2020.

¹⁸The right to self-defense is codified in international law. It was as a result of the clamped down on the political activists, with arbitrary arrests, detention and extrajudicial killings that pushed the different separatist groups in Both North and South West Regions of Cameroon, to pick up arms, as a right to "self-defense as articulated in most international law and armed conflicts guides.

Conclusion

The outbreak of the armed conflict in Cameroon in 1917 between government forces and Anglophone armed separatist fighters was the result of a combination of grievances ranging from political economic and socio-cultural. These grievances gained national and international recognition through the activities (social media publications) of trans-national actors. The aim in this article was to bring out the interactions that exist between the grievance theory and transnationalism and demonstrate that even though there exist a point of divergence, the point of convergence between the two was instrumental in transforming the Anglophone question or problem into an armed confrontation by 2017. Thus throughout the paper we have vividly explored the grievance theory versus transnationalism concepts to deduce that; studies of this nature need considerable caution when arriving at a conclusion. Very importantly we realize that despite the important role played by grievances and transnationalism, a closer look revealed that government's response or reaction to the grievances presented over the years played a non negligible role in fueling the armed conflict. In clear terms the issue with which the Anglophone Diaspora and separatist leaders exploited to defy every moves by the government over the years, were not just the grievances that have been a subject of discussion over the years, but the actions that government has always demonstrated in relation to the grievances presented and the actors who carried forward the grievances. There is therefore a genuine necessity to probe into the porous borders that separate disciplines in the social sciences and do an interdisciplinary, detailed and historical research to understand the deep-rooted reasons for the outbreak of armed conflicts like the Anglophone armed conflict in Cameroon.

Ultimately, the grievance theory and the concept of transnationalism enjoy borders but are inseparable in understanding the dynamics surrounding the evolution of the Anglophone armed conflict today because, no single argument is strong enough to have radicalize the conflict beyond the borders of the two English speaking regions. The points of divergence and convergence, rather offers a more all-encompassing understanding of the armed conflict in Anglophone Cameroon. Today, close to a decade since the start of the armed conflict, many unanswered questions remain; why are the belligerents unable to talk, why is the international community unable to bring both parties to the table of dialogue, why has the absolute and legitimate power of the state been unable to successfully impose a solution to the armed conflict and finally, why have non-state actors become too strong for states to manage. Answers to these questions may go a long way to handle the cyclical armed conflicts not only in Cameroon but in the world at large.

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