



Cultural Diversity in Conflict and Peace Making in Africa

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Abstract

Contrary to common belief that Cameroon is a haven of peace in a turbulent Central African sub region, this paper demonstrates that the absence of war in the country does not imply that it is peaceful. Given the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country with its more than 289 ethnic groups and a colonial legacy of French and English cultures and languages, plus remnants of a German sub-stratum, it should be clear that there are many potential ingredients for conflicts in Cameroon. The politicians seem to have nurtured these cultural and/or linguistic diversities in ways that fuel conflict and can even spark civil war. The tension that results from these ethnic and/or linguistic and religious splinters is not overt, however, due to the repressive nature of the regime in place. However, this tension continues to grow, to the detriment of the country's socio-economic development. There is therefore an acute need for measures to defuse such cultural conflicts which have the potential of sparking future civil strife in the country.

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Introduction

Since the late 1980s, the globalisation phenomenon and the resulting political liberalisation seem to have led to an increased obsession with ethnicity, 'autochthony' and the 'politics of belonging' in Africa and elsewhere, thereby creating a crisis of identity. So pervasive and disturbing was this issue of exclusion and new forms of identity arising from 'repackaging', 'retribalisation', 'reconstruction' and 'redefinition' of Africans that a special issue of *Africa Today* (1998) and a plethora of writers (e.g. Awasom 2004; Fawole & Ukeje 2005; Fonchingong 2005), as well as CODESRIA have focused on it in an attempt to x-ray its complexities. Cameroon is a special case study of identity construction and activation. Such a situation can be a threat to national integration because of Cameroon's triple German, Gallic and Anglo-Saxon colonial legacies and its more than 289 ethnic tribes.

Cameroon was born out of the erstwhile German colony of Kamerun, which became a United Nations mandated territory after World War I. The colony was splintered to cater for French and British interests against the backdrop of the imperialist morass that ensued. The north- and south-west regions of the country, known today as Anglophone Cameroon, were administered by the British, while the rest of the territory known today as Francophone Cameroon was administered by the French. These two separately administered regions reunified in 1961 after a plebiscite to form a two-state federation with two prime ministers, a federal legislature and a single president (Ngoh 1999). In 1972, the population voted in a referendum to adopt a new constitution setting up a unitary state to replace the federation whose name *ipso facto* changed from Federal Republic of Cameroon to United Republic of Cameroon. This event, referred to as 'the pacific revolution' was to turn the tide in Cameroon's chequered colonial history (Stark 1980; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003) as it immediately resulted in what can be called a complete annexation of English-speaking Cameroon into a unitary state dominated by French-speaking Cameroon. A number of factors resulting

from the fusion of the two entities generated ethnicisation and a growing polarisation of communal identities: First, there were many inequalities which engendered disgruntlement. Secondly there was a spectre and repression of opposing voices – especially of leaders and supporters of a political party, Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), which had been founded in 1948. Finally the state had the ability to effectively encapsulate the vulnerabilities of regional fracturing that were a result of the union. More disturbing, however, is the fact that in present-day Cameroon, the ruling elite has adopted a rather naive approach to the concept of peace and security – as meaning the absence of internal and external armed war or conflict.

Peace and security must be viewed from a broader perspective than this narrow one of the absence of internal and external armed war or armed conflict (Jinadu 2000:3). It must be viewed from the more positive and more embracing perspective of creating an enabling environment for self-realisation and for the enjoyment and sustenance of self-development and self-actualisation (Jinadu 2000:3). Thus, from a human development perspective (UNDP 1994) and from a physical conflict perspective, Cameroon is today confronted with a serious security crisis. Unfortunately, the ruling elites in Cameroon have responded to the security crisis only by adopting mainly repressive and military security strategies (Bidima 2001; Gemandze 2003) within a framework of national security policies. The emphasis is thus on national security rather than on human or personal security. Yet, it could be argued that a policy of human security or personal security (Cilliers 2004; Dumas 2004) is more appropriate for conflict prevention and/or resolution.

In view of the persistence of internal conflicts, the absence of peace and security and the potential for the eruption of large-scale violent internal conflicts, there is urgent need for appropriate policies for managing cultural diversity and/or diverse socio-political identities in Cameroon. Given this background, this study situates the dynamics of the discourse on cultural diversity that has become polarised as a result of elite manipulations and the scramble for shrinking state resources. It sheds light

on the appropriation of ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences as a modality for reproducing elite hegemony on state instrumentality in a period of compulsory economic and political reform.

State (de)construction and hegemonic alliances

The roots of the fragile Cameroonian stability are not self-evident. There is hardly another African country with greater diversity in terms of ethnic groups, languages and religions. Among the over 200 ethnic groups counted by experts, there are various types of Bantus. There are semi-Bantus on the Adamawa Plateau (or the Grassfields) in the south-west, and Fulbes (Peuls) and Kirdis in the north. The peoples of the north are predominantly Muslims, while those in the south and the west are predominantly Christians, but there are also large numbers of animists. Needless to say, Cameroon's inner and outer boundaries were drawn arbitrarily by the colonial masters and they cut across ethnic lines.

Colonisation added to the diversity because the once German 'Kamerun' was split into two protectorates under the League of Nations — British Cameroon in the west, and French Cameroon in the east. After independence, followed by reunification, French and English were adopted as official languages of the country. Besides these two officially widely used languages (French being significantly more widely used than English), there exists Pidgin English (considered by experts to have developed in the plantations) which is widely spoken along the coastline, even in French-speaking Douala and in almost all the major towns in the country. Cameroon's great ethnic diversity is therefore accompanied by a unique linguistic and cultural pattern which is particularly complex in politically sensitive areas like Douala and the Grassfields regions.

As if such diversity were not enough, the country was also divided along ideological lines at the time of independence. The communist-inspired UPC was in violent revolt against the Ahidjo regime, which was backed by President De Gaulle of France. President Ahidjo's first task was to build up a strong army and stop a guerrilla war. From the beginning,

Ahidjo's rule was autocratic (Jackson & Rosberg 1982:152-156) and quickly developed the three central features of neopatrimonial rule described by Bratton and Van de Walle (1997:61-68) as presidentialism, clientelism and the massive redistribution of state resources.

Under Ahidjo, presidentialism meant the almost total concentration of power around one person and one institution, 'la présidence' (Prouzet 1974:151-86; Bayart 1985:141-59). Ahidjo built up a large clientelistic network reaching into practically every corner of the country. People obtained their jobs, their licenses, contracts or projects through hire and were expected to show appropriate gratitude. Loyalty to the president was more important than performance on the job, and as a result, the private good had priority over the public good. Such patronage implied massive distribution of state resources.

Clientelism went hand in hand with the formation of a multi-ethnic ruling class that to this day includes representatives from almost all parts of the country. Given the great cultural diversity of the country, Ahidjo may not have had any other choice as no single group seems large enough to monopolise power. Whatever the reason, multi-ethnic elite politics has since been a Cameroonian reality (Le Vine 1986:20-52; Prouzet 1974:51-58, 85-126).

Interestingly, Ngayap (1983) pointed out that there are two levels of elite integration: a 'macroéquilibré géopolitique' and a 'microdosage régional'.¹ At the macro level, the cabinet and especially the 'ministres d'état' (senior ministers) have at all times been composed of representatives of all major regions and ethnic groups. Appointing both speakers of English and French to important posts deftly bridges the Francophone-Anglophone division. Ahidjo (the former president) and Biya (the current president), both Francophones, have often chosen English-speaking prime ministers or vice-presidents. 'Microdosage' until recently, shows at the provincial level, where the more important positions are deliberately assigned to

1 The first leading to a broadly balanced geopolitical integration, and the second to a smaller scale regional integration.

representatives of all divisions. Furthermore, and in order to promote integration, regional provincial offices are often headed by non-locals (Ngayap 1983:68-87).

When Ahidjo resigned in 1982, his ethnic agenda was carried on by his successor, Paul Biya, who perfected it. It is institutional practice in Cameroon that during elections, high state officials and the well-placed urban elite leave their offices for their respective villages to garner support for the ruling party – the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) (Fonchingong 2005). Those whose constituencies perform well are sure of securing their posts or gaining better appointments while those whose results are dismal subject themselves to the vagaries of the ethnic arithmetic, modulated by the wisdom of the Head of State. Monga (2000) succinctly refers to this logic of ‘national integration’ as the ‘ethnic alchemy’ that has characterised socio-political life in Cameroon since Ahidjo’s reign. It is the reason why the composition of the cabinet after major elections often leaves Cameroonians keen on analysing its geopolitical zoning and ethnic character. While the ethnic balancing has the advantage of pacifying a highly complex polity, it also entails the obvious disadvantage of waste, mismanagement and economic stagnation (Jurg 1999). The fault lines have become complex to manage and even the sisterly English-speaking provinces – North-West and South-West – have been dragged into the politicisation of ethnicity.

Politics of ‘belonging’ and exclusion

Cameroon’s cultural diversity, instead of serving as a melting pot for state construction, has been used by unscrupulous politicians to foster dividing and ruling. The stalled democratic process under Biya, has led to a revival of ethnic sentiments. In their diversity, Cameroonians are trying to negotiate a sense of national identity against the backdrop of elite machinations and regionalism. Re-echoing the sentiments on cultural diversity, Geschiere and Gugler (1998) have examined the phenomenon of the ‘eleventh province’. These are the people with complex identities,

trapped at the Francophone/Anglophone frontiers and making attempts to adopt a new self-identity within the logic of incorporation. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2000) reiterate the upsurge of autochthony within the context of globalisation with underpinnings of notions of us/them opposition. Focusing on the tensions within Cameroon, they present autochthony and exclusion in relation to national politics. In this vein, Yenshu (2003) demonstrates that cultural diversity in Cameroon can be attributed to historical events at the local, regional and national levels. Ndue (1999) decries governmental ineffectiveness as he argues that it has continuously declined as a result of parochialisation of the public realm and resource allocation by government and other state institutions which have typically come to follow ethnic or religious lines. His concerns match those of Nnoli (1998), who points out that the intensified polarisation of society into sub-national, ethnic, and sub-ethnic cultures widely separated in terms of identity and loyalty, encourages further hostility rather than cooperation.

As Fonchingong (2005) points out, the euphoria and high expectations associated with the advent of multiparty politics in Cameroon in the 1990s were soon to become a mirage as the stage was returned to politics for parochial interests. Awasom (2004) and Jua (2004) underscore that ethnic/regional cleavages have crystallised since the institutionalisation of 'autochthonisation', 'politics of belonging', or 'the son of the soil' syndrome, following the re-introduction of plural democracy in Cameroon in 1990 and the use of identities to cultivate system-supporting attitudes. Against the backdrop of state clientelism and patronage politics the political landscape has been reduced to a zero-sum game of 'who is in' and 'who is out', thereby opening the floodgates for elites to negotiate identities on behalf of purported collectivities (See Fonchingong 2005 for details).

As the foregoing impinges on the question of national integration, Awasom (2004) wonders if the notion of unity is being ridiculed, as priority is given to belonging to a group first and to the nation second. If this is the case, the notion of unity is being jeopardised by ethno-regional

jangoism, formed and sustained by the state. The elite are in the frontlines fighting for ethno-political supremacy of the various ethnic groups and political representations in Cameroon. They play a prominent role in the fractionalisation and integration of classes and ethnic groups in national politics. As Ake (2000) notes, the only way for elites to secure life and property and some freedom is to be in control, or at least, to share in the control of state power. The phenomenon of exclusion and monopoly of power is commonplace in the state paradigm in Cameroon. Jua (1991) stresses that the government's hand-picked elite or barons serve as transmission belts between the president and the different ethnic groups.

Thus, political sloganeering and the 'motions of support' syndrome are frameworks under the manipulation of the elite (Fonchingong 2004; Mbuagbo & Akoko 2004). In essence, every important ethnic group feels represented within the regime and thus able to exercise some influence on government policy. Loyal followers in the ethno-client network are rewarded by appointments and nominations to state offices, state resources and rent-seeking opportunities. The extraordinary development of political and administrative tribalism is rife. It is a tradition that senior officials upon appointment or nomination seek tribal endorsements from their various villages and regions, which seems to confirm that ethnicisation and regionalism are inherent in Cameroon's political landscape. This tribal canonisation following high-level appointments put the elite in a political vantage point, as they bargain for the group's share of the national cake.

Ethno-political cleavages in Cameroon

According to Le Vine (2004:215), the ethnic factor has been and remains critical to Cameroon politics, given the country's extraordinary ethno-cultural heterogeneity and a number of important ethnic and cultural cleavages operating on both the national and regional political areas. He mentioned that ethnic and cultural cleavages in Cameroon include the old North-South division based on historical, ethnic and cultural

distinctions between the mainly Muslim and Fulani peoples in the Northern Savannahs and the predominantly Christianised and non-Muslim populations in the South Central, South East and Coastal areas of the country. In the North, there is the split between the Islamised and the so-called Kirdi (pagan) peoples; in the South various permutations of identity politics involve the South Western Bamoun and 'Grassfields' peoples (mainly the Bamilekes); the Centre-South Ewondo-, Bassa-, and Beti-speaking peoples and the Coastal Douala (Le Vine 2004:215).

Amundsen (1999:466) offers a more detailed analysis of socio-cultural and political cleavages in Cameroon. He asserts that the political cleavages in Cameroon correspond to three distinct socio-political core regions; viz, the Northern, Western and South-Central regions.

Firstly, there is the South-Central region and the Beti (Amundsen 1999:467-468). The South-Central region consists of the Central, South and East administrative Provinces. The capital city, Yaounde, is in the Central Province. The dominant ethnic groups in the South-Central regions are the Beti and Bulu ethnic groups. The Head of State, President Biya, hails from this region. According to Amundsen (1999), tendencies towards ethnic cleansing of the higher echelons of the central power structure, especially in the security and military forces and the central administration, further accumulate power in the hands of the Beti ethnic group. Extended privileges and multiple key posts are said to be concentrated in the hands of Biya's closest family and among people from his village (Amundsen 1999:467). Moreover, various patron-client networks and ethnic loyalties have been nurtured over a long period by prominent government and party officials establishing close ties between politicians and their constituencies, and making dividends of all sorts reach this region more easily. All these factors have led, on the one hand, to an unquestionable loyalty on the part of most of the rural residents to the urban-administrative elite of the region and, on the other, to a certain possibility of control for the regime (Amundsen 1999:468).

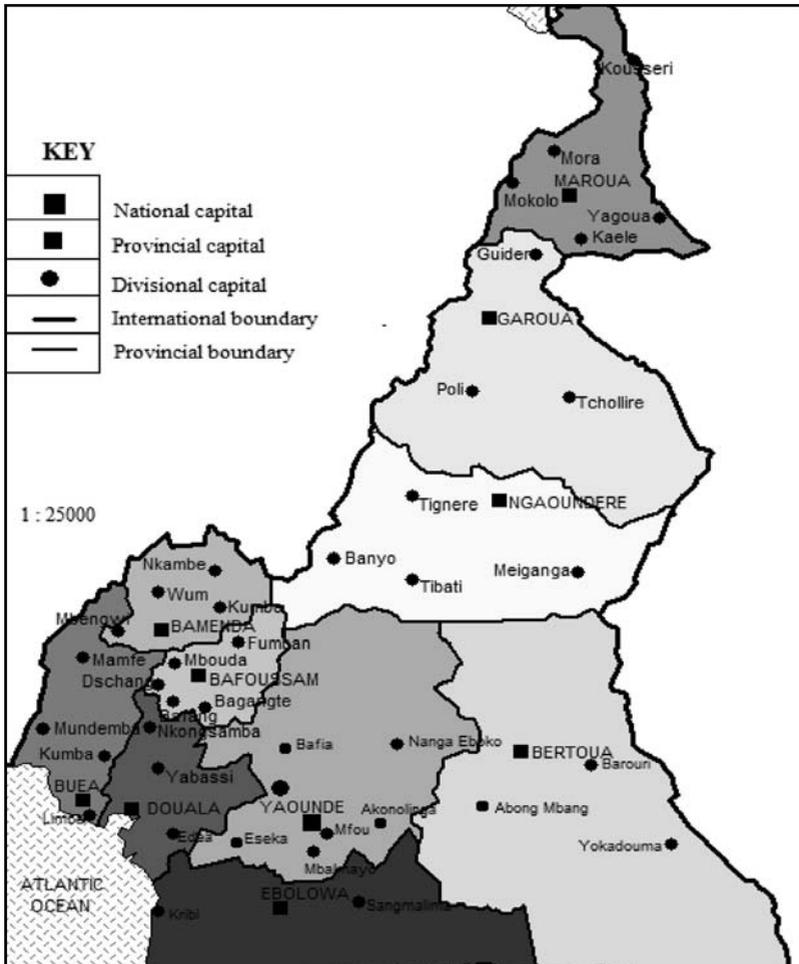
Furthermore, the Beti, both civil servants and coffee or cocoa farmers, vote massively for the ruling party and the Biya government (Amundsen 1999). This situation is partly explained by President Biya's ethnic preference for the Betis, which has led to an overwhelming Beti entourage around him with its extensive clientelist network in the Beti core-land. It is also partly due to the belief of this ethnic group that they entirely depend on the state sector for livelihood and so they must do everything in their power to make sure that the regime stays in place (Amundsen 1999: 408). From the perspective of conflict analysis, it is important to note that the government (or some clients of centrally placed politicians) has been using threatening propaganda to frighten the Beti masses into voting for the ruling party. Local broadcasts from radio stations in Yaounde are said to transmit covert political threats and various kinds of messages during political campaigns that foster distrust, fear and hatred on an ethnic basis in many Beti communities (Amundsen 1999: 408).

Secondly, there is the Western region and the Bamileke cleavage. The Western region consists of the three predominantly Bamileke provinces of the North-west, the South-west and the West, and in addition the Littoral province with different ethnic groups. These three Bamileke provinces are highly cultivated highlands with a dense population, making the Bamileke the most numerous (more than 20 percent of the population) among Cameroon's some 200 ethnic groups (Amundsen 1999:408-409). The Bamileke have the reputation of being among the most enterprising peoples of Africa and truly capitalist oriented. It is likely that they possess a greater share of the private wealth of the country than would be expected in view of their numbers. They have spread all over Cameroon, seeking business opportunities in most sectors. Furthermore, they are organised in extended family units, giving each other mutual and financial support and hence increased opportunity (Amundsen 1999:469).

John Fru Ndi, leader of the most important opposition party in Cameroon, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), comes from this region. In fact, one of the more promising tendencies in Cameroon is multiple efforts of different opposition groups in this region to form a hosting

coordination or alliance of opposition forces to contest the power monopoly of the Centre-South. It seems that they are able to coalesce their cultural, economic and regional interests and thereby to overcome internal dissensions in the face of the authoritarian central power (Amundsen 1999: 470).

Figure 1: Ethno-Political Cleavages in Cameroon



Source: Fombe 2007

Thirdly, we have the North, with the Fulani and the Kirdi cleavage. This region consists of the three administrative Northern provinces of the Extreme North, the North, and the Adamawa. The region is rather densely populated, and is characterised by Muslim domination. The Muslim Fulani (or Hausa or Peul) in all respects constitute the leadership of the region (in religion, culture, administration, ownership and wealth) (Amundsen 1999:470-471). The Northern provinces are also characterised by the presence of a multitude of different and oppressed non-Muslim peoples. The word Kirdi, meaning 'non-believer' in Arabic, has a negative connotation; but is usually employed to designate this non-Muslim population. Some Kirdi tribes have adopted Christianity as a form of protest against Fulani domination, thereby adding a second, religious, dimension to the extreme social tensions in Northern Cameroon (Amundsen 1999: 471-472).

Conflict situations in Cameroon

Since reunification in 1961, inter-community and ethnic conflicts have been common in Cameroon. Inter-community or ethnic conflicts (with various degrees of intensity) have erupted in almost all of the ten administration provinces of the country. The ethnic/regional cleavages have crystallised since the institutionalisation of 'autochthonisation', or 'politics of belonging'. These conflicts are consistent with the drive of 'belonging'. Ihonybere (1994) argues that in a context where the state is absent, 'the masses turn to ethnic, religious, and philanthropic organisations for hope, leadership, self-expression and support', thus accounting for the bloom in associational and ethnic groupings in Cameroon. For example, in the logic of South West indigenes, the North West Elite Association (NOWELA) is purportedly protecting the interests of North Westerners. The La'kam stand for the ideals of the Bamilekes of the West, while the Essigan represent the interests of the Betis from the South, East and Centre. The SAWA² and

2 SAWA literally means 'seaside', 'coast' or, as adjective, 'littoral' in the Douala Language spoken in the Littoral Province of Cameroon.

revitalised Ngondo cater for the interests of Bassas and Doualas. Recently, some elites of the Grand North joined the race to defend the interests of all Northerners (Adamawa, North and Far North Provinces) commonly referred to in the Cameroon ethnic/regional register as 'Nordist' (See Ardener 1967, Yenshu 1998:27, Monga 2000 and Awasom 2004 for further details).

These ethnic cleavages represent different geopolitical interests and are carved along tribal lines. Such ethnic groups are 'natural groups with ready-made cleavages for man-made conflicts and alliances in a wider state system' (Otite 1990:4). The ineffective control of voices of dissent and ethnic sentiments may lead to the institutionalisation of ethnic hatred and conflicts. These ethno-regional communities have become conduits in regional quests, thirsting for access to state resources. It is legitimate to note that such regional associations have resonated sharply in the search for inclusion in the polity.

Dominant ethnic groups in government dictate the pace of change. Along these lines, the Beti hegemony and confiscation of power in Cameroon were supposedly articulated by Cardinal Tumi, Archbishop of Douala, in an interview granted to *L'Effort Camerounais*. The Beti occupation of political space was proven right following a survey of senior administrators, the military and other top government functionaries. However, Cameroonian politicians are exploiting cultural differences by engaging in political discourses that couch cross-ethnic economic inequalities and social justice in regional terms (Monga 2000).

In this circumstance, as Fonchingong (2005) notes, we witness the sprouting of seemingly withdrawn identities that have the potential for agitation and protest engineered by the 'divide and rule' system in Cameroon as they scramble for scarce state resources. Associational life (Ake 2000) is blooming as the legitimacy of the state vanishes and the withdrawal of identity and loyalty, fear, suspicion and even hostility commences.

The fact that such ethnic affiliations (Awason 2004) are fashioned along lines of regional consciousness brings to the fore the categorisation of non-members as strangers and outsiders. This bifurcation syndrome (Fonchingong 2005) has marred relations between the two English-speaking provinces that are continually torn apart by the divisive politics of the regime in place. In most towns in the South West Province, non-indigenes are tagged as settlers, graffis, and kam-no-gos. These stereotypes are used for those from the Grassfields (North-West and West) regions of Cameroon.

In the major elections since 1990 (1992, 1997, 2002, 2004 and 2007), non-indigenes were often reminded of their 'stranger' status. Awason (2004) notes that the liberalisation of the political landscape in Cameroon had the undesirable and unforeseen consequence of realigning the citizenry into supporters of the ruling CPDM on the one hand, and opposition forces on the other, and this quickly assumed ethnic postures. Socpa (2002) states that the advent of multipartyism in the 1990s brought about ethnic tension and violence involving the Bamelike and Beti ethnic groups in Yaounde. He however underscores the fact that multipartyism is simply a pretext because the main causes of the ethnic conflicts are inequalities of access to land, political positions and control of commercial activities (Socpa 2002:76). For instance, in Douala where the main opposition party, SDF, won the 5 Urban District Councils, the Doualas, under the umbrella of the SAWA movement, organised a protest march against the domination of their municipality by 'strangers' (Awason 2004; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000; Yenshu 1998).

The Biya regime, which had evolved and consolidated itself in the one-party context, saw itself threatened by the 'opposition enemies' and started perceiving Cameroonians as either autochthones or allogenes – those who belong (insiders) or those who do not belong (outsiders). The increasing currency of slogans about autochthones versus allogenes can be seen as marking a new form of ethnicity (Geschier & Nyamnjoh 2000). The Government did not take the fall of the strategic economic city of Douala to the opposition SDF party lightly. It therefore instigated

large-scale demonstrations by the autochthonous people of Douala under the canopy of their traditional organisation, the SAWA.

Again, the elections in the capital city and Beti heartland, Yaounde, were given a special twist (Awasom 2004). In spite of its overwhelming cosmopolitan character, the Biya Government treated the elections in this city as if it was a Beti rural enclave, allowing no opposition party to win any of the Urban Local Authorities. In the Yaounde 5th District Council for instance, which is occupied predominantly by Anglophones and Bamilekes, SDF scored an absolute majority, winning all the 35 seats. But the government annulled the results on the pretext that the ruling CPDM party had petitioned against the inclusion of the name of Mani Theodore on the SDF list whereas the said Mani Theodore was still a member of the CPDM party. The SDF protested and produced Mani Theodore's letter of resignation from the CPDM party but that was to no avail.

Similarly, prior to the 2002 twin elections (municipal and legislative), the divisional officer overseeing the registration of voters in Buea (provincial capital of the South-West Province) blatantly told non-indigenes who complained of lack of voters cards to go and register in their province of origin. This has become a common practice in Cameroon. The then Prime Minister of the Republic, Peter Mafany Musonge (who hails from the South-West Province), even distinguished his national brethren when he told them not to let the 'graffis' (those who originated from the Western grasslands of Cameroon – North-West and West Provinces) have any control in the councils in Bakweri Land (*The Post* 2002). One cannot help wondering aloud about the scope of his administration and if he was Prime Minister of Cameroon or of a particular tribe. During the 1997 local government elections, one-time Governor of the same province, Peter Oben Ashu distinguished himself as a propagandist of the politics of belonging. The Governor gave firm instructions that non-indigenes in Kumba, another town of the South-West Province, should produce residence permits before they could vote. The Bamenda graffis, generally sympathetic to the opposition SDF, became inescapable targets of

the Governor's public campaigns. He presented them as 'land grabbers', 'ingrates' and 'bellicose strangers' (Awasom 2004: 283). This brings to the fore the cross-cutting identity and ethnic question in Cameroon's multiparty democratic dispensation.

The pre- and post-election violence that sanctioned the 1992 presidential elections showed the cracks in the state apparatus orchestrated along ethnic lines. The frequent molestation of Anglophones and Bamilekes, especially in the South and East Provinces, and the likewise harassment of some Southerners in the North-West Province is instructive of the instrumentation of tribalism and regionalism. Many political activists, journalists and students, particularly Anglophones and Bamilekes, were arrested and tortured. In the 2007 twin election, polling officers who found themselves in predominantly ruling party and opposition strongholds became victims of ethnic conflicts in their efforts to monitor the counting of ballots. Auto-defence networks, thuggery and ethnic militias were prevalent features.

After the 2002 elections, three officials of SDF were molested and exiled from their native Ekondo-Titi (South-West Province) for spearheading the opposition party's campaigns. This was done by the indigenous population, under the influence of the elite (*The Post* 2002). It is commonplace in Cameroon prior to elections for the elite associations, regional groups and ethnic cleavages to get together and indicate their leanings. Such meetings, organised by a handful of top elites, purportedly speak on behalf of their kith and kin. The meetings are usually sanctioned by resolutions and 'motions of support' transmitted to the ruling party and regime in place. Such slogans are given a high coverage on the state media (See Fonchingong 2005 for detail).

The Anglophone problem

Today Anglophones constitute approximately one-fourth of the Cameroonian population.³ What is known as the 'Anglophone Problem' in Cameroon, has received (and will probably continue to receive) considerable treatment in the literature (Balencie & de La Grange 1996; Gemandze 2002; Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997, 2000, 2003, 2004; Nkoum-Me-Tseny 1999; Jua 2001, 2004; Mbuagbo 2002). According to Konings & Nyamnjoh (1997:207), the root cause of the Anglophone problem may be traced back to 1961 when political elites of two territories with different colonial legacies – one French and the other British – agreed on the formation of a federal state. Contrary to expectations, this did not provide for the equal partnership of both parties, let alone for the preservation of the cultural heritage and identity of each, but turned out to be merely a transitory phase to the total integration of the Anglophone region into a strongly centralised, unitary state (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2004:192-197). The result over time was the creation of an Anglophone consciousness: the feeling of being 'marginalised', 'exploited', and 'assimilated' by the Francophone-dominated state, and by the Francophone population as a whole (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997:2001). Konings and Nyamnjoh (2004:192-193) have analysed Anglophone grievances from three main perspectives – political, economic and cultural.

The resurgence of multipartyism in Africa in the late 1980s, starting with Benin Republic, provided Anglophones with an instrument to express their grievances. They therefore spearheaded the reintroduction of multipartyism in Cameroon and this act initially polarised the Cameroon polity along Anglophone-Francophone lines and provided an opportunity for both communities to publicly state what they thought about each other.

Firstly, from the perspective of the political domain, Anglophones complain of their exclusion from key government and party positions and

³ They are estimated at about 17,3 million.

their inferior role in decision-making councils and organs (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2004). *Secondly*, as regards the economic domain, Anglophones complain of the dismantling or neglect of their region's infrastructure, the lack of public investment in their region, and the rape and drain of their region's economic resources (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2004). *Thirdly*, the Anglophones complain of the continuous attempts at 'Frenchification', that is, giving pre-eminence to French as the special language and to inherited French institutions and bureaucratic practices in all aspects of state administration and public life, even in the Anglophone territory itself (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2004:193).

These grievances have been articulated with various degrees of intensity by a number of Anglophone movements. Prominent among these are the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) and its Youth Wing, the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL). The SCNC was founded in April 1993 at the All Anglophone Conference (AAC) in Buea. It strongly advocates the restoration of the statehood and independence of the Southern Cameroons. In fact, the SCNC defines itself as an irredentist movement, representing the mainstream Cameroonians working for the restoration of Sovereign independence of the Southern Cameroons.

The Government has adopted a number of strategies in response to Anglophone grievances (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003:133-136):

- ♦ Trivialisation and demonisation of the Anglophone problem (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003:109-111).
- ♦ Divide and rule (Koning & Nyamnjoh 2003:111-121).
- ♦ The establishment of direct and indirect control over the mass media (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003:111-121).
- ♦ Repression (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003:133-136).

The above authors assert that most of the strategies employed by the government to deconstruct Anglophone identity have tended to be accompanied by ruthless repression of the Anglophone population and Anglophone activities.

In fact, in spite of the SCNC's 'stand' for 'The Force of Argument and not the Argument of Force',⁴ it has so far borne the brunt of Government repressive machinery.⁵ For instance, Amnesty International reports that in December 2005, the Appeals Court in Yaounde decided on appeals by imprisoned members of SCNC against their 1999 convictions by a military tribunal. The prisoners had been sentenced to between eight years and life imprisonment after an unfair trial before special courts directly controlled by the Ministry of Defence, on charges in connection with armed attacks in North-West Province in 1997. The prisoners had been denied an appeal for more than five years. Most of them looked sick and frail as a result of life-threatening prison conditions and medical neglect (Amnesty International 2006). In fact one of the prisoners, Julius Ngu Ndi, who had been serving a 20-year prison sentence, died from tuberculosis in July 2005. He had reportedly been denied adequate and prompt medical treatment for several months and was taken to hospital only days before he died (Amnesty International 2006).

Furthermore, peaceful political activities by SCNC members were met with arbitrary and unlawful detentions. For instance, on 15 January 2005, as many as 40 SCNC activists were detained and Intervention Unit Officers in Buea reportedly assaulted the group's leader, Henry Fossung. Ayemba Ette Otun and about 20 other SCNC members were arrested while meeting in October and detained for up to two weeks (Amnesty International 2006). *The Post* (2002) reports that Titiahonjo Mathew, a teacher by profession and SCNC activist, was arrested in Ndop with several other activists, tortured and transferred to Bafoussam Central Prison,

4 See *The Post*, No 0803 of 6/10/2006 p.3, 'SCNC Leaders are not Cowards'. Prince Hitler Mbinglo, Northern Zone Chairperson of the SCNC, stressed the 'SCNC Motto: The Force of Argument not the Argument of Force, vowing that no amount of force will deter them. See also *The Post*, No 0713 of 31/10/2005 p.8, 'SCNC as Passive Resisters'.

5 See *The Eden* newspaper, No. 038 of 31/10-07/11/2005, 'New Mezam SDO told to Fight Secessionists'; *Le Front*, No 121 of 21/09/2006 p.4, '1^{er} Octobre: Etat d'urgence dans la zone Anglophone', where it is reported that between 5000 and 7000 troops were deployed to pre-empt independence commemoration activities by the SCNC in the North-West and the South-West Provinces of the Country; and *The Post*, No 0830 of 22/01/2007.

where he died under undisclosed circumstances.⁶ In another instance, as reported in *The Post* (2006), five SCNC activists (Henry Nshadze, Edwin Limfonyuy, Moses Komban, Thomas Kongso and Joseph Jumran) from Bui Division were taken to Bafoussam in September 2002 after being detained and severely tortured by Kumbo gendarmerie led by Captain Becklen. At the Bafoussam Central Prison, one of them, Nshadze, suffered a severe cough while Limfonyuy and Komban had swollen legs as a result of torture.⁷

From the foregoing analysis, there is no doubt that the Anglophone problem, especially as articulated by the SCNC and the response of the governing/ruling elite is potentially one of the most explosive conflict situations today in Cameroon (Balencie & de La Grange 1996). In fact, Freedom House (2006) states that the linguistic distinction in Cameroon constitutes the country's most potent political division.

National culture: towards conflict prevention and resolution in Cameroon

There is a considerable body of literature on cultural and ethnic diversity in Cameroon. Part of this literature is concerned with the political instrumentalisation and/or mobilisation of cultural/ethnic diversity (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000; Socpa 2002; Zognong & Mouiche 2002; Yenshu 2003). Much of this literature however, does not pay special attention to the question of prevention, resolution and/or management of conflicts resulting from the instrumentalisation of cultural and/or ethnic diversity. Internal conflicts in Cameroon are caused by the 'underlying' and 'proximate' 'causes' of internal conflict identified by Brown (1997:5). This is clear from the socio-cultural and political cleavages as well as the conflict

6 *The Post* No 0400 of 26/08/2002, p.2, 'British High Commissioner Alarmed by Reports on Tortured', and p.3, 'Courts Orders Retrial of SCNC Case'.

7 *The Post*, No 0905 of 10/10/2006, pp 1-2, 'Troops storm SCNC Conference, arrest Nfor Nfor, 40 others'; see also *The Herald* No 1890 of 23-24 January 2007, pp. 1-2, 'Government Offensive seeks to wipe out SCNC'.

situations reviewed above. Crucial factors in this regard are 'underlying' causes, 'structural factors', 'political factors' as well as 'cultural/perceptual factors' (Brown 1997:5). Secondly, as regards 'proximate causes', internal conflicts are 'elite triggered', by 'bad leaders' (Brown 1997:5), especially through the instrumentalisation of cultural/ethnic diversity.

It could be argued that the 'underlying causes' as well as the 'proximate causes' of internal conflicts in Cameroon are both 'nurtured' by the absence of a nationalist ideology. In this context of cultural and/or ethnic diversity, the institutionalisation of national culture could be most appropriate for conflict management and/or resolution.

A classic statement on national culture is offered by Fanon (1963). He defines national culture as: the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. A national culture in underdeveloped countries should therefore take its place at the very heart of the struggle for freedom, which these countries are carrying on (Fanon 1963:233). Fanon further asserts that if culture is the expression of national consciousness, then national consciousness is the most elaborate form of culture. In Africa the problem of national consciousness and of national culture takes on a special dimension (Fanon 1963:247).

From this perspective, it could be argued that the promotion of national culture is compatible with some elements of the integrated theory of the politics of nationalism and ethnicity proposed by Kellas (1991). The Cameroon government has recognised the importance of national culture for national integration and national unity. Article 1(2) of decree N°2005/177 of 27 May 2005, establishing the Ministry of Culture, provides (inter alia) that the Minister of Culture is responsible for the formulation and implementation of government policy as regards cultural development, the promotion of culture as well as national integration.

More specifically, the decree provides that the Minister of Culture is responsible for:

- ♦ The development and dissemination of national culture; and
- ♦ The establishment of strategies and follow-up measures aimed at reinforcing national integration.

At the local level, article 22 of Law N° 2004/018 of 22 July 2004 governing Local Government in Cameroon provides that local authorities shall promote culture and national languages. More specifically local authorities shall (inter alia):

- ♦ Organise cultural festivities and/or events;
- ♦ Offer assistance to cultural groups and/or associations; and
- ♦ Participate in regional programmes for the promotion of national languages.

It is clear from these legal and regulatory provisions that Cameroon has a policy on national culture. The problem however is that no serious effort has so far been made to ensure the implementation of this policy.

Conclusion

Contrary to official discourse, Cameroon is not an 'island of peace and stability' in a conflict ridden/war torn Central African sub-region. Peace and security must not be equated with the absence of internal and external armed war or conflict. The current socio-cultural and political cleavages and latent and/or overt conflict situations indicate that the Cameroonian polity is highly volatile and inflammable. The probability of conflicts escalating to large-scale armed struggle is high. The camp forming that exists in the country presently, fuelled by politicians for selfish reasons is a premonition for pending full-blown conflicts and wars. There is therefore an urgent need for a review of the current policy on national culture to ensure its effective/successful implementation.

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