
The Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon: Unmasking Government's Implication in the Radicalisation of the Crisis

Christian Pagbe Musah
The University of Bamenda

Abstract:

This paper unravels government's implication in the radicalization of the Anglophone Crisis that broke out in late 2016 and degenerated into what has been otherwise termed the "Ambazonian" secessionist war that ensued in 2017. This came on the backdrop of what started as a resistance against the Francophonisation of the Anglophones and the Anglo-Saxon institutions in what came to be known as the Anglophone Problem. This resistance had been a daily struggle of Anglophone activists, Anglophone pressure groups and the Anglophones in general since the early 1960s. Their struggles were however less violent until late 2016 when pacific protests put up by Anglophone lawyers and teachers trade unions against corporate grievances and social vexations took a twist in 2017 and escalated into a violent political crisis and war of separation. The paper based on primary and secondary sources, makes a critique of government's responses and policies towards the corporate grievances and the Anglophone Problem in general and begs the conclusion that they in one way or the other contributed in escalating the situation. The paper reckons that, though the potency of secession for Anglophone Cameroon/former Southern Cameroons appears gloomy, however, if the government does not seek and implement authentic consensual measures other than the military option in resolving the crisis from its roots, there is fear that it will become a protracted warfare with much violent and bloody episodes and may lead to a full scale civil war in Cameroon and within the central African sub region.

Key Words: Ambazonia, Anglophones Crisis, Anglophone Problem, Government, Radical, Repression, Secession.

Introduction

The Anglophone Crisis emerged on the background of the Anglophone Problem. Following the outbreak of World War I, the Allied forces led by British, French and Belgian troops attacked and defeated the Germans out of the Kamerun protectorate in 1916. Britain and France partitioned German Kamerun into two unequal disjointed parts. The French got four fifths while the British made away with one fifth. The British further divided her portion into British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons and administered them as integrals of British Northern Nigeria and British Southern Nigeria respectively for administrative convenience. In 1922, the League of Nations recognized this divisions and the boundary which came to be referred to as the Oliphant-Picot line in honour of Lancelot Oliphant, a British diplomat and George Picot a French diplomat. In a meeting in London in February 1916, they partitioned the former German Protectorate by drawing a line on the map of Kamerun. The partition was concluded on July 10, 1919 by the Milner-Simon Agreement. The boundaries

between British Cameroons and French Cameroon ran from Lake Chad in the North to the Mungo River in the South and became the international boundary that separated both territories (Nfi: 2014, 34) . The British in administering her portions, introduced the policy of Indirect Rule whereas the French implemented the policy of Assimilation in French Cameroon. The territories were placed as Mandate B territories of the League of Nations. As a consequence of this division, the different administrative styles and owing to the British decision to administer British Cameroons as integrals of Nigeria which estrange her from French Cameroon, both territories developed two distinct cultures and attitudes. The British Cameroons became a product of the Anglo-Saxon culture while French Cameroon emerged as a quintessence of the French centralized republican system of the Napoleonic code. These differences could be viewed in the different languages, social attitudes and styles, systems of measurement, administrative systems, education and the judiciary systems (Ndi: 2005).

French Cameroon gained independence on January 1, 1960 as La Republique du Cameroun. Meanwhile the nationalists in the British Southern Cameroons could hardly agree on the political future of the territory. Due to the political ideological differences that characterised the nationalists of the British Southern Cameroons, the United Nations decided that the future of the territory will be decided in a plebiscite. British Southern Cameroons had the option of voting either to gain independence in association with the independent Federal Republic of Nigeria or voting to reunify with the Independent Republique du Cameroun. Following the UN organised Plebiscites of February 11, 1961, the British Southern Cameroons under the leadership of John Ngu Foncha voted overwhelmingly to gain independence by reunifying with their “brothers” of La Republique du Cameroun within the framework a federation (Ngoh: 1987, Ngoh, 2002, Ebune, 1992:102). At the Fouban Constitutional talks of July 1961, that cemented the union of the two states, it was agreed amongst other things that a federation was the best option that would preserve the cultural identity of the two states and their institutions (Ngoh, 2011: 53-54). Thus on October 1, 1961, the Federal Republic of Cameroon came into existence with British Southern Cameroons as the state of West Cameroon and La Republique du Cameroun was the State of East Cameroon. However, post-independence developments left the Anglophones with a plethora of socio-political and economic grievances as the constitutional agreements that were concluded upon at Fouban were systematically being brushed off by the Yaounde Francophone dominated regimes. These Anglophone grievances came to be referred to as the Anglophone Problem.

Anglophone Resentments

To begin with, Anglophones in Cameroon are regarded exclusively and limited to the people of former British Southern Cameroons defined by the peculiarity of territory, ethnic base, and ancestral history or origin (Bobda, 2001, Nfi, 2014:56 & 76). The Anglophone Problem is a topic that has vigorously and hotly animated academic debates by scholars for decades with varying arguments as to its origins and causes. Nonetheless, the preponderating conclusion arrived at, is the treatment of Anglophones as “second class” citizens in their motherland (Mukong: 1990, Ndiva: 1980, Dze-Ngwa: 1997, Ngoh: 1999, Mbile: 2001, Ngwane: 1992, Anye: 2008, Nkwi & Nyamjoh: 1995, Nyamnjoh: 1995, Awasum: 1998, Konings & Nyamnjoh: 1997, Konnings & Nyamnjoh: 2003, Abwa: 2011, Tangie: 2013, Anyangwe: 2014, Tita: 1993, Tata: 2003, Fanso: 2014, Awasom: 2020, Bayart: 1978). Within the Cameroon federation and thereafter, the Anglophones complained of marginalisation, assimilation, denigration and exploitation by the

Yaounde Francophone dominated regimes. This was exhibited in the closure of their economic institutions, the annihilation of the Anglophone cultural identity through the imposition of the French language and administrative styles on the Anglophones and their institutions, the appointment of Francophones to strategic positions and the numerous constitutional reforms that disregarded the 1961 Fouban agreement that instituted a union of two equal federated states. These resentments together with other issues led to what became known as the Anglophone Problem. The Anglophone Problem can therefore be defined as a struggle by the ethnic Anglophones (former Southern Cameroon Anglophones) to uphold and preserve their cultural identity especially the administrative styles, educational, the Common Law legal system and the English Language threatened by the deliberate attempts at eroding and/or assimilating them by the majority Francophone regimes. The Anglophone grievances were wide and varied and owe their rise to the federal constitution that wielded a lot of powers to President Amadou Ahidjo who ruled by decrees and progressively violated the constitutional agreements (Ngoh:1999). This was also continued by President Paul Biya who took over from him in 1982. The resentments therefore date as far back as the early years of the union.

In 1962, President Ahidjo with the intention to cloud and handicap the federal system, signed a presidential decree that split the federation into six administrative units and each placed under a federal inspector. West Cameroon comprised one of the administrative units. The powers of the Prime Ministers and the authority of the federated states were therefore undermined, particularly that of West Cameroon as the Federal Inspector answered directly to Ahidjo (Fanso, 2012:10). Again, constitutional changes effected by the Yaounde regimes to centralise political powers was also decried by the Anglophones. In 1972, President Ahidjo following a referendum whose legality has been severely put to question by the Anglophones (Fanso, 2012, 1, Konings: 1999, 303), abolished the federation in favour of a unitary state, called the United Republic of Cameroon. West Cameroon was divided into two, to form the North West and South West Provinces (today Regions). Ahidjo then appointed Governors and local administrators who were not accountable to the people they governed (Tembon, 2018:5). One of the prime impacts of the abrogation of the federation was the loss of the cherished Anglophone autonomy which they had enjoyed since 1954 when Southern Cameroons was given a quasi-regional autonomy and granted full autonomy in 1958 within the Federation of Nigeria. To add salt to injury, President Paul Biya who took over Ahidjo in 1982, changed the name of the country from the “United Republic” to the “Republic of Cameroon” in 1984. The removal of the word "United" from the name of the country was understood by the Anglophones as a sign of Francophone assimilation/annexation of Anglophone Cameroon (Fanso, 2012:1). By effect, the nomenclature of the country returned to “Republic of Cameroon”, the name that French Cameroon adopted at her independence in 1960 before reunification in 1961. The Anglophones considered these constitutional changes as a disregard on the Anglophone cultural identity and Anglophone political pressure groups started pressing for a return to the two state federation or separation (Dinka, 1985, Mukong, 1990).

The Anglophones also complained that Anglophones were never appointed to head strategic ministries like the Ministries of Territorial Administration, Education, Finance, Defence, *Societe Nationale de Raffinage* (SONARA), and *Societe Nationale des Hydrocarbures* (SNH). Anglophones at best were appointed only as deputies/assistants with little or no administrative powers as the Francophones who headed such ministries had full authority.

Commenting on the secondary position of the Anglophones in Cameroon, Takougang intimated that Beti's (Francophones) made up three quarters of the 47 Senior Divisional Officers in Cameroon in 1991. It was the same scenario with Directors and General Managers of state parastatals as three-quarters were always Francophones. So too was with the appointment high-ranking bureaucrats in the newly created office of Prime Minister (Takougang and Krieger, 1998, 94-96). Furthermore, Anglophone economic institutions like Cameroon bank, West Cameroon Electricity Corporation, Wum Area Development Authority, Santa Coffee Estate, West Cameroon Development Agency, West Cameroon Produce Marketing Board, Powercam etc were dissolved or closed without justification. West Cameroon also lost its Tiko, Bali, Weh and Besongabang airports as a consequence of the creation of the unitary state. It also led to the collapse of private business ventures in Anglophone Cameroon like Fomenky's Direct Suppliers, Niba Automobile, Kilo Brothers, Nangah Company, Boyo Company. The Yaounde regimes were held responsible by the Anglophones for the extinction of these institutions (Mukong, 1990:56, Ndobegang, 2009:4).

Socially, the English language and the Anglophone values were relegated to the background and the French language was systematically and subtly imposed on the Anglophones and their institutions as a means to assimilate them. (Musah, 2020). In the educational domain, Anglophones faced enormous language challenges in the Federal bilingual University of Yaounde that was created on the 26th of July 1962. The Federal University had as aim to promote bilingualism and enhance linguistic integration of the two state languages. Unfortunately, the University was bilingual in theory but in practice it remained almost entirely a French institution as French was the dominant language instruction (Konings and Nyamnjoh: 1997, 213). Also, for the most part, official state documents were hardly published in both languages. The Yaounde regimes only succumbed to long and accumulated petitions regarding the frustrations of the Anglophones that at best documents were translated in English and more often than not, they were done in a careless manner, sometimes rendering the translations inaccurate or incomprehensible (Awamengwi: 2015, 50). In 1983, in attempts at frenchifying the treasured Anglophone General Certificate of Education Board (GCE), a government decree was signed reorganizing and making it similar to the French Baccalaureat Board (Nyamnjoh: 1995, 52). This met with stiff resistance from the Anglophone communities. Similarly, Anglophones were discriminated upon in educational and training opportunities. For many years only a handful of Anglophones gained admissions into prestigious institutions like the National Institute of Youths and Sports, the Advanced School of Engineering, the School of Administration and Magistracy, and the Combined Military Academy. In fact Anglophones had become at best, second class citizens in their land of birth.

Their agitations and protests expressed through protest literatures, petitions, law suits in foreign courts by front line Anglophone activists and personalities like Albert Mukong, Dr. Bernard Fonlon, Fon Gorji Dinka and through pressure groups like the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM), Ambazonian Movement, Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM) (Nfi:2020, 35-38). At first, they called for the return to the two state federation in the hope of negotiating with the central government. The Southern Cameroons Independence Restoration Council (SCIRC) formed in 1997 on her part, expressed that it was ready to lead an armed rebellion in the quest for the independence for Southern Cameroons (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003: 214). The activities of the pro-Anglophone activists,

the Anglophone pressure groups and the grievances of the Anglophones in general, had covertly transcended to an everyday resistance (Ngam & Budi: 2020). These activities evolved to be more radical in ideology with occasional street manifestations following the abrogation of the federation in 1972 and accentuated after 1984 due to the change of the country's name from the "United Republic of Cameroon" to simply "Republic of Cameroon" (Ibid, 36). This was the name that former French Cameroun adopted at her independence. To the pro Anglophone pressure groups, the change of name meant that the Republic of Cameroun had seceded from the union. However, the activities of the pro Anglophone pressure groups formed for the most part after 1984 were relatively less violent in action. In fact, the situation has been described as a no-war-and-no-peace atmosphere between these pressure groups, and the central government (Fonkem: 2018, 110). Nevertheless, the situation changed with a more prevalent radicalization in ideology and widespread violence in actions following the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis in late 2016 and the ensued Anglophone revolution or war of separation which started in 2017.

The Anglophone Secessionist Crisis

It is important to note that the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis in the two Anglophone regions of the North West and South West was the explosion of a time bomb that had been ticking for several decades. In fact, it was as a direct accentuation of the Anglophone Problem. The teachers and lawyers strikes that called for the respect of the Anglophone cultural identity which had been relegated to the background by the appointment of French speaking magistrates to Anglophone courts and teachers of French background to schools of the Anglophone subsystem of education was the immediate factor that triggered the crisis. In February 2015, the President of the North West Court of Appeal issued a decision compelling lawyers to make their court submissions in the French language. This was seen as an outright and total disrespect of the common law system (Ngwoh: 2017, 7). The Common Law lawyers from the North West and South West Regions and other regions reacted to this including other grievances by convening a meeting in Bamenda on May 9, 2015 which was attended by some 700 legal practitioners. These lawyers came up with a memorandum that was channeled to the government via the Minister of Justice. Included in their demands was the request for a clear demarcation between the Common Law system and the Civil Law, the creation of a Common Law department at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration et de Magistrature (ENAM). The lawyers also demanded the creation of a law school and the respect of the Anglo-Saxon educational sub system in the Anglophone regions (Human Rights Watch 2019). Regrettably the government failed to take any measures in addressing the demands of the lawyers. In February 2016, the Cameroon Education Forum (CEF) addressed a memo to the Prime Minister Philemon Yang complaining the non-applicability/or partial applicability and violation of the provisions of the Ordinance of Education that was signed over twenty years at the time of their writing. The CEF also lamented the frenchification of Anglophone schools with the appointment of teachers of Francophone educational background, the non-appointment of an Anglophone to the post of minister of Education. The government failed once more to respond to the lawyers and teachers demand and the lawyers called for a four day sit down strike from the 11 to the 14 of October 2016 (Ngoh, 2019: 390). On October 11, 2016, the lawyers took to the streets protesting and demanding the translation into English the Code of the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) and other legal texts and the restoration of the Common Law system. Again, on November 21, 2016, the teachers took turn to strike as well, castigating amongst other things the lack of Anglophone teachers in Anglophone schools, the

adulteration of the English sub system by the appointment of Francophone teachers who did not have a good command of English and the failure to respect the Anglo-Saxon character of schools¹. More to that, Mancho Bibixy, a journalist at a local radio station led what has been termed the “Coffin Revolution” of November 21, 2016 to join the teachers and lawyers and complained of the high level of unemployment, poor road conditions, the garbage and filth that filled the city of Bamenda and government corruption (Tembon, 2018:6). Government failed to act accordingly and the striking teachers and lawyers added political and constitutional reforms to their list of grievances. The Anglophone populations in general and extremists or radicals in particular complained that they had been marginalised for too long (Musah, 2021: 20). The teachers and lawyers trade unions including other Anglophone civil society organisations formed the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC) by the end of 2016. Their demands included a return to a two state federation in the operation of government affairs as was the case following the 1961 federation, the end to the marginalization of the Anglophones, the respect and preservation of the common law legal system and the Anglo-Saxon educational subsystem, the release of over 100 Anglophones who had been arrested in the two regions in the months of September, October and November in connection to the protests². They called for civil disobedience and a boycott of schools and courtrooms against the Frenchification of the Anglophone institutions. In fact, they called for sit-at-home strikes in what was termed operation ghost town declared on January 9, 2017.

The government attempted at several instances following meetings held in Bamenda in the months of December and January by some government ministers with representatives of the lawyers and teachers trade unions fused into the consortium to resolve the corporate grievances that they had earlier presented. But in her discussions with the consortium, the government was faced with the complexity and different shades of opinion of the varied camps that animated the consortium. There were moderates who wanted the corporate issues to be resolved; others demanded a return to a federation experimented in Cameroon between 1961 and 1972. While there was the extremists who wanted outright secession. These were all indications of the numerous Anglophone grievances. The government argued that she was ready to look into all the corporate grievances so long as they did not affect the unity and territorial integrity of the state³. Unfortunately the government failed to come to a consensus with the consortium and did not adequately identify the gravity of the issues the consortium presented (Musah; 2021,20). The consortium was accused of in sighting rebellion and terrorism and was outlawed by the government on January 16, 2017. Its leaders were arrested on January 17 and jailed in the Yaounde central prison. The crisis escalated into an armed conflict.

On October 1, 2017, Ayuk Tabe Julius claiming to be the leader of the Anglophones, declared the independence of the “state of Ambazonia”⁴ (Former Southern Cameroon). The

¹ For details regarding the demands of the teachers Unions see, The Post, No. 01849 Monday, September 4, 2017, 2-6.

² The Rambler, edition No. 0037, 18 January 2017.

³ Professor Victor Julius Ngoh, Discussing issues of the Anglophone Crisis with Guy Nana Roger, journalist at My Media Prime on 15 October 2020, sourced from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4EZf-tH7jYO>

⁴ Ambazonia comes from Amba Bay found along the South Western Coast of Cameroon. It was here that the London Baptist Missionary Society first settled and in order to pay homage to the then Queen of England, they named it Victoria. In fact, it is the present day Limbe, a city in the Anglophone South West Region of Cameroon

government through the security and defense forces reacted with stiff resistance as it was out to protect the unity and territorial integrity of the state. The situation worsened in January 2018 when reports were aired by the media about targeted attacks by the secessionists on military barracks and control posts (Fai, 2018: 5). With the complicity of the Anglophones in the diaspora, several secessionist armed groups were created in the two Anglophone regions to fight for the “restoration” or “independence” of the Southern Cameroons or “Ambazonia”. The manoeuvres shifted from a political crisis to a war of separation with the formation of armed militias. The secessionist military groups included; Southern Cameroons Defence Forces (SOCADEF), the Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement (SCRM), Ambozonian Defense Force (ADF), Ambozonian Self-Defense Council (ASDC), Lebialem Red Dragons, Ambazonian Restoration Army (ARA), Manyu Ghost Warriors among others. Their protest snowballed into intractable and rising spectre of violence and radicalization. The radicalization of the Anglophone crisis marked by the formation of armed secessionists or separatists groups and the war between these groups and the security and defense forces put the peace, social cohesion and *le vivre ensemble* in the two Anglophone regions at peril. The emergence of the armed separatist groups and the ultimate war, confirmed predictions that had been made as far back as the 1980s by commentators on Cameroons socio-political atmosphere. They had called the attention of the government and warned on the possible impact that could arise as a consequence of the poor management of the Anglophone cultural identity. In an excerpt highlighting the US Embassy’s analysis about government’s management of the Anglophone Problem, the excerpt of February 3, 1986, warned that:

the Anglophones...who constitute some 20 percent of the population of the nearly 10 million...fear their gradual assimilation into the dominant francophone community, according to US Embassy reporting. Though they currently lack the leadership and unity to effectively challenge Biya’s rule, we believe the Anglophones minority is a potential time bomb and should the central government fail to respect their cultural and linguistic traditions, the two million strong community may view armed confrontation as their only alternative. Cameroon is officially bilingual, but without a perfect mastery of French, it is difficult for Anglophones to gain Admittance to the best schools and enter the civil service. According to the US Embassy, Anglophone students slightly over one-eighth of the 15000 students attending the University of Yaounde are a potentially volatile group. Student demands include the creation of an English language university, greater government efforts to promote bilingualism and a possible return to a federal state. Although the security services could probably handle an outbreak of violence at a series of schools, we believe it would be a significant setback blow to Biya’s efforts to develop national unity and reconciliation (Quoted in Musah, 2020: 39).

What the American embassy in Cameroon had anticipated and warned the government against became a realized fact in 2017. Thus, many analysts have blamed the government for the non-respect of the Anglophone cultural identity. The government has also been accorded a heavy dose of responsibility for the escalation and radicalization of the Anglophone problem into a crisis and finally to a war of secession due to its poor policies in addressing the Anglophone grievances since reunification. Policies marked by denial, condescendence, nonchalance, repression and crackdown towards the Anglophones vis-à-vis their grievances in part, laid the foundations for the radicalization of the crisis. In fact, one can make the argument that the

government down looked and under estimated any possibilities of Anglophones rising against the Francophone led regime in reaction to the Anglophone Problem to the extent of it leading a war of separation as will be elaborated as we continue in the discussion.

Government Denial and Nonchalance towards the Plight of the Anglophones

It should be noted that despite the numerous Anglophone petitions and protests that expressed the plight of the Anglophones since the 1960s and throughout the years of the union and even in 2016 just before the crisis broke out, the Ahidjo and Biya regimes successively reacted with a subtle policy of silence and denial (Gould, 2019: 37, Konings, 1996: 33). For instance, throughout the 1980s and 1990s when the Anglophones resurfaced with momentum the question of the Anglophone Problem, the Biya regime preferred to openly or subtly deny the existence of an Anglophone Problem. The Yaounde government employed every means possible including repression, arbitrary arrests and detention, harassments, threats in firm determination to defend the unitary state system (Konings, 1996: 33). The Biya government ignored the grievances put up by the Anglophones and did all to minimize the division between the Anglophones and the Francophones and resulted to reprimanding the Anglophone activist movements that were out to defend the cause of the Anglophone cultural identity. The government ignored the Anglophone identity and brandished a common Cameroonian identity, arguing that Cameroon (Anglophones and Francophones) had one identity under the German colonial era (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003: 109). In fact, rather than the government to address the issue, she chose to feign “ignorance” or a deaf ear to the problem. When Albert Mukong in 1985 released his book *Prisoner without a Crime* which exposted his experiences with forces of law and the time he spent in the harsh prisons in Cameroon as a result of his activism for the Anglophone cause, the book was immediately banned by the Biya government and he was arrested and detained in 1988 and was released several months later in May 1989 (ibid, 198). The banning of the book was a means by the Biya government to minimize and eradicate any descending voices from the Anglophones in regards to the Anglophone problem. The government went further and gave the impression that there was no consensus amongst the Anglophones regarding their grievances, accused and demonized Anglophone federalist’s activists groups by equating them to secessionists (Konings, 1996:32 and Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003: 108, Ami-Nyoh, 2020: 244). These attitudes by the government was a serious sign of disrespect, nonchalance and humiliation towards the Anglophones. It only added adrenaline to the hearts of the enraged Anglophones. Some Anglophone pressure groups and movements like the Ambazonian Movement (AM), the Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM) and the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) who initially spearheaded calls for a return to a two state federation, were pushed to adopt extremists stands and started pressing for outright secession for the Anglophones. These pressure groups called on the Anglophones to celebrate as national feast days, the 11th of February (the day of the plebiscites) and the 1st of October (the day Southern Cameroons gained independence by reunifying with La Republique du Cameroun) (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997: 216-217).

In response, the promulgation of the 1996 Constitution was in part to steer up democratic governance and detach the country from the colonial system of autocracy (Enonchong: 2021,1) and more especially to address the Anglophone Problem that was raised in equivocal terms by the holding of the All Anglophone Conferences of Buea and Bamenda in 1993 and 1994

respectively and the declarations⁵. However, a retrospective analysis demonstrates that government's indifferent character in the implementation of real and effective decentralization was an intrinsic mistake. Decentralization was envisaged as an innovation that was to be a sort of panacea to the Anglophone Problem. Though the vast majority of the Anglophones really wanted a return to a federation, they nonetheless accepted decentralization which was to grant some degree of autonomy to the regions. In spite of that, by the time the crisis broke in 2016, real and effective decentralization in Cameroon was still a dream yet to be realized. Government's nonchalance towards the effecting of decentralization had sank to its lowest ebb, the euphoria which the Anglophones had for decentralization. One can therefore argue that, had the government implemented real and effective decentralization from the late 1990s after its insertion in the 1996 constitution, the crisis may not have broken out and even if it did, it probably would not have had the violent and radical nature with which it developed from 2017. In sum, by the time the crisis broke out in 2016, a sweeping majority of the Anglophones had lost interest in decentralization and started demanding a return to a federation with secessionist agitations as a consequential effect.

In the wake of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, the government continued with her policy of denial and nonchalance. Worthy to note and as mentioned above, that before the Anglophone lawyers and teachers took to the streets in October and November 2016 demanding for the respect of the Anglophone cultural identity, they had at several instances channeled petitions as regards their grievances to the competent authorities' some time back but without any positive responds. A conference was held in Bamenda on May 9, 2015 followed by another in Buea wherein the lawyers re-iterated their concerns regarding the translation of the OHADA Code and Treaty through a communique which was sent to the Presidency of the Republic. In the same vein, the Anglophone lawyers through the Cameroon Bar Council in a press release of June 16, 2016, vehemently condemned the translation disparity between the French and English version of the Penal Code bill introduced in the June 2016 parliamentary session. There was the fear that divergence in interpretation and or misinterpretation could develop as a result of the unprofessional translation with probability of creating chaos in the judicial administration⁶. The Anglophone teachers unions had also seen their worries ignored by the Prime Minister whom they had written to months earlier. The Cameroon Education Forum (CEF), SYNES/UB chapter, CATTU and a host of other unions in February 2016 had called the attention of the government through the Prime Minister in regards to issues affecting the Anglo-Saxon educational sector. In spite of all these moves, the government shillyshallied and did not show any significant interest to see into their worries (Ngoh: 2019, 389, Fanso: 2017, 387-400). They resolved to strike actions between the months of October and November 2016. When the question of the Anglophone Problem came up, the Government tactic changed from a policy of subtle silence to outright denial (Gould, 2019: 37). Some government ministers like Paul Atanga Nji, an Anglophone who was then Minister of Special Duties at the Presidency and Chairman of the National Security Council on several occasions on national television denied the existence of an Anglophone Problem and said it was fiction. This was a very big blow to the Anglophone community hearing such declaration from an Anglophone elite who ought to have defended their

⁵ AAC Standing Committee 1993, *The Buea Declaration*, Limbe: Nooremac Press.

⁶ The Anglophone File 27 June 2016, <https://www.gngwane.com/2016/06/national-bilingual-commission-cameroon.html>, Accessed on 04/06/2021.

interest. The situation escalated when the then Prime Minister Philemon Yang an Anglophone, Paul Atanga Nji and other Anglophone ministers and elites under the banner of the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM) the ruling party tried to organize a rally and march at the Bamenda grand stand on December 8, 2016 to counter the claims of an Anglophone Problem. Amid tense atmospheres, these government ministers and officials attempted to demonstrate that there was no Anglophone problem and to down play the issue through the rally and march. The angry Anglophone population took this as a high level of insolence and responded with confrontations to disrupt the march. The forces of law and order reacted with disproportionate brutality and shootings on unarmed protesters which led to the death of at least two civilians, many wounded and others arbitrarily arrested (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Around the same period, that is the month of December 2016, the National Assembly and the Senate were all in session and did not find it necessary to debate on the question of the Anglophone Problem at a time when the socio-political atmosphere was relatively less volatile. Again, on November 23, 2017, the parliamentarians of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) of the opposition stormed the national assembly demanding that the Anglophone Problem be put on the table for debate. They even chanted “*how many people will Biya kill*” (how many Anglophones will the Biya regime kill). Despite their efforts to coarsen the parliament to discuss the question of the Anglophone Problem, the parliament which was overridingly made up of CPDM members (President Biya’s party) refused to discuss the issue. Thus, it is evident that the states position in regards to the Anglophone Problem was that of denial and nonchalance towards the legitimate concerns of the Anglophones. The government failed to understand that the solution laid in facing the problem squarely when things were less volatile rather than ignoring it. The government had decided to play deaf and not see into their concerns. This only aggravated the situation and radicalised the extremist Anglophones who initially and peacefully wanted constitutional matters resolved. The fact that the government made peaceful change impossible, made the violent option inevitable to the Anglophones.

Government Condescendence/ Intimidation on the Anglophones

Condescendence and intimidation via derogatory words or hate language has exacerbated or triggered many conflicts and wars in human history and in the recent past in Africa (Dadson, 2008, Akindes, 2004). Disparaging words and speeches contributed in provoking the outbreak of the Rwanda 1994 Genocide and the Lyban Revolution in 2011. This is explained by the fact that, such words and language are not only derogatory, but ridicule the dignity of the people and are volatile in generating political tensions into violent conflicts whether the peoples cause is genuine or not (Kah, 2019: 145). The unpopular policies of condescendence and intimidation by the government towards the Anglophones also contributed to the radicalization of the crisis. Since the 1980s and 1990s, Government personalities and ministers often branded the Anglophone political pressure groups that demanded for a return to a federation with pejorative connotations (Kah, 2019: 146). This reprimanding attitude came out of assumed pretense marked by the almost deficiency in the understanding and without appreciating the motives why these groups pressed for political and constitutional reforms (Nkwi, 2018: 123). This attitude by the Government was done to give it a superfluous legitimacy of organised violence on the Anglophone groups who presented legitimate grievances in order to force them to give up their struggle (Roxana, 2019: 269). For example, John Ngu Foncha, one of the leading Anglophone architects of the reunification in his resignation letter from the CPDM of June 9, 1990 decried

how Anglophones had been ridiculed and regarded as “*les Biafrais*” (“Biafrans”, meaning strangers from Nigeria so to speak), “*les ennemis dans la maison*” (enemies in the house), “*les traîtres*” (traitors) by the then Minister of Territorial Administration Ibrahim Mbombo Njoya. Minister Ibrahim Mbombo Njoya told Anglophones to go elsewhere because they had supported the launching of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) party which was seen by the Anglophones to be the new mouth piece that was to defend their interests and the Anglophone Problem in particular (Mukong, 1990: 155, Konnings & Nyamnjoh, 2003: 201, Abwa: 2011,206). The labeling the Anglophones as “Biafrans”, was equating them to Easterners in the Nigerian Federation who led the secessionist war of 1967-1970 and which gave the impression that they were not accepted in their motherland (Kah, 2019: 147). Akum (2009), reported that suspicion and continuous frustration that prevailed in the Anglophone regions was partly due to abusive language emanating from the Francophone led regime. Such frustration in the long run contributed in producing consequences such as secessionist attempts by force out of the frustration of the Anglophones as it generated in 2017 (Kah, 2019: 154).

In the wake of the Anglophone protests and demonstrations in 2016, several government ministers and civil administrators took turns in denigrating the Anglophones by calling them names which added in aggrieving their hearts. Government ministers like Issa Tchiroma Bakary (then Minister of Communication), Paul Atanga Nji (then Minister of Special Duties at the Presidency of the Republic and presently Minister of Territorial Administration), Jacques Fame Ndongo (Minister of Higher Education), Laurent Easo (Minister of Justice), Elvis Ngolle Ngolle (former Minister of Forestry and Wild Life) contemptuously stigmatized the protesting Anglophone populations on several occasions as “*secessionist*”, “*terrorists*”. Minister Fame Ndongo had at a point in time referred to the Anglophones as “two cubes of sugar in a basin of water which will melt, yet have no effect”. To him, the Anglophones were a “toothless bulldog”. Minister Laurent Easo made a derisive comment towards the striking lawyers when he intimated that “when they will be hungry, they will return to the courts”⁷. The Governor of the South West Region, Bernard Okalia Bilai branded the Anglophones as “dogs” in 2017 and warned that if any “*dogs*” (the Anglophones) should step out to protest they would be killed (Fichanfie et al, 2020:1803). Regrettably, this impudence acted as a bolster and added in exacerbating the tensions and the collective consciousness of the Anglophones as a persecuted minority was awakened. The moderate voices that called for the return to a federation rapidly lost grounds to extremist separatists who employed guerilla war tactics upon government authorities, security and defense forces and on state institutions in both regions (ICG: 2017). They were out to “fight” for the rights and dignity of the Anglophones as a people and to “liberate themselves” from the “oppressors” rather than give in to government intimidations. It is evident that the government did not understand the gravity of such condescendence towards an angry people. It also underestimated the disgruntlement of the Anglophones and failed to appreciate the seriousness of the Anglophone Problem.

Government Repression and Crack Down on the Anglophones

Another very unpopular policy which the government initiated in the wake of the outbreak of the crisis in 2016 was military repression, torture and ruthless crackdown on unarmed protesters. A typical characteristic of the Ahidjo and Biya regimes especially on Anglophone pressure groups

⁷ *The Guardian Post*, November 5, 2021.

that were out to defend the Anglophone interests dating back from the 1970s. As earlier mentioned, in the months of October, November and December of 2016, government security and military forces responded with disproportionate force on the protesting lawyers, teachers and students of the University of Buea. Videos went viral showing Lawyers in their wigs and robes being harassed, humiliated and beaten with batons by security forces while they attempted demonstrating in the streets of Bamenda and Buea. Protesting students of the University of Buea in November 29, 2016 who were demanding for their bursaries to be paid were pulled out of hostel rooms, beaten and trailed in mud by security forces. Others were raped by security forces and at least 100 were indiscriminately arrested and jailed (The Observer: 2016, Nkwi: 2018,139, Ngoh: 2019, 389, Fanso: 2017, 397-400). In fact, the people were not only deprived of their fundamental human rights to protest, but were also seriously physically and mentally abused (Fichanfie et el, 2020:1802). This drew the attention and sympathy of the public which only added in crystalizing their indignations and what was principally corporate grievances soon transcended to political and constitutional demands (Tapuka, 2016). The extreme level of response and violence by the government through security and military forces who in addition to shooting at unarmed protesters with life bullets that led to many deaths between October 2016 and January 2017, rampant indiscriminate torture and arrests, razing of villages amongst other things only added in estranging the Anglophones, fueled the unrest and further radicalised the protesters (Nkwi, 2018: 136). These culminated in opening a Pandora's box and in the face of these unpopular government response, Honourable Joseph Wirba, SDF Member of Parliament for Jakiri Special Constituency in the North West Region, took to the rostrum of the National Assembly on December 13, 2016 with a speech that objected and debunked government's attitude. He decried that "when injustice becomes law, resistance becomes a duty" (Tembon, 2018: 7). To Hon. Joseph Wirba, it was the duty of the Anglophones to defend themselves against the enormous injustice that had befallen them, largely caused by the Francophone dominated Ahidjo and Biya regimes and to stand up and fight for their rights even if it meant taking up arms. Explained by the emergence of armed belligerent groups to counter the military repression of the government. It should be made clear that the first victims of the crisis who were killed were not government officials or defense and security forces but rather, unarmed Anglophone civilians who were shot at and killed by government security and defense forces.

Again, the banning of the Anglophone consortium in January 16, 2017 (The Economist: 2017) which came as a result of fizzled dialogue between the government and the consortium on the 13 and 14 of January marked by police brutality that led to the killing of two civilians in Bamenda, was a fundamental blunder by the government. When the government failed to arrive at a consensus with the consortium, the consortium was accused of in sighting rebellion and terrorism and was outlawed. Its principal leaders Barrister Nkongho Felix Agbor Bala and Dr. Fontem Aforteka'a Neba alongside 54 other members were arrested in January 17 and jailed in Yaounde. They were accused of terrorism, fostering hostility against the government, secession, civil war, rebellion and attempts at destabilizing the state including other charges. This was the same scenario with Fon Girji Dinka who on March 20, 1985 addressed a memorandum to Paul Biya to convey the frustrations of the Anglophones. He was arbitrarily arrested and thrown in prison without a court appearance till January 1986. Albert Mukong who was an eminent advocate for the "restoration" of the state of Southern (West) Cameroons and other prominent Anglophone journalist and politicians also suffered the same fate during the rule of President Amadou Ahidjo (1961-1982) (Mukong: 1985, Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003: 197-198). Such

amount of repression was therefore nothing strange to the regime in response to the plight of the Anglophones. These civilian consortium leaders were tried in military tribunals following the Terrorism Law. The arrest and imprisonment of the principal leaders of the consortium (most of whom were moderates) just a day after the consortium was outlawed, was widely understood by the Anglophone populations that the government was never sincere at dialoguing and resolving their problems. Thus, the Anglophone populations became very doubtful of governments desire or willingness in resolving the Anglophone problem. More to that, the banning of the consortium did not only lead to the absence of an Anglophone leadership on ground with which the government could dialogue, but it also by extension led to a leadership lacuna that was regrettably exploited by the extremist or radical Anglophone diaspora (Okereke, 2018: 11). At this point, government's decision to ban the consortium was an indication that the government had not made a good diagnosis of the problem and therefore was unable to prescribe the required solutions. Added to this, the violent government response through security and military forces on protesters of the September 22 peaceful protests and October 1, 2017 which led to many deaths set the stage for armed conflicts. The leadership vacuity and coupled with the brutal response of the government security and defense forces, led the extremist Anglophone diaspora like Ebenezer Akwanga, Tapang Ivo, Chris Anu, Ayaba Cho Lucas, Paxson Agbor, Nso Foncha, Eric Tataw to collude with other Anglophones at home in sponsoring the formation of radical armed separatist groups to fight for the "independence" or "restoration" of the state of "Ambazonia". In fact, the "restoration" or "independence" of the state of "Ambazonia" by every means available was vastly propagated throughout the Anglophone populations via social media platforms by the new radical diaspora leaders who had taken over the driving sit of the Anglophone revolution (Nfi, 2020:39). The separatist armed groups or "Amba Boys" as generally referred to, had as mission to enforce civil disobedience, enforce the respect of Mondays as ghost town day with no activities especially government related, attack and kill civil and military authorities, urge school boycotts, control the movement of persons in and out of the Anglophone regions and to take over the administration of "their" land (Nfi, 2020: 40). In fact, the "Amba Boys" were out to make the Anglophone regions ungovernable by the Yaounde government by every means possible.

Mindful of the role which the internet and social media played in communication in recent African revolutions such as the Arab Spring and the Lybian Revolution, the government in an attempt to isolate the Anglophones, disrupt them from communicating with the new leaders in the diaspora and to also sever the communication of an alternative discourse, effected internet cuts in the two Anglophone regions from March 19, 2017 for a period of 92 days and imposed repressive curfews in both regions. The government issued a ministerial decree through the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication in an effort to censor information, that carried sanctions such as long jail terms against those who propagated narratives that criticized the government and its policies towards the Anglophone Problem (Gould, 2019: 37-38). These government decisions rather gave an opportunity to the Anglophone extremists, the diaspora and the Anglophones in general who interpreted the measures as an attempt by the government to taunt them, impose repressive measures in order to silence them from conveying their legitimate worries and not solve them.

When government policies of intimidation, repression and crackdown failed to make the Anglophones give up their cause, President Biya openly declared war on the extremist armed secessionist groups of the Anglophone regions on November 30, 2017 and proceeded in heavily

militarizing the regions. This gave a vast majority of the Anglophones and the extremists the impression that President Biya and his government was instead out to combat them rather than organize inclusive dialogue in addressing the situation. The extremists and the belligerent groups took this as a pass to canvass the opinion that it was the government that declared war on the Anglophones and they had as duty to fight and protect “their citizens”.

Conclusion

The reunification of the British Southern Cameroons and La Republique du Cameroun and the formation of the federal republic in October 1961 did not meet the expected aspirations of the Anglophones. The several constitutional reforms and assimilation policies of the successive Yaounde regimes left the Anglophones with an avalanche of problems over the years. The Anglophone Problem as it came to be called was/is the struggle by ethnic Anglophones to uphold and preserve their cultural identity. This was championed by Anglophone intellectuals, activists, pressure groups and other commentators through protest petitions, art plays, literatures and street manifestations since the 1960s. Amongst other things, they demanded for the return to a federation and the respect of the Anglophone cultural identity. This was championed by Anglophone political pressure groups such as the SCNC, FWCM and CAM, SCIRC in the 1980s and 1990s and their activities were less violent until 2016. However, due to poor methods and unpopular government policies in addressing the Anglophone problem in general and the pacific corporate protests that began in 2016, extremist Anglophones exploited the situation and things turned violent and radical. Government policies such as denial, nonchalance, crackdown and repression only added in fueling the flames of the unrest which exploded and snowballed into the “Ambazonian” war of separation in 2017. In fact, the Anglophone Problem had an evolutionary paradigm shift from frustrations to escalation or crisis and finally radicalization and war of separation. Though the prospects of secession remain bleak, should the government not seek and implement veritable consensual measures in resolving the crisis from its roots, there is fear that the crisis will become more protracted, more violent and bloody and may lead to a full scale civil war in Cameroon and within the central African sub region.

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