

## **“Ideas are Immortal, Suppress them and they will Ultimately Fester with even more Macabre Consequences”: Analyzing the Ambazonian Revolt in Cameroon Since 2016**

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**Abstract:** The Ambazonian revolt in Cameroon which began in 2016 is a case study in understanding the relationship between ideologies and social revolts. Ideologies such as nationalism, identity politics, and historical grievances drive the revolt, with nationalism fostering a collective identity among the Anglophone population who feel marginalized by the Francophone government. Identity politics exacerbates these sentiments by highlighting cultural differences and perceived injustices. Historical grievances rooted in colonial legacies also contribute to the ideological landscape. The revolt itself, characterized by protests, armed conflicts and calls for secession, is the dependent variable. This study therefore focuses on the relationship between ideological persistence and its effect on revolts with Ambazonia as a case study. The monograph analyses the Cameroon Anglophone problem and its resulting conflicts over the past eight years using authoritative secondary data. It examines historical documents, academic articles and institutional reports to highlight the persistence of the Ambazonian ideologies. The study emphasizes the influence of enduring ideologies on socio-political dynamics and the resilience of these ideas. Findings from the analysis reveal that the Ambazonian revolt in Cameroon is a result of a complex interplay between ideologies and social revolts. It is driven by nationalism, identity politics and historical grievances leading to protests, armed conflicts and calls for secession. The revolt is not a spontaneous reaction but a culmination of longstanding issues. Policymakers must recognize these factors and address them constructively to prevent further escalation and effectively analyse and contain these stubborn ideas for lasting solutions.

**Keywords:** Ambazonian, Anglophone, Cameroon, Conflict, Ideas, Immortal

### **1. Introduction**

A series of complaints from common law attorneys and the Cameroon Education Forum (CEF) culminated in what became known as the Ambazonian revolt in Cameroonian history. 700 attorneys from the principal North West and South West Regions, along with a few from other parts of the country, gathered in Bamenda on May 9, 2015, and accused the federal government of 'chopping apart and replacing conventional Common Law inspired rules governing criminals, civil proceedings, and evidence, with the basis and ethos that French influenced or replicated civil laws, which they fiercely and equivocally dismissed,' on purpose (Ngoh, 2019: 390). In February 2016, the education authorities in Cameroon were suspicious and acting in bad faith when the Cameroon Education Forum, in a similar vein of petitioning, brought the regime's attention to the state of the English subsystem of education in the country, implying that its provisions have been routinely broken, ignored, or only partially put into effect (Ngoh, 2019). The government dilly-dallied in responding to the grievances tabled by lawyers and teachers and this escalated into an armed conflict between the Cameroon army and several revolutionary groups in the two English speaking regions of the country. The latter exploited the corporate

grievances in the country to her advantage. In fact, the original grievances of lawyers and teachers were drowned in a fast flowing stream of uncompromising call for secession and independence of the two English speaking regions of Cameroon re-baptized the Federal Republic of Ambazonia.

The main groups that amplified the secessionist drive were the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC), created in 2011 by former members of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), the Southern Cameroons People Organization (SCAPO), created in 2001 to handle legal proceedings for the autonomy of Southern Cameroons and the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), launched in 1995 by Southern Cameroon youngsters headed by Ebenezer Akwanga, and the Movement for Restoring of the Sovereignty of the Southern Cameroons (MORISC), founded in 2016 in the United States by Herbert Boh. In 2017 The Southern Cameroons Ambazonian United Front (SCACUF) was created as an umbrella association for the Republic Of Ambazonia - the SCNC, SCACUF, SCYL and the Consortium) while in March 2018, the Ambazonia Self Defense Council was founded to represent most of the armed groups. Against this background, the North West and South West Regions became veritable hot-beds of rebellion, kidnapping, ghost town operations and other heinous or monstrous crimes especially from September 2017 in a bid to accentuate the secessionist drive.

The recent outburst of secessionist claims has been tied to the 1959 general elections and the 11 February 1961 plebiscite that resulted in reunification. This paper examines how these elections informed the Ambazonia crises in Cameroon today and argues that other considerations also contributed in no mean way to the crisis which many scholars have labeled as the Anglophone problem transformed into a crisis or armed war. This paper therefore has as objective to probe into the ideological issues of educational identity, legal identity and cultural identity, the resulting historical grievances amongst other issues and their effect on the Ambazonian Revolt.

## **2. Literature review**

The literature on the Anglophone problem that since 2016 translated in to a veritable crisis is a well-documented subject in the historiography of Cameroon. What is lacking is the ideological dimension of the conflict that this paper seeks to attend to. It is no surprise then that opinions on the crisis vary greatly, depending on the perspective of those involved. As per Menyoli's (2021) assertion, the Ambazonian war, also known as the Cameroonian civil war, is a multifaceted and intensely polarizing matter that stems from the enduring conflicts between the English-speaking minority residing in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon and the government, which speaks French. The Northwest and Southwest regions were once part of the British colony of Southern Cameroons, and were traditionally separated from the French-speaking part of Cameroon. After independence, the Anglophone regions were incorporated into the Republic of Cameroon, leading to resentment among Anglophone Cameroonians over perceived marginalization and discrimination. He thus submits that the ongoing crisis is a consequence of longstanding political, economic, and cultural grievances among Anglophone Cameroonians who have been marginalized, discriminated against, and excluded from key decision-making processes and positions of power in the country. To this, the government's response to the crisis has been inadequate, with excessive use of force and human rights violations, and that dialogue and reconciliation are needed to resolve the conflict.

Achu (2018) maintains that identity reconstruction is certainly a key element in understanding the Anglophone crisis. The conflict in Cameroon is in part a result of the way in which Anglophone Cameroonians' identity has been constructed, with many feeling that their identity has been undermined or ignored by the Cameroonian government. Anglophone Cameroonians have long felt marginalized in the country, with their culture, language and institutions being subordinated to the dominant Francophone culture. This has resulted in a sense of alienation and frustration among Anglophone Cameroonians, who feel that their unique identity has been ignored and their rights have been violated.

Eko (2003) sees the Anglophone case from the lenses of the role played by the press. To him, the English-language press in Cameroon has played a significant role in the "Anglophone problem" by providing a platform for Anglophone voices to express their grievances and advocate for their rights. The English-language press has helped to create a sense of group identity among Anglophone Cameroonians by emphasizing the shared experiences and challenges of the community. They have also used nostalgia to evoke a sense of pride in the history and culture of the Anglophone regions, which has helped to strengthen the Anglophone identity.

Still hinging on the role played by the press, Kuate (2022) stresses the fact that the English Press in Cameroon has played a significant role in mediating the Anglophone problem by providing a platform for Anglophone voices to be heard and by raising awareness about the issues facing the community. The Anglophone press has provided a space for Anglophone Cameroonians to express their grievances and advocate for their rights, which has helped to bring attention to the issues facing the community. Additionally, the Anglophone press has served as a watchdog, exposing human rights abuses and corruption in the government and providing a counter-narrative to the official government line.

Nfah-Abbenyi (2014) further situates the conflict as one of the post-colonial traumas resulting from the odd legacy of colonial rule. To him, the legacy of colonialism has left a lasting impact on Cameroon, particularly on the Anglophone community. The trauma of colonialism, including forced assimilation and cultural erasure, has left many Anglophone Cameroonians with a deep sense of mistrust and resentment towards the Cameroonian government and the dominant Francophone culture. This has fuelled the identity politics of the conflict, as Anglophone Cameroonians seek to assert their own identity and resist further marginalization. Nfobin & Nchang (2014) on their part positioned the Anglophone problem in a purely legal context. They maintain that, the Cameroon "Anglophone Question" is an on-going legal issue in international law. At the heart of the question is the status of the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, and whether they have been adequately protected under international law. The issue has been complicated by the historical context of Cameroon, which was once a German colony that was divided between France and Britain after World War I. This division created a linguistic and cultural divide that persists till date.

Konings (1999) in a solution oriented paper indicated that, the Anglophone struggle for federalism in Cameroon is rooted in the idea that federalism would provide a political solution to the marginalization and discrimination faced by the Anglophone community. The proposed federal system would create two autonomous regions within Cameroon, one for the Francophone regions and one for the Anglophone regions. This would allow for greater political representation and decision-making power for the Anglophone community, as well as the ability to preserve and promote their unique cultural and linguistic identity. This paper submits that the militant phase of the Anglophone conflict that commenced in 2016 was actually an outburst of pent up ideas and grievances nursed since the pre plebiscite era in British Southern Cameroons.

### **3. Theoretical underpinnings of the study**

This paper that thrusts on the deathlessness of ideas can be anchored on the platonic theory of forms and Kantian idealism. Plato believed that ideas were not just concepts in our minds, but rather that they existed independently of our human experience in a realm of forms or ideas. In his conception, ideas are eternal, abstract and perfect entities that may exist independently of human thought and are the ultimate reality; hence, the physical world is a pale imitation of these ideal worlds of forms. The forms represent the perfect, unchanging, and eternal versions of things, such as justice, beauty and truth. The ideas are the source of all knowledge and understanding (Macintosh, 2012). On his part, Immanuel Kant, a prominent German philosopher proposed that ideas are mental frameworks that organise and structure our experience of reality. They are not the direct reflections of the external world but rather a way of understanding and representing it. Kant believed that the world as we experience it is not the world as it really is, but rather a product of our mental processes. He argued

that the human mind plays a role in shaping our experience of the world by imposing categories and structures on it (Allison, 2004).

#### **4. Research methods**

The monograph makes use of authoritative secondary data such as articles, book chapters and books to argue in a chronological manner that the viscosity and intractability of the Anglophone problem turned conflict for the past eight years now is testimony to the tenacity and obstinacy of ideas. This methodology that we employed is called historiography methodology in research. By this, a systematic and critical approach was used to study and interpret historical events, sources and narratives, encompassing source criticism to analyze authenticity and biases and contextualization to situate events within social, political and cultural frameworks. The study also engaged interpretation to examine historians' perspectives and assumptions and narrative analysis to deconstruct dominant narratives and explore alternative perspectives. In order to compare the past and present studies, a comparative analysis was adopted to contrast different accounts and interpretations. Reflexivity was also engaged to acknowledge; that is, this researcher's own positionality and biases, ultimately uncovering nuanced understandings of historical events, challenging prevailing narratives and contributing to a richer comprehension of the past. This methodology offers a nuanced and contextualized understanding of historical events and political phenomena, enabling these researchers to critically evaluate multiple perspectives, challenge dominant narratives, and uncover complex power dynamics, ultimately providing a more comprehensive and accurate analysis.

#### **5. Results**

The ongoing Ambazonian revolt in Cameroon is not a historical accident. Although transformed into an armed conflict from 2016 onwards, it has always assumed smothering proportions in the collective memory of many English speaking Cameroonians. The imbroglio originated from the suppression of the most popular option of Southern Cameroons, *secession* and *independence* during the elections that prefaced reunification. Though eliminated from the plebiscite options presented to the electorate on 11 February 1961, the idea survived and has punctuated and informed political agitations in the territory since then without much attention from the government. The Lack of commitment to the Federal Constitution drafted at Fouban amplified the minority position of the English-speaking part of Cameroon in political decision-making and defense of her socio-cultural values, hence engendering protest demonstrations. The constitutional amendment of 1984 that led to the change of name from 'United Republic of Cameroon' to 'Republic of Cameroon' contributed immensely in fueling the idea of secession and the ongoing Ambazonian war in Cameroon that seeks to achieve that end. This amendment arguably, was the most profound reason for the Anglophone struggle for statehood for it justified the annexation or assimilation allegation against the French dominated Cameroon and is undeniably, the event that birthed the name 'Ambazonia' in the recent historiography of Cameroon. In fact, the outburst of the Anglophone crisis since 2016 and the reverberating need to restore the independence of Southern Cameroons under the name "Federal Republic of Ambazonia" since then, is a clarion call to all managers of political institutions that ideas can be characteristically suppressed but can never be killed, they are immortal and for compelling reasons will continue to smother looking for a vent to slip out.

#### **6. Discussions**

##### **6.1. The Journey to the 1959 and 1961 Elections**

The 1959 general elections and the 11 February 1961 plebiscite became necessary only because Cameroon was partitioned after the First World War, 1914 - 1918. The mauling and expulsion of Germany by a joint Anglo-French onslaught assisted by Belgian troops, resulted into the provisional partition of the territory between

Britain and France in 1916. This partition was predicted on the failures of a joint administration proposed by France by way of a condominium to ensure effective control of the territory for the duration of the war (Elango, 1987: 28-29). The division of the country enforced an entirely novel internationally set frontier and separated Kamerun's citizens and ethnic groups in ways that interfered with their old political, economic, and cultural connections and practices. Elango (1987) captured the impact of partition on Cameroon. Barely four decades later, had these concerns (division) justified some of the confined concerns that encouraged Cameroon nationalist sentiments. Many years after Cameroon gained its independence, some of the biggest challenges to the country's development remain the political, economic and cultural effects of the split. The most obvious and urgent of which include the attempts to establish a truly bilingual culture and to close the economic growth gap between both the former French and British mandates, in addition to the issues brought on by the disparities in the ways that French speakers and English speakers think and behave (Elango 1987).

Against this nationalistic adumbration, it is worthy to note that the spheres allocated to Britain and France as a result partition became the League of Nations' mandated territories from 1922 to 1946 when the Trusteeship was introduced and thereafter as Trust territories of the United Nations Organization until 1960 for French Cameroon and 1961 for British Cameroons.

The transmutation from the mandate system after the Second World War signaled a change in colonial responsibilities as emphasis shifted from economic development under the Mandate System, to progressive development towards self-government or independence as contained in Article 5 of the Trusteeship Agreement. In this light, Trusteeship powers were to help in the evolution of representative democratic bodies wherein appropriate consultations were to be engaged to give the indigenous people a chance to freely express their opinions on the political regime (Nkeh, 2020). Goaded by this political imperative, it became incumbent upon Britain to involve the people of Southern Cameroons in the politics that was to preface independence while pressure groups and political parties were also to operate unperturbed.

The Second World War had strong political consequences for British Cameroons. British Cameroons' survivors who accompanied the allied troops to Europe and other countries to fight against the Axis returned home after the war and started questioning some of the British policies and colonial institutions. The emerging British Cameroons intelligentsia from Nigeria started talking of autonomy within Nigeria while others talked of self-determination and independence. On 27 March 1940, the Cameroon Youth League (CYL) was formed. It was constituted mostly of British Cameroonian students in Nigerian institutions under the patronage of EJ Alex-Taylor, a Nigerian Lawyer. It was the first a pressure group to articulate the feelings and wishes of the politically conscious British Cameroonians and its founding members were PM Kale, EML Endeley and JN Foncha. With "Unity and Cooperation" as its motto, the group sought to address the social, political, educational, and economic grievances of British Cameroonians while also pursuing Southern Cameroons' recognition. Though headquartered in Nigeria's Lagos, the CYL had branches in Bamenda and Bamusso. These students were seemingly united in seeking a redress to British Cameroons grievances and a recognized status for Southern Cameroons. It however collapsed mainly because of differences among the Cameroonian population in Lagos.

One of the founding fathers of the CYL, EML Endeley formed the Cameroon National Federation (CNF) in May 1949 with the major objective being the creation of a separate region for British Southern Cameroons and reunification of British and French Cameroons. From the CYL and CNF positional objectives are three discernable political views - autonomy within Nigeria, separation from Nigeria and reunification. In 1950, RJK Dibongue and NN Mbile withdrew from the CNF and formed the Kamerun United National Congress (KUNC) because Endeley of the CNF toyed with the idea of reunification. Mbile explained the policy of the KUNC thus, 'we want the Cameroons under British and French administrations to be brought together as in the days of German rule'. Amongst its many objectives, the KUNC called for the reunification of British and French Cameroons and the teaching of English and French in French and English schools respectively. It should be

noted therefore that, the pressure groups in British Cameroon did not have a common political platform and destiny for the territory. These differences were replicated in the political parties that were created in the territory especially after 1953 and this complicated the quest for a political consensus in view of Southern Cameroons political destiny necessitating the elections of 1959 and 1961.

Most Southern Cameroonian prominent politicians were members of the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) and so embraced the ideas of Nnamdi Asikiwe, leader of the party. Agitations however developed when the Richards constitution 1946, and the Macpherson constitution of 1952, failed to grant a separate region for Southern Cameroons within Nigeria nor independence and reunification. While the Macpherson constitution sought to improve on the political participation of Southern Cameroons in Nigeria, dissenting tendencies were not lacking. In fact, while the political developments orchestrated by the Macpherson constitution were on course, RJK Dibongue and Um Nyobe of the Union des Population Du Cameroun (UPC) met a Tiko and agreed to have a meeting at Ezeka. The Ezeka decision, that was drafted during the session, called for the instant reunion of the Cameroons, the formation of a blended legislature with eighty percent Cameroonian members, and the setting of a five-year timeline for the proclamation of independence starting on January 1, 1952 (Welch, 1966). The political polarities abound in Southern Cameroons and before the Macpherson constitution could mature, the Eastern Region of Nigeria was immersed into a serious political crisis in April 1953 which inadvertently triggered the birth of political parties in Southern Cameroons with divergent views.

Mbile maintains that the Eastern Regional Crisis involved the question of a possible reshuffle of the Eastern Regional Government of nine ministers referred to as the Eyo-Ita Government sworn in early 1952, (Mbile, 1999). In 1953, the NCNC dominated the Eastern House of Legislature, and Eyo-Ita, the party's vice chairman, led the Eastern Region's administration. The impasse resulted from Eyo-Ita's unwillingness to carry out "unconventional constitutional" modifications and reorganize the Eastern Region's government at the party's president, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's, request. Thus, the president and other prominent members of the NCNC precipitated the fall of the Eyo-Ita led government; however, Muna of Southern Cameroons departed, while the Nigerian ministers – later dubbed "sit-tight Ministers" – refused to go. The crisis persisted as a motion requesting for the reinstatement of Muna as member of the Executive Council of the Eastern Region was rejected by a 45 'No' against 32 'Yes' votes in the House of Assembly (Mbile, 1999).

In light of this, the elected leaders of British Southern Cameroons chose to adopt the stance of compassionate impartiality in order to avoid getting involved in Nigerian politics. Again, not all Southern Cameroonian delegates accepted this position. NN Mbile, RN Charley, SC Ndi and PN Motoby-Woleta stood against it. The NCNC favored any political destiny the people of Cameroon were to choose autonomy within Nigeria, reunification and independence, and were committed to supporting it as a policy. The Obafemi Awolowo Action Group (AG) further stated that the party endorsed their demands for an independent legislature and the freedom to decide whether to stay in Nigeria or go abroad (Welch, 1966). The position of eminent Nigerian politicians was indicative of the political tendencies inherent in Southern Cameroons political class.

After every effort to control it collapsed, the Eastern House of parliament was suspended by the Governor of the Eastern Region in 1953. The Kamerun National Congress (KNC), a combination of the Endeley-led CNF and the KUNC of RJK Dibongue, had been the original native political group in British Southern Cameroons. The 9 delegates that made up the compassionate impartiality alliance broke off their ties to the Eastern Region in June 1953. The KNC refused to recognize NN Mbile, the KUNC general secretary. Together with PM Kale, SC Ndi, PN Motomy-Woleta and RN Charley, formed the Kamerun People's Party (KPP). So while the KNC stood for autonomy within Nigeria (separate regional status), the KPP maintained a pro-NCNC stance. The KNC however, was constituted by politicians with different political aspirations for British Southern Cameroon: The autonomists who were led by Endeley wanted the British Cameroons to be granted greater autonomy within the Nigerian Federation. The secessionists were generally led by the traditional rulers who wanted British

Southern Cameroons to secede and eventually ask for a separate independent state. There were also the reunificationists who were led by RJK Dibongue and later by Ndeh Ntumazah. This group stood for secession of Southern Cameroons from Nigeria and its reunion with French Cameroon and finally there were the Foncharians led by Foncha who preferred to be the sounding board of popular opinion (Ngoh, 2019).

These political lines of division remain itched in the political skin and minds of Southern Cameroonians when the AG and NCNC members united in their demands that the Macpherson constitution be replaced. At the Lancaster House Conference in London, Lord Lyttleton insisted that if Endeley's KNC emerge victorious in the elections to be held as a result of the dissolution of the Eastern Regional House of Assembly, Southern Cameroons would be accorded a separate legislature. Following the popular vote victory of the KNC, Southern Cameroons was awarded a "Quasi Federal Territory" in accordance with the Lyttleton constitution, which came into effect on October 26, 1954, at the Lagos Constitutional Conference presided over by Lord Lyttleton. On October 26, 1954, the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly convened for the first time in Buea, following Endeley's appointment as boss of the government Management.

After the elections that furnished Southern Cameroons with a quasi-regional status in 1954, Endeley began talking more in favor of autonomy within Nigeria. This antagonized key members of the KNC. JN Foncha and AN Jua left the KNC and formed the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) in 1955, calling for the separation of British Cameroons from Nigeria in the meantime. The KNDP programme involved separation from Nigeria, autonomous legislature for Southern Cameroons, negotiations for unification and independence. Since these goals appealed to that of the UPC, the latter worked actively in Southern Cameroons to achieve the goals enunciated by the KNDP.

The different political positions in Southern Cameroons came to the fore in view of the fact that the Lyttleton Constitution stipulated that the life of the first Southern Cameroons House of Assembly would end by 31 December 1956. In this vein, elections were scheduled for March 1957 for the House of Assembly. The KNC campaigned for the creation of a separate Region for Southern Cameroons within Nigeria, the KNDP stood for secession and ultimate reunification and the KPP stood for integration with Nigeria. The KNC emerged victorious by winning six seats. The KNDP won five seats and the KPP had two seats. With only a slide victory, the Endeley led government initiated an alliance with the KPP in an effort to have a comfortable majority in the House of Assembly. This was achieved in 1957 as members of the KNC and KPP agreed to work together to salvage the territory from "secessionist propaganda" and in view of the tribal politics being propagated by the KNDP (Daily Times, 1957).

On 15 May 1958, Endeley was appointed Premier of Southern Cameroons and fourteen days later, he made a policy speech to the effect that Southern Cameroons would never return to the status it was before 1914. By implication, he had completely dropped the idea of reunification in favour of association with Nigeria. In the London Constitutional Conference of 1958, the KNC and KPP requested for Regional Status for Southern Cameroons at par to the other Nigerian regions. The KNDP rejected the stance on grounds that it would lead to closer association with Nigeria. Though Southern Cameroons was granted a full regional status similar to other Nigerian regions, the diverse and complex political views amongst Southern Cameroonians were replicated in the campaigns that prefaced the 1959 elections and 1961 plebiscite campaigns.

## **6.2. The 1959 and 1961 Elections: Suppression of the Secessionist Ideology**

In the British Cameroons, the options of secession, integration and reunification dominated political debates in the wake of the 1959 general elections. The Endeley led KNC/KPP alliance's position on integration was waning. His policy towards natural rulers that hinged on dissuading them from meddling in party politics which to him, could expose them to the disdain of a section of their subjects, antagonized the chiefs of the KNC party. Endeley actually made the clear observation that "any chief who continues to exist in political activity does so at his own

personal risks." The traditional rulers felt offended by this mentality because they believed they had the capacity to intervene in national affairs and make corrections when they saw everything had been seriously wrong. They also became antagonistic to the KNC/KPP collaboration and supported the KNDP's "secessionist" policy, even though they had previously supported Endeley wholeheartedly. Even Foncha who was advocating a fusion of secession and reunification had a strong leaning on secession. Chem-Langhee intimates that, the most popular option in the territory was secession pure and simple and which the Concert of National Rulers and Chiefs advocated, (Chem-Langhee, 2004).

The 1959 elections for an enlarged House of Assembly in conformity with the 1958 Nigerian reforms were key because the elected leader could lead the discussions hinging on the destiny of the territory. The KNC/KPP alliance explicitly campaigned for continued association with Nigeria and a separate region (Rubin, 1971). The KNDP supported by the One Kamerun (Ok) party campaigned on a platform designed to suit the aspirations of different groups while to the natural rulers, chiefs and the illiterate masses, the KNDP-OK coalition promised secession from Nigeria and ultimate independence, to the western educated elite and teachers, it offered secession and to students it upheld reunification. The KNDP - OK coalition won the elections with 75326 votes against 51384 votes for KNC - KPP alliance. The former had 14 seats against 12 seats for the latter indicating a very narrow victory (Ngho, 2011).

To the average voter, the call for secession and independence by traditional rulers, the OK's position of "immediate independence and reunification" and KNDP's call for "Separation and ultimate reunification proved to be so confusing. It should therefore be noted that the Foncha led coalition won the elections of 1959 because the party tactfully tailored its campaign message to suit the divergent and conflicting wishes of most of the electorate hence making many to vote without a clear understanding of their positions. The highly supported view of secession was drowned in this largely misunderstood victory.

After the elections, the thirteenth session of the UN debated the Southern Cameroons issue in February 1959. Endeley and Foncha failed to reach a consensus with regards to the political destiny of Southern Cameroons making a plebiscite the only way to decide British Southern Cameroons future (Atem, 2012). The Endeley camp demanded that the idea for a plebiscite should be abandoned completely or limited to an unambiguous selection, whilst Foncha recommended that, in the event that one was to be held, the only option up for debate would be between a split from or integration into the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This was discussed at a subsequent gathering of all sides in Bamenda. On the other hand, Endeley stated at a different Mamfe gathering that "reunification be preferred option for maintaining collaboration' with Nigeria, (Johnson, 1970). It was in the midst of this difficulty to reach political consensus in Southern Cameroons that a split within the KPP occurred leading to the formation of a political party, the Kamerun United Party (KUP). Led by PM Kale, the party insisted on the attainment of a separate regional status within Nigeria and later, the achievement of independence for Southern Cameroons as a separate political entity when Nigeria would accede to independence. Mbile also abandoned the initial goal of the KPP and aligned with Endeley's goal for independence of Southern Cameroons as a region within Nigeria.

The political situation after the 1959 plebiscite was indeed fluid and volatile as politicians switched from opinion to opinion and at the same time there was the hardening of political positions. Christopher Eastwood of the Colonial Office notified JW Robertson that in a discussion with Malcom Milne, Deputy Commissioner in Southern Cameroons, Foncha noted that: Whatever he might have said publicly when campaigning (in the 1959 elections) and whatever he might have said to or about Ahidjo, he was not interested in early association with the French Cameroons and he wanted no more eventual than some loose sort of confederation (Ngho, 2019).

In March 1959, Foncha again observed that he would accept unification with an independent French Cameroon only if the General Assembly were to insist upon it. Amazingly again, later in 1959, Eastwood informed JW Robertson and Sir Andrew Cohen of a discussion he had with Foncha in which he explicitly stated

that he would not want unification with French Cameroon if it remained a unitary state. When Eastwood asked Foncha what would then be the alternative in view of the fact that the UNO would not stand for continued trusteeship or independence. Eastwood noted that Untold Story, in his view, the only alternative would be to join Nigeria, Foncha said 'yes' (Ngoh, 2011). This vacillating attitude of Foncha epitomized the outlook of Southern Cameroons' politicians between 1947 and 1961 and beyond. In May 1959, the Foncha led government was offered an opportunity to state their view on the political future of the territory during a meeting at Ikeja, Lagos on 20 May 1959 with Lennox-Boyd. The later accepted on Jua's prodding to drop the reunification alternative if the Southern Cameroons' government firmly rejected it perhaps by a motion in the house of Assembly. Unfortunately, this opportunity was not exploited by the Southern Cameroons' delegates at the Mamfe plebiscite conference of that year.

At the Mamfe conference, the antagonistic positions of the KNDP and the KNC-KPP alliance were not mitigated. The KNDP maintained that the plebiscite options should be secession or association while the KNC-KPP wanted reunification or association and not secession. The KNC-KPP leadership knew that *secession* was the most popular of the three options which it did not want. The delegate of the Kamerun Society, who was sent to support *reunification*, went and supported *association* or *secession* instead. PM Kale wanted independence as a separate political entity while the National Union of Kamerun Students (NUKS) wanted *secession* and *ultimate reunification*. What emerged from the Mamfe debates as indicated above was that, the most popular wish was secession, then association and reunification in that order (Ngoh, 2011). In fact, reunification was not an acceptable household word in Southern Cameroons because of the persecution, assassination and wanton destruction of lives and property as a result of terrorist activity in French administered Cameroon.

It should be noted that the popularity of secession challenged the British policy of coaxing the Southern Cameroons towards association with Nigeria or attainment of independence as part of Nigerian Federation. This drive led Malcolm Milne to advise at the Mamfe Conference that a number of the Cameroonians people's closest allies are unaware of a future which is more probable to bring joy and fulfillment to the Southern Cameroons instead to maintain their relationship with Nigeria. At Mamfe, this thread of reasoning was not accepted and so Southern Cameroons delegates were invited to the UN at New York as another bid to reach a consensus.

During their September and October 1959 UN meetings in New York, political leaders from Southern Cameroons solidified their opinions more thoroughly. Foncha maintained vehemently that it was tantamount to rebellion for anybody to wish for his homeland to be swallowed by yet another, and that separating Southern Cameroons from Nigeria could "create a path accessible for building up of a bigger Cameroon" (Ngoh, 2023). Endeley refuted Foncha's claim, stating that a reunion is the final objective that Foncha and his government will strive for, following split and that he was opposed to Foncha and the KNDP to take the region and its citizens on an enjoyable trip to an unidentified location (Ngoh, 2023). NN Mbile broadened the already complex plebiscite discourse when he proposed that each tribe or division should be allowed to make its choice on the alternatives of association with Nigeria or reunification with French Cameroon. Against this background of futile quest for a consensus, Mrs Angela Brooks of Liberia finally produced a draft resolution which was tabled to the Trusteeship Committee in October 1959. It was later adopted by the Fourth Trusteeship Committee of the UN General Assembly by a vote of 74 to zero with only two abstentions as UN General Assembly Resolution 1352(XIV) of 16 October 1959 which spelt out the two questions in the plebiscite as follows:

1. Do you want to associate with the Nigerian autonomous federation in order to gain independence?
- Or
2. Do you want to join the autonomous Republic of Cameroon in order to gain independence?

The motion stated that those who were qualified for voting consisted individuals who were born in the Southern Cameroons or with parents who were born there (Ngoh, 2023: 86-87). It is evident from the foregoing that the most common option to secede and become a political entity that is autonomous was turned down. Considering

the fact that even Britain knew that reunification was the least popular of the options for Southern Cameroonians; that attempts to school Southern Cameroonians to understand the British Nigerian political mind and character failed; and considering that the rebellion in French Cameroon orchestrated by the UPC had alienated the most of Southern Cameroonians' population; secession, the third option was the wishes of most Southern Cameroonians. Its rejection in the plebiscite option deprived Southern Cameroonians of the right to self-determination indeed.

A plebiscite held on February 11, 1961, was arranged by the UN. The findings were accepted by the UN General Assembly through Resolution 1608(XV), which counted 9 746 votes in favor of joining the Federation of Nigeria and 233 against 571 votes in favor of embracing the Republic of Cameroon. In British Northern Cameroon, 146 294 votes were in favour of Nigeria and 97 659 votes were counted in favour of the Republic of Cameroon. In this light, Southern Cameroonians was to achieve independence by joining the Republic of Cameroon and Northern Cameroon by integration with Nigeria. The question that begs for an answer is - was the plebiscite results especially for Southern Cameroonians a true reflection of the wishes of the majority of Southern Cameroonians?

Ngoh (2011) maintained that the outstanding victory of the reunification ticket was partly because a respectable section of Southern Cameroonians electorate thought that reunification platform had been replaced by *secession* and *independence* as a separate state; they voted for reunification therefore with the understanding that it was secession. Other Southern Cameroonians felt that proposals for a United Federal Republic of Cameroon would prove unacceptable and unworkable with the end results being an independent separate Southern Cameroonians.

Another key factor that explains the fact that secession was the popular option that was swept aside was the fact that the KNDP led government was very conscious that reunification was very unpopular and a clear explanation of the two alternatives to the populace would clarify the unclear position of Foncha and his KNDP cohorts. To avoid such a situation, French Cameroonians supported KNDP hooliganism whose duty was to intimidate, prevent from lecturing and if very necessary beat up lecturers or campaigners of the opposition. In fact, KNDP hooligans with the support of French Cameroon settlers disturbed and prevented the supporters of integration with Nigeria from lecturing in Santa, Mankon, Nso, Bambui and Ndop (Lon, 2013). Many French Cameroonians with or without the ten years' residential qualification in the plebiscite, massively participated in the votes in Muyuka, Bambalang, Bangolang, Balikumbat, Awing, Santa, Nso, Ndop, Widikum, Guzang, Bamenda town, and Victoria Division, thereby influencing the votes in favour of reunification. This overwhelming French influence cowed the views of several indigenous Southern Cameroonians. In fact, Lon (2013) submitted that French Cameroon immigrants initiated the idea of reunification, propagated it, wooed and converted some Southern Cameroonians, convinced the UN to accept it as a plebiscite alternative and massively voted albeit illegally, for reunification in 1961 in order to become citizens in their new homes. By so doing, the idea of independence for Southern Cameroonians as a separate state was defeated. The argument sustained here is that, though suppressed in 1961, the ongoing Ambazonian war in the Republic of Cameroon is a testament to the irregularities that marked the 1961 plebiscite for ideas do not die. The reunification victory necessitated the convening of the Foumban conference to hatch a constitution that could accommodate the unique characteristics of the two uniting states. The nature of the Foumban constitution and Ahidjo's attitude to it has also been analyzed as one of the major causes of the Ambazonian conflict in Cameroon.

### **6.3. The Foumban Conference Legitimizes the Separatist Claim**

Though the 1959 and 1961 elections did not reflect the wish of many Southern Cameroonians' aspiration for an independent state, scholarship on the decolonization process post independent Cameroon argue that reunification was only a process and not the main cause of the ongoing armed conflict in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon. According to Ngoh (2019), the inability of the politicians in Cameroon's various

governments to put into practice both the word and the spirit of the agreements made at the Yaounde Tripartite Talks in 1961 and the Fouban Constitutional Conference served as the impetus for the reunification of Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon. The Southern Cameroons House of legislatures never had the opportunity to consider and embrace the Federal Republic of Cameroon's draft constitution; instead, it was ratified exclusively by the National Assembly of the Republic of Cameroon in August 1961. This was particularly troubling for the people of southern Cameroon, since Article 59 of the federal constitution implied that: the current stipulations, which amend the Republic of Cameroon's constitution, which was enacted on February 21, 1960 by the citizenry of Cameroon (formerly known as French Cameroonians), will take effect on October 1, 1961. *The amended constitution will be released in both French and English, with the genuine French content being included* (Ngoh, 2019).

The basic understanding from this was that the West Cameroon legislative Assembly never endorsed the constitution and the emphasis on the authenticity of the French text combined to fuel the Ambazonian spirit as the constitution in their opinion was not legally binding on the two English speaking regions of the country. Even though in the late 1970s, the phrase 'the French text being authentic' was subsequently deleted, the harm had been done and notion of the superiority of the French language lived in infamy in the collective memory of die-hards of the English-speaking minority. It should be noted here that the dominance of the French language was amongst the grievances of the English-speaking education family in Cameroon that was expressed through petitions and demonstrations and recently through armed struggle.

The watering-down of federal structures and the conditionality of federalism even before the ink endorsing the Fouban Constitutional provisions and the Yaounde Tripartite Talks was dry, also contributed in instigating the Ambazonian rebellion in Cameroon. On 20 October 1961, the Federal President, Ahidjo, signed Decree N° 61/OF/15 which divided the new federation into six Administrative Inspectorates and Federal Inspectors were appointed to each of the regions and were accountable to president of Federal Republic. In West Cameroon, the Federal Inspector, Jean Claude's role was both technical and political and he was more powerful than the Prime Minister. Inspectors were empowered to closely supervise political life in the federal states thereby limiting decision making powers of local authorities in the federation. The decree's profound restriction of the autonomy of state vis-à-vis the Federal authorities was an exact opposite of a Federal system as the states of West Cameroon's Prime Minister was virtually transformed into a 'glorified puppet.' The concept of Federalism was smothered by Ahidjo's statement at the Fourth Congress of the Union Camerounaise (UC) in July 1962 that the Republic of Cameroon had to change into a federation in order to reclaim a portion of its national territory that had specific features, rather than creating a fresh republic with a federal structure. It was a sign that Ahidjo would not permit West Cameroon's political culture and values to develop and function (Ahidjo, 1962). The marginalization of Anglo-Saxon values in the union and their minority status in the political structure of the Republic of Cameroon since 1961 was contributing factors to the Ambazonian movement.

Another fall-out of the Fouban arrangement that gave credence to the Ambazonian revolt was the decision of the Federal President to merge the Judicial Police of East Cameroon and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of West Cameroon with the department of Federal Sûreté (National Police). Despite criticisms from West Cameroonians and Foncha's lack of clarity on policy matters with West Cameroonians, Ahidjo went ahead and appended his signature on Decree N°63/OF/216 of July 1963, creating and reorganizing the National Police. This further eliminated the powers of the West Cameroon Commissioner of Police and the Prime Minister to control the activities of the West Cameroon Police Force and security issues.

Foncha claimed that the decision to merge the forces was carried out without due consultation with West Cameroon officials and requested that the Attorney- General of West Cameroon advice on the constitutional legality of Ahidjo's decree. He explained that the decree was justified by articles 5(6), 5(16) and 6(c) of the Federal Constitution and that because the constitution was drafted on the French system, it should be interpreted in the

French manner which differed from the Common Law. He advised further that “French lawyers attach less importance than English trained lawyers do to the precise words used in the French system, the judicial police investigated crimes (Ngoh, 2019). It should be observed again that the incongruity of French judicature and the English Common Law practices in Cameroon was among the lawyers grievances that dovetailed into the unceasing Ambazonian war in Cameroon meanwhile, the merger of the CID and the Judicial Police with the Federal Sûreté, marked the introduction of French police with a typically different political and military culture in the English speaking section of the federation. The influx and domination of the police by French speaking Cameroons constituted part of the grievances of the Ambazonian fighters who even today see them as part of the ‘occupation Forces’ in ‘Ambazonian’ territory.

Furthermore, in September 1966, the Cameroon National Union (CNU) was created following the dissolution of all the political parties in the federation. The federal Republic thus became indisputably, a one-party state. This political system did not cherish healthy political discussions and dissent and the uniqueness of West Cameroon was gradually but firmly eroded away. It became difficult to protect and project the interests of minorities especially as the party defined the guidelines of the federation’s policy and the government implemented the decisions. In 1972, the Federal Republic was conceived to have outlived its usefulness and Foncha acquiesced to Ahidjo’s proposal that, a referendum be held in 1972 to determine the will of the people. The dismantling of the federal constitution/system later worsened the political and socio-economic frustrations of the English speaking people of the then North West and South West Provinces. The result of this political distress was the creation of pro-Anglophone pressure groups such as the Cameroon Action Movement (CAM) in 1979 which became petulant in its condemnation of the situation of Anglophones in the union and appeal to secession or a return to a two-state federation (*Cameroon Tribune*, 1983). The 1972 referendum therefore signaled the death of the Cameroon federation and for Anglophones, it was near assimilation of her Anglo-saxon characteristics and identity. It was however, the change of the name of Cameroon in 1984 that triggered more resentment from the English speaking minority in Cameroon.

#### **6.4. The Constitutional Amendment of 1984 and the Birth of ‘Ambazonia’**

The suppression of the most popular option and the failings of the Fouban Conference did not kill the idea of a separated independent state of Southern Cameroons. When President Paul Biya on 25 January 1984 proposed a modification of the unitary constitution which among others would change the name of Cameroon. According to Law No. 84-001 of 4 February 1984 therefore, the name, “The United Republic of Cameroon” was abolished and replaced with “Republic of Cameroon.” This raised some misgivings and generated swift reactions from among English speaking Cameroonians who described it either as ‘assimilation’ or ‘annexation’. The disturbing issue was that the new name was what French Cameroon adopted when it achieved independence on 1 January 1960. The interpretation of the political decision was that the Republic of Cameroon had annexed or assimilated the former British Southern Cameroons. Since English Speaking Cameroonians believed that British Southern Cameroons reunited with the Republic of Cameroon as equal partners, the change of name was worrisome.

It was in this context that Gorji Dinka, former President of the Cameroon Bar Association, criticized Law No. 84 - 001 of 4/2/84 which abolished the name “United Republic of Cameroon” and replaced it with “Republic of Cameroon”. Actually, Dinka maintained that: the law omitted a provision specifying that the government institutions of the United Republic of Cameroon would remain structures of the resurrected Republic of Cameroon, either on purpose or by default. Therefore, the United Republic of Cameroon's structures were all dissolved along with the legislation. Biya [was] neither President of the United Republic of Cameroon, which had been eliminated nor of the recently reconstituted Republic of Cameroon because the latter [had] neither a governing body nor a legislature (Dinka, 1985).

With the feeling that former British Southern Cameroons have been granted “independence” justified by the fact that the adoption of “Republic of Cameroon” indicated that the other part that joined to make Cameroon “United Republic” has been liberated by the return to “Republic of Cameroon”, refused to be annexed, Nationalists in the English part of Cameroon as led by Dinka noted that the “new state” be re-baptized the “Republic of Ambazonia”. This protest action attracted the wrath of the government but again it must be understood that this development was key in bringing about the ceaseless war plaguing Cameroon for it marked the origin of and justification of the name ‘Ambazonia’ in the context of the struggle for restoration or independence that was denied them in 1961 and confirmed by the 1984 amendment.

The All Anglophone Conference (AAC1) in Buea in April 1993, which gave rise to the Buea Declaration and the AAC11 IN Bamenda in 1994, which were previously mentioned, was another latent expression of Anglophone dissatisfaction with the administration and leadership of the country. About nine representatives of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), who had been requested to go after the reinstatement of Southern Cameroons' sovereignty in a UN meeting in June 1995, stormed the Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) Provincial Station in Buea on the evening of December 30, 1999, at around 11:50 p.m. They overpowered the lone police officer on duty and proclaimed the secession and independence of the North West and South West provinces (now known as regions). According to the chairman of the SCNC Strategic Committee, Justice Ebong Frederick Alobwede, the SCNC noted that “We the people of the former British Southern Cameroons officially declare our independence from the Republic of Cameroon, (Ngoh, 2023). The message did not go on air but Henry Fusung, Chairman of the SCNC released an eight-page address wherein he stated that the annexation of Southern Cameroons by the Republic of Cameroon made the former to regress in every department of life and that by fraud, numerous manipulations and fraudulent misrepresentations, Southern Cameroons lost everything (Ngoh, 2023,200).

Meanwhile, Justice Ebong and other SCNC militants went ahead and hoisted the SCNC flag at the Community Field, Limbe and the Biya government, let at the time by Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge did not investigate the root causes of the incident neither did it acknowledge them. Though this political action did not culminate to official independence of the former Southern Cameroons region of the country, it was again proof of the fact that ideas can be suppressed but they never die.

It was in this line of reasoning that the transformation of the Anglophone problem into an armed conflict in 2016 provided an opportunity for the proponents of secession to take up arms against the Republic and mobilized diaspora support in their bid for independence. As tensions and atrocities characterized the crisis, some Cameroonians in the diaspora insisted on *secession* and *independence* of the North West and South West Regions, now referred to by them as the Federal Republic of Ambazonia. This secessionist current was captured by John Fru Ndi during the Social Democratic Front National Executive Committee meeting in the following words: There is a very strong current in the presence of the crisis which is the request for outright separation by those in the diaspora. We have discovered that most of the people clamouring for secession are being sponsored” (Ngoh, 2023).

The Ambazonian revolt or the call for armed secession attracted significant popular and financial support with hope of enhancing the dream of “My Trip To Buea” as supporters were told that the “Ambazonian President” would declare the independence of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia on 1 October 2017. The Social Media disseminated this information which helped to mobilize the masses for the great event which however is still expected. The secessionist stance has become so strong that many Cameroonians feel that the form of State should be revised and in this wise, Federalism, Unitary Decentralization and Secession are attracting some degree of support.

## **7. The Contributions of the Study to Science**

This study on the War in Southern Cameroons, also known as the Ambazonian War will significantly contribute to scientific knowledge in several fields. In history and political science, the study will provide new insights into the complexities of civil wars, the role of ethnicity and identity in conflict, and the impact of colonial legacies on modern conflicts. In economics, this research will shed light on the war's devastating effects on economic development, trade and human capital. In psychology and sociology, the study explores the long-term effects of trauma, displacement and cultural heritage on individuals and communities. Additionally, in the domain of public health, this study examines the war's impact on health outcomes, nutrition and disease patterns. Overall, the study will expand the understanding of the multifaceted consequences of conflict and informed strategies for post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation and development.

## **8. Limitations of the Study**

Researchers studying the Ambazonian War have encountered several limitations, including restricted access to the conflict zone, biased or unreliable sources and limited availability of primary data due to the ongoing nature of the conflict. Additionally, the sensitive and politicized environment has led to difficulties in conducting interviews and surveys, with some respondents fearing retribution or persecution. The destruction of infrastructure and records has also hindered the collection of accurate and comprehensive data, while the complexity of the conflict has made it challenging to identify and verify reliable sources. Furthermore, the rapidly changing situation on the ground has limited the ability to conduct longitudinal studies or evaluate the effectiveness of peace building initiatives, making it difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions about the conflict.

## **9. Recommendations**

To ensure an end to the Ambazonian War, recommendations include: Irrespective of the causes and consequences of the war, an attempt to move the warring parties from their positions of wants to needs is fundamental. Wants in this case means winning at all cost while needs refer to a position where the parties can make concessions. For instance, the implementation of an inclusive dialogue and negotiations between the Cameroonian government and Ambazonian leaders, addressing grievances and root causes of the conflict especially in the areas of marginalization and cultural suppression. Additionally, effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs for separatist fighters, as well as accountability mechanisms for human rights abuses are crucial. Furthermore, economic development initiatives, infrastructure rebuilding and social services restoration in the affected regions can help rebuild trust and foster reconciliation. International mediation and support from stakeholders such as the African Union or United Nations can also facilitate a peaceful resolution. Ultimately, a comprehensive and inclusive peace agreement that respects the rights and aspirations of all parties is essential to achieving lasting peace and stability in the region.

## **10. Conclusion**

The contention in this write up is that the Ambazonian war in Cameroon hangs on a plurality of causes. British policy of encouraging independence for Southern Cameroons as part of Nigeria made her to frown at any secessionist tendency manifested by Southern Cameroonians. The UN's family discouragement of the granting of independence to "small" states and France's support for reunification, worked in synergy to silence and eventually eliminate the third option from the choices that were presented to the electorate in 1959 and 1961 respectively. It is in this context that the irregularities that marred especially the 1961 plebiscite exercise were never sanctioned even though it was clear that votes in Bamenda North, Bamenda East, Victoria Division, Muyuka, Batoke and Likumba were illegally and significantly influenced by French immigrants from the

Republic of Cameroon. The outburst of the Anglophone crisis since 2016 therefore and the emphasis on the need to restore the independence of British Southern Cameroons under the name "Federal Republic of Ambazonia" is a reminder to the leading coterie of the state that ideas can be characteristically suppressed but can never be killed for they are timeless and eternal and as Ranke puts, it may become the ultimate reality. Therefore, building the spirit of nationalism is fundamental in attaining a conflict free nation in the context of this raging war.

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