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Chapter 4

Chieftaincy and Privatisation in Anglophone Cameroon

by Piet Konings

Introduction

Privatisation has become a key instrument in the stabilisation and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) imposed on Africa by the Bretton Woods institutions. It is an essential part of an overall strategy to open up African economies to market forces and promote private-sector development. Since public enterprises are considered to have performed dismally, African governments are under considerable pressure from international donors to sell them to domestic and foreign private capital. Given their troubled economic condition and acute dependence on foreign financial flows, African governments have officially accepted privatisation so as not to forfeit the international support crucial for their political survival.

Several authors, however, have observed that the actual number of privatisations has remained modest in Africa.¹ They point to various technical and financial constraints as well as socio-political factors to explain this curious finding. Interestingly, some factors reflect the same political concerns that led to the creation of so many public enterprises in the years after independence: an inability to attract foreign investment to politically and economically unstable African nations, the absence of a well-developed domestic entrepreneurial class, and the pursuit of patron-client relationships by African 'patrimonial' states.² Some authors also highlight the resistance to privatisation by civil society, in particular by professional bodies, student organisations and trade unions, since privatisation often involves the sale of public property to well-placed nationals or to foreign enterprises, and generally results in massive lay-offs of workers.³

While there is now an abundance in literature on the role of chieftaincy in African post-colonial states,⁴ I have not yet come across any publication that

¹ Grosh & Makandala 1994: **162-163**, Mkandawire 1994: **196-200**, Tangri 1999: **39-68**.

² Sandbrook 1985: **13-41**, Tangri 1999: **19-37**.

³ Olukoshi 1998: **35-37**, Konings 2002: **327-329**.

⁴ Cf. Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal & Ray 1996, Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal & van Dijk 1999.

examines the role of chieftaincy in current privatisation projects. Leading specialists, including Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, appear to be more interested in the role of chieftaincy in political liberalisation than in economic liberalisation.

In the present paper I focus on the virulent opposition of Bakweri chiefs in Anglophone Cameroon to the government announcement on 15 July 1994 of the privatisation of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), one of the oldest and largest agro-industrial parastatals in the country. These chiefs claimed Bakweri ownership of CDC lands. They felt betrayed at not having previously been consulted about the CDC privatisation, and warned the government that the corporation could not be sold to non-natives without Bakweri consent and compensation.

This chapter intends to demonstrate that the current resistance of the Bakweri chiefs to CDC privatisation is part of their long-standing struggle for the return of the vast Bakweri lands that were expropriated during German colonial rule for the purpose of plantation agriculture and later, in 1946, leased by the British Trust Authority to the newly created CDC. In this endeavour, they have always been assisted by the Bakweri 'modern' elite who, like their chiefs, felt aggrieved by the dramatic loss of their ancestral lands. Following the announcement of the privatisation of the CDC, the Bakweri chiefs have received support from other sectors of the 'traditional' and 'modern' elite in Anglophone Cameroon that are inclined to perceive the privatisation of the CDC as a renewed onslaught by the Francophone-dominated post-colonial state on Anglophone identity and colonial heritage. This alliance of the 'traditional' and 'modern' elites forms a mighty force to ensure that justice will prevail on the issue of the Bakweri lands. It has forced the government to repeatedly postpone the actual privatisation of the CDC and to finally enter into negotiations with the landowners.

In this article I first describe the fierce and protracted struggle by Bakweri chiefs for a return of the expropriated ancestral lands. This will provide the necessary historical background for my subsequent discussion of their present resistance to CDC privatisation.

Bakweri chiefs and the retrieval of CDC lands

The Bakweri are a small ethnic group that live on the slopes of Mount Cameroon in the present Fako Division of the South West Province of Anglophone Cameroon.⁵ Compared to the highly centralised states in the North West Province of Anglophone Cameroon ruled by powerful, even sacred, chiefs,⁶ the social organisation of the Bakweri, like that of most other ethnic groups in the South West Province, was segmentary. Chieftaincy tended to be a weak institution in the various autonomous Bakweri villages, and often a colonial creation. It was only during British indirect rule

⁵ Cf. Ardener 1956: 22-32, 1996: 45, Matute 1990: 8-31.

⁶ Cf. Fisiy 1992: 188-210, 1995: 54-55, Konings 1999: 189-190.

that chieftaincy became rooted in the local communities and that two paramount chiefs were installed to act as the district heads of Buea and Victoria.⁷

When Cameroon became a German protectorate in 1884, the Germans characterised the Bakweri as an aggressive and savage people who might create problems for the opening up of the hinterland. In 1891, the Bakweri of Buea, under the leadership of the legendary Chief Kuva Likenye, the only Bakweri chief who had established a measure of military control over some of the surrounding villages,⁸ defeated a German expedition. It was not until 1895 that their area was truly 'pacified'. The fertile, volcanic soils around Mount Cameroon proved suitable for large-scale plantation agriculture. More than 100,000 hectares of Bakweri land were expropriated by the German colonial state and the original occupants were expelled and sent to restrictive native reserves.⁹ German companies rushed to the area in a frenzied bid to get the best tracts of land¹⁰. In protest, the Bakweri showed little enthusiasm for work on the plantations, certainly not for the menial jobs there. They were no longer branded by the Germans as aggressive and savage but rather as apathetic or even downright lazy – a stereotype that has persevered until the present day.¹¹ To solve the serious labour problem in the area, German planters were compelled to recruit labour from other areas in Cameroon. While initially most migrant workers returned to their region of origin after short spells of work on the estates, an increasing number gradually decided to settle in the area near the plantations after retiring, thus aggravating the land problem.¹² This often resulted in extensive squatting by Bakweri and migrants alike on plantation lands which were only partly cultivated. Due to extreme overcrowding in the reserves, intruders frequently tried to ignore or resist eviction notices. The planters were sometimes obliged to surrender some of their land, while government purchased certain areas for the benefit of native communities.¹³

Following British occupation of the area during the World War I, the property of the German planters was confiscated and turned over to the Custodian of Enemy Property. When, shortly afterwards, the British took over the administration of the area,¹⁴ the plantations were merged and a government department was formed to

⁷ Mbake 1975: **66-73**, Geschiere 1993: **159-163**, Takougang 1996: **17-19**.

⁸ Ardener 1996: 76-78.

⁹ Konings 1993a: **37**, Clarence-Smith 1993: **197**.

¹⁰ Epale 1985: **23-34**.

¹¹ Courade 1982: **357-388**.

¹² Konings 1993a: **58-63**, 2001: **171-177**.

¹³ Epale 1985: 94-95.

¹⁴ The erstwhile German 'Kamerun Protectorate' was partitioned after the World War I between the British and the French, first as 'mandates' under the League of Nations and later as 'trusts' under the United Nations. The southern part of the British mandate/trust territory, which became the Southern Cameroons, was initially attached to the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria until 1954, when it achieved a quasi-regional status and a limited degree of self-government within the Federation of Nigeria. It

manage them. By 1922, however, the British Mandate Authority had already decided to dispose of them as the administrative costs of maintenance were said to be excessive. It seriously considered returning the plantation lands to the original owners but eventually abandoned the idea and instead concluded that it would be in the best interests of the territory and its inhabitants to return the plantations to the foreign private enterprises. According to Eyongetah and Brain,¹⁵ one of the principal reasons for the British Mandate Authority handing over the plantations to foreign planters was:

‘...that it would have been impracticable to split the plantations into small plots for Cameroonian owners – since without capital backing, the buildings and machinery would fall into ruins. Moreover, it feared that the natives’ lack of experience would mean that disease would be spreading among the crops and the cocoa plots would be destroyed.’

Consequently, in 1922, the estates were put up for auction with a restriction on bidding by ex-enemy nationals. But little interest was shown in the plantations and very few were sold because of divergent reasons: the considerable capital resources needed to put the plantations that had been neglected since British occupation back into operation; the problem of recruiting and controlling labour; the low commodity prices then prevailing on the world market; and uncertainty at the time about the future of the mandated territories.¹⁶ Another auction was held in London in November 1924, this time without restrictions on German bids and almost all the estates were bought by their former German owners.

At the start of the World War II, the German estates were expropriated again by the Custodian of Enemy Property. After the war, a decision had to be reached, once again, on how to dispose of the properties. Meanwhile, the young educated Bakweri elite had founded several nationalist and ethnic associations such as the Cameroon Youth League (CYL) led by P.M. Kale and Dr. E.M.L. Endeley and the Bakweri Improvement Union under the leadership of J.A. Kale and D.M.L. Endeley.¹⁷ This made a considerable contribution towards a growing awareness of colonial injustices regarding the Anglophone population in general and the Bakweri in particular, notably the large-scale expropriation of Bakweri lands by the Germans and the subsequent lack of land among the Bakweri people. As soon as they got wind of the ongoing British deliberations about the future of the ex-German plantations, they approached their chiefs for common action in defence of Bakweri interests. This eventually led to the formation of the Bakweri Land Committee (BCL).¹⁸ The BCL’s

attained full regional status in 1958. In a UN-organised plebiscite in 1961, the Southern Cameroons opted for reunification with Francophone Cameroon. See, for instance, Le Vine 1964, and Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997.

¹⁵ Eyongetah and Brain 1974: 103.

¹⁶ Epale 1985: 79-80.

¹⁷ Ebune 1992: 101-138.

¹⁸ Molua 1985.

original membership consisted of 48 men, including 25 chiefs. Members of the Buea chiefly family played a prominent role in the organisation. Paramount Chief G.M. Endeley was its president, his cousin, D.M.L. Endeley, was its secretary, and the latter's brother, E.M.L. Endeley, was one of the driving forces behind it.¹⁹ On 8 June 1946, Chief Endeley informed the Resident in Buea of the formation of the BCL. Its major objective, he stated, was 'to take charge of all the land in Victoria Division which virtually belongs to the natives'. It was his fervent wish that the committee would continue to exist 'as long as the Bakweri people live'.²⁰

Upon its formation, the BLC sent several petitions to the British administration and, since Britain had assumed responsibility for the territory, the so-called Southern Cameroons, under United Nations Trusteeship after the war, to the United Nations. On 24 August 1946 in a petition addressed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the BLC demanded that:

- the ex-enemy plantations be handed back to the people of the Southern Cameroons;
- part of the plantations originally belonging to the Bakweri people be handed over to the Bakweri administration; and
- the profits made on the plantations by the Custodian during the last five years be paid to the Native Administration concerned as compensation for the loss of land expropriated from the Bakweri by the German government.²¹

After considerable deliberations, however, the British Trusteeship Authority declined once again to surrender the former German plantation lands to their original owners. The British administration had little faith in the Bakweri peasantry's ability to raise agricultural output. They therefore advocated a continuation of plantation production in the Trust Territory, all the more so because substantial investments had already been made in, and considerable profits been derived from, this form of production by the ex-German planters. Nevertheless, it was more reluctant this time to hand over the plantations to foreign, private enterprise, being well aware that such a transfer would badly hurt the rising expectations of the Bakweri and would certainly lead to vehement opposition by the BLC. Instead, it announced in November 1946 that the former German plantation lands would be leased to a newly established statutory corporation, the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC). It hoped that the foundation of a public corporation, which would run the ex-German plantations for the benefit of the people of the territory, would reduce the expected Bakweri opposition.

¹⁹ Matute 1990: 125-128

²⁰ See letter of Chief G.M. Endeley to the Resident in charge, Buea, dated 8 June 1946, ref. no. BLC/2/1, in: BNA, file Qf/e (1946)1, Bakweri Land Committee.

²¹ Petition of the Bakweri Land Committee to the Right Honourable S.A. Creech Jones MP, Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated 24 August 1946, in: BNA, file Qf/e (1946)1, Bakweri Land Committee.

The proposed public corporation, the CDC, eventually came about with the passage of two ordinances during a special session of the Nigerian Legislative Council from 9-12 December 1946. The first ordinance, the Ex-Enemy Lands (Cameroons) Ordinance no. 38 (1946), provided for the acquisition of the ex-German plantation lands which had been vested in the Custodian of Enemy Property for the duration of World War II. Under the terms of this ordinance, the Governor of Nigeria, upon acquisition of the lands, was to declare them 'native lands' and to hold them in trust for the common benefit of all the inhabitants of the territory. This final acknowledgement by the British administration that the ex-German plantation lands were Bakweri property was subsequently endorsed in a special resolution on Bakweri lands adopted at the Sixth Meeting of the United Nations Trusteeship Council in March 1950. The second ordinance, the Cameroons Development Corporation Ordinance no. 39 (1946), provided for the foundation of the proposed corporation, the CDC. All the lands acquired by the governor under the first ordinance would be leased to this corporation, whose main objective was to develop and manage the lands in the interests of the people of the trust territory.

Following the passing of these two ordinances, the Governor of Nigeria immediately bought the plantation lands from the Custodian of Enemy Property for a sum of £850,000 and leased them to the newly established corporation for a period of sixty years, renewable for an equivalent term at the corporation's discretion.²² The CDC, in turn, was supposed to pay monthly ground rents to the treasury but they were never transmitted to the Bakweri.

Although the first ordinance recognised Bakweri title to the CDC lands, the Bakweri Land Committee was not satisfied. It complained bitterly that it was not even treated with the courtesy of being informed of what the government intended to do with these lands. It had lodged several petitions in 1946 and continued to demand the return of these lands to the Bakweri people.

Unwilling to give up the struggle, the BLC decided to send a representative to the United Nations which had granted it a hearing after the receipt of its petition. E.M.L. Endeley was chosen to present its case. This move, however, was hindered by the British administration: while it had given the impression of financing Endeley's trip to New York, it actually paid only his passage to Lagos, thus forcing Endeley to return to Cameroon.²³

In reaction to the ongoing Bakweri protest, the British administration asked Mr W.M. Bridges, a senior district officer in the Southern Cameroons who was well acquainted with Bakweri society,²⁴ to carry out an investigation into Bakweri land complaints and to recommend appropriate solutions. Bridges set off his investigation

²² Konings 1993a: 39.

²³ Epale 1985: 153.

²⁴ Mr Bridges had served as a political officer in the area for a considerable period of time and had even submitted a detailed intelligence report on the Bakweri. See BNA, file Ag 10, Intelligence Report on Bakweri, Victoria Division, Cameroon Province, by Mr W.M. Bridges, D.C.

in 1948 on the assumption that 15 acres (6 hectares) of land would be more than adequate for each Bakweri household. He eventually concluded that a surrender of 25,000 acres of CDC land would satisfy Bakweri land requirements. He proposed that the land be used for the cultivation of food crops on a controlled tenancy basis and that the CDC should provide technical advice, social welfare services, and market facilities for approved crops.²⁵ His report was presented **by the British administration to a visiting UN mission with a view to countering the points and arguments advanced by the BLC, which continued stressing that the Bakweri were not asking for an increase in land ownership but for a return of all their lands.**

Until the departure of the British from the Trust Territory in 1961, neither the Bakweri land problem nor the settlement scheme proposed by the government had been resolved. The 31 December 1959 agreements that legalised the secession of the Southern Cameroons from the newly independent Republic of Nigeria, demanded that the CDC surrender to the government of Southern Cameroons all its rights, titles and interests under the previous leases and certificates of occupancy. The government of the Southern Cameroons, in turn, agreed to lease all those lands to the CDC for a period of ninety-nine years with effect from 1 January 1960. At the end of that period the CDC lands were to be transferred to the legitimate owners, the Bakweri.

After the reunification of the British and French Cameroons in 1961, the Bakweri land problem disappeared from the national agenda as the new political leaders increasingly turned their backs on 'regional and parochial issues' in their pursuit of national unity.²⁶ Moreover, the post-colonial state became more interested in the expansion of the agro-industrial sector for the necessary modernisation and increase of agricultural production than in a return of plantation lands to their legitimate owners.²⁷ In addition, post-colonial governments adopted, and even extended, the policy of the British Trusteeship Authority of co-opting some leading members of the Bakweri 'traditional' and 'modern' elites onto the Board of Directors and management of the CDC.

On 6 July 1974 the government promulgated law no. 74-1 that laid down the rules for governing land tenure in Cameroon.²⁸ This law, which made a distinction between private and national lands, would later serve as the basis for rejecting prior Bakweri claims to the CDC lands on the grounds that these lands were national lands – a clear violation of the UN-sanctioned 1946 ordinances creating the CDC and the 1959 agreements between the CDC and the government of the Southern Cameroons.²⁹

²⁵ Konings 1993b: 159.

²⁶ Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: **210**.

²⁷ Konings 1993a: 17-34.

²⁸ Fisiy 1992: **34-38**.

²⁹ According to the Bakweri, the 1974 Land Law (Ordinance no. 74-1 of 6 July 1974 to establish rules governing land tenure) does in fact ground Bakweri rights in positive law in its classification of all land tenured into the "Grund Buch" (the case with all CDC lands) as 'land...subject to the right of private property'. See BLCC, Open Letter to all Prospective Buyers of CDC Plantations, Buea, 12 October

This bold refutation of previous ordinances and agreements remained largely unchallenged because by this time the autocratic rule of President Ahmadou Ahidjo had silenced all organisations that were not under government control. The BLC died a natural death, although occasional memoranda were still presented to the government by its most dedicated members.

To the Bakweri however, the land issue continued to be a matter of priority, especially since the government made full use of the powers it had been granted by the 1974 land law to confiscate increasing amounts of native land in the name of 'the imperative interest and defence of the economic policies of the nation'.³⁰ Exactly 20 years later, when it announced the privatisation of the CDC, the government would learn that the BLC, like the legendary phoenix, was merely lying in wait before rising again at the appropriate moment.

Bakweri chiefs and the privatisation of the CDC

Privatisation has been put forward by international donors as a magic formula capable of curing the ailing Cameroonian economy. At the start of the economic crisis in the mid 1980s,³¹ there were some 175 public enterprises in the country, employing around 80,000 people.³² These enterprises served both economic and political ends. Besides being avenues to economic modernisation and growth, they allowed the government to engage in prebendal politics and to cement a 'hegemonic alliance', incorporating the country's emerging elite into the state apparatus.³³ A 'patrimonial logic' existed in many African post-colonial states,³⁴ but was particularly strong in Cameroon, a country with stark ethnic and regional cleavages.³⁵ It is beyond doubt that this logic contributed to the poor performance of most public and para-public enterprises.³⁶ Prior to the economic crisis, the Cameroonian government was subsidising parastatal-sector losses to the tune of some 150 billion CFA francs a year. Though most of the oil revenues were initially kept in secret bank accounts abroad, their primary function soon became the covering of parastatal deficits.

From the very start of the economic crisis, the World Bank made parastatal reform the cornerstone of its lending conditions. Given the growing budgetary

2000. For the 1974 land law, see Republic of Cameroon, 1981, *Land Tenure and State Lands*, Yaoundé: Imprimerie Nationale.

³⁰ Republic of Cameroon, 1981, *Land Tenure and State Lands*, Yaoundé: Imprimerie Nationale, p. 81.

³¹ For the causes and effects of this crisis, see Konings 1996a: 252-255.

³² Tedga 1990: 125-144, van de Walle 1994: 152.

³³ Bayart 1979: 52-53.

³⁴ Chabal & Daloz 1999: 3-16.

³⁵ Nyamnjoh 1999: 105-111, Gabriel 1999: 175-180.

³⁶ Tedga 1990: 162-163, van de Walle 1994: 155-156.

constraints, the Biya government officially agreed to cooperate. In May 1987 it appointed a national commission to recommend reform measures for the parastatal sector. One year later the commission reported back to the president, having determined which institutions should be liquidated, sold to the private sector or revived. However, few public enterprises were effectively privatised, only six between 1988 and 1994.³⁷ Van de Walle offered the following reasons for the slow pace of privatisation:³⁸

‘Although the government is proceeding with care on the politically sensitive issue of lay-offs, this does not appear to be the major constraint on rapid implementation of the reform agenda. Rather, intra-elite competition and haggling over the rents freed up by privatisation, along with the lack of technical expertise within the state, served to slow down the process of institutional reform.’

Dissatisfied with the government’s performance, the World Bank threatened in early 1994 to suspend a of US\$ 75 million credit to Cameroon if the government did not accelerate the process of privatisation. Subsequently, on 15 July of that year, the government announced the privatisation of 15 large public enterprises. Among these were five agro-industrial parastatals, including the CDC. For various reasons (**Konings 1996c: 211-212**), the announced privatisation of the CDC incited commotion in the country, particularly in the Anglophone region.

The CDC is the most important agro-industrial parastatal in the country. It is one of the few agro-industrial enterprises in the world that specialises in a variety of crops – the four major ones being rubber, palm oil, tea and bananas. With the assistance of several international financial institutions, it expanded its cultivation area from 20,000 to 42,000 hectares after independence and reunification.³⁹ It is the second largest employer in Cameroon, surpassed only by the government, and formerly employed 25,000 workers. At present, it still employs about 12,500 permanent workers and a few thousand seasonal and casual workers. The CDC, in fact, has been of great significance to development in the Anglophone territory. Students of plantation agriculture, such as Beckford,⁴⁰ have blamed the persistent poverty and underdevelopment of Third World economies on this mode of production. In the case of the CDC, however, this thesis finds little support. The corporation has been a major instrument of modernisation and is largely credited with whatever socio-economic development has occurred in Anglophone Cameroon. It has created employment for many men and women, has constructed numerous roads, supplied water and electricity, built and staffed schools, awarded a substantial number of scholarships, provided medical care for a large proportion of the local population,

³⁷ Mama 1996: 175.

³⁸ 1994: 162.

³⁹ Konings 1993a: 40-48.

⁴⁰ Beckford 1972: 215.

and has stimulated the supply of goods and services to itself and its workers. It has played a key role in the commercialisation and modernisation of peasant production, as an intermediary in marketing the Bakweri peasantry banana production in the 1950s and in the establishment of regional smallholders' oil palm and rubber schemes since the early 1960s.⁴¹ Of late, it has handed over a substantial part of its oil palm plantations to local contractors. As a result, the CDC has been called the economic lifeline of Anglophone Cameroon.

Government announcement of the privatisation of this important agro-industrial enterprise was all the more shocking to the Anglophone population since the CDC:

- had been one of the rare public enterprises in Cameroon to perform relatively well until the economic crisis;
- had been able to survive this crisis mainly because the management and workers had agreed to adopt a series of drastic adjustment measures aimed at cost reduction and productivity increase; and
- was on the way to economic recovery following the 50 per cent devaluation of the CFA franc in early 1994.⁴²

That the government singled out the CDC for privatisation irrespective of its bright prospects for recovery and its immense contribution to regional development was regarded by the Anglophone community as provocation and can only be fully grasped with reference to what has come to be called the 'Anglophone problem'.⁴³ The essence of this problem is that the Anglophone minority feels 'marginalised, exploited and assimilated' by the Francophone-dominated state and even by the Francophone population as a whole in the aftermath of reunification in 1961. It was not until the political liberalisation process of the early 1990s that the Anglophones started openly organising in various associations and pressure groups to protest against their alleged subordinate position and to put forward claims for self-determination and autonomy. These newly created Anglophone movements were inclined to perceive the privatisation of the CDC as a further step in the dismantling of the Anglophone colonial legacy by the Francophone-dominated state. They were therefore determined to form a united front to maintain control over the CDC, the pride and economic lifeline of Anglophone Cameroon, and forestall its sale to Francophone or French interests. Several protest marches were organised in the region, demanding the government revoke its decision forthwith.⁴⁴

Unsurprisingly, the most vehement opposition in Anglophone Cameroon came from the landowners. As soon as the privatisation of the CDC was announced, the

⁴¹ Ardener 1958: **10-25**, Konings 1993b: **221-236**.

⁴² Konings 1995: **533-534**. [pp]

⁴³ Konings 1996b: **25**, Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: **207**.

⁴⁴ Konings 1996c: **212**.

Bakweri chiefs and elite mobilised to revive the moribund BLC and to adopt a common position with regard to the privatisation, which had been planned without the slightest consideration of the Bakweri land problem. Soon thereafter the BLC was renamed the Bakweri Land Claim Committee (BLCC).

On 23 July 1994, the Bakweri chiefs and elite met in Buea under the chairmanship of Paramount Chief S.M.L. Endeley of Buea and Paramount Chief F. Bille Manga Williams of Victoria (Limbe) to discuss the implications of the government decision. They agreed to strongly oppose the announced privatisation on the grounds that the CDC lands were Bakweri property and could thus not be sold to non-natives without Bakweri consent. After lengthy and passionate discussions, an *ad-hoc* committee was elected by acclamation to assist the BLCC in preparing a detailed memorandum on the Bakweri position to be presented to the government and all other interested parties.⁴⁵

On 4 August 1994, over 500 Bakweri chiefs, notables and elite gathered at the Buea Youth Cultural and Animation Center and approved the memorandum drawn up by the *ad hoc* committee. In the memorandum, the Bakweri agreed that, if privatisation had to take place at all, it should be on the basis of 'a creative and enlightened partnership between the owners of the land on which the corporation operates and the providers of finance capital without which it would not be possible to run a modern, technologically sophisticated agro-industrial complex like the CDC'.⁴⁶ They insisted that any privatisation plan should be based on 'terms which recognise the ownership of land as a distinct variable which, together with the cash, make plantation agriculture possible; consequently, landowners deserve ground rent compensation in much the same way as the CDC was liable to pay ground rents for the use of the land'.⁴⁷ The memorandum was later presented to the Provincial Governor for onward transmission to President Biya. At the end of this historic meeting, the eminent Bakweri scholar, Professor Ndiva Kofele-Kale, secretary of the *ad hoc* committee, was designated counsel for the Bakweri people with instructions to present their case before the United Nations and other international forums.

The Bakweri case was strongly supported by Anglophone movements. A powerfully worded petition to the head of state, co-signed by the Anglophone movements and the Bakweri chiefs, reiterated that the Bakweri had never relinquished ownership of the CDC lands and that the corporation could not be sold without Bakweri consent. It pointed out that the Bakweri had never been paid royalties for the use of their lands since the creation of the CDC in 1946. It also stressed that the Bakweri were not inclined to renew the 60-year CDC lease, reclaiming the CDC lands after its expiry in 2007.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See *Fako International*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1995), pp. 14-16.

⁴⁶ Memorandum of the Bakweri People on the Presidential Decree to Privatisise or Sell the Cameroon Development Corporation, Buea, 27 July 1994.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Konings 1996c: 213.

Concerned with the mounting anger in the Anglophone region in general and the Bakweri community in particular, the Biya government decided to send a delegation of high-ranking Anglophone allies to the South West Province to appease the population. The delegation was led by Chief Ephraim Inoni, Deputy Secretary General at the Presidency and Chief of Bakingili, a village located on the territory of a Bakweri subgroup. The delegation met a number of Bakweri representatives in Buea to discuss the land problem. Though speaking on behalf of the government, Chief Inoni appealed to the Bakweri representatives not to forget that he was one of them. He acknowledged that there should have been prior contact between the government and the Bakweri before the announcement of the corporation's privatisation but he denied the widespread rumours in Anglophone Cameroon that the French and some high-ranking Francophones had masterminded the whole operation. While admitting that the financial situation of the corporation had improved after the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc, he argued that privatisation would enable the corporation to obtain new capital for necessary investments in production and processing. The Bakweri Paramount Chief, S.M.L. Endeley,⁴⁹ who had always been a staunch supporter of the regime until the Bakweri land issue arose, then took the floor. Amid thunderous applause he declared that he himself, as the custodian of the ancestral lands, and the Bakweri population as a whole were against the privatisation of the CDC. He requested Chief Inoni to report this to President Biya:

'We are in a country where we like to cheat ourselves, where government hands decisions through dictatorship (...) We say no, no (to privatisation), go and tell Mr Biya that he cannot afford to go down in history as the man who sold the CDC.'⁵⁰

After the government delegation returned to Yaoundé, the government did not undertake any further action with regard to the CDC privatisation. This apparent victory for Anglophone resistance turned out to be short-lived however. In 1997 rumours of an imminent privatisation of the CDC became more and more persistent. In compliance with the accord that had been agreed with the IMF and the World Bank within the framework of the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) in 1997, the privatisation of the CDC was expected to be launched soon. That the government, under severe pressure from the Bretton Woods institutions, was preparing the ground for the privatisation of the CDC could be concluded from the speeches and interviews of leading government and CDC officials at the opening ceremony of the corporation's golden-jubilee celebration in Bota-Victoria on 1 December 1997. In his speech on that occasion, the newly appointed Prime Minister

⁴⁹ Chief S.M.L. Endeley is a brother of Dr. E.M.L. Endeley and Mr D.M.L. Endeley who were leading figures in the BLC. He is a retired Chief Justice who acted, among others, as chairman of the ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), in Fako Division and chairman of the CDC before being appointed Paramount Chief of Buea in 1992. For his career, see, **for instance**, Gwellem, J.F., 1985, *Cameroon Year Book 1985/86*, Limbe: Gwellem Publications, pp. 113-114.

⁵⁰ Cited in *Fako International*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1995), p. 16.

Peter Mafany Musonge, a Bakwerian himself who had been the CDC's general manager from 1988 to 1997, said:

'Since the traditional international funding agencies no longer finance corporations like CDC, the establishment should be prepared (...) to foster new business relationships to raise new money while the state plays the role of facilitator (...). Traditional rulers within CDC's areas of operation, workers and other Cameroonians must understand perfectly well and make sure that peace reigns for conclusive investment.'⁵¹

The CDC's chairman, Mr N.N. Mbile, added that 'privatisation should not scare us as we are confident that government will protect the interests of the Cameroonian people, the original landowners, the workers, new investors and the state itself'. Moreover, the CDC deputy general manager, Mr Richard Grey, then revealed that the highly reputable international consultancy firm Coopers and Lybrand had already been selected by the World Bank and the government to carry out a study into the privatisation of the CDC that would be completed by 30 June 1998. The Bakweri chiefs who attended the ceremony, notably Chief S.M.L. Endeley of Buea, were frustrated by these statements and revelations and condemned any future privatisation.⁵²

The CDC was finally put up for sale in January 1999. Few protests were heard from the now almost dormant Anglophone movements.⁵³ Their leadership's only activity was to make a strongly worded statement on 10 April 1999 warning prospective CDC buyers to desist from investing in the purchase of the CDC. Bakweri chiefs and elite, however, quickly rallied again. In a meeting with southwestern members of parliament and government, they denounced the privatisation of the CDC saying that the latter's acceptance of the sale of the CDC 'was tantamount to a betrayal of their people'.⁵⁴ The BLCC officially wrote to President Biya on behalf of the Bakweri people on 3 March 1999 requesting that it be included in the privatisation negotiations and that compensation be paid for the use of Bakweri lands. When rumours spread that various multinational companies like Fruitiers/Dole, Chiquita and Del Monte were already negotiating with individual government officials about the purchase of the whole or parts of the CDC at throwaway prices, the Bakweri in the diaspora once again addressed the head of state on 1 October 1999 in support of the BLCC position.⁵⁵

Since no reply was forthcoming from the presidency, the BCLL, strongly supported by regional organisations of chiefs and elite like the South West Chiefs'

⁵¹ *The Post*, 5 December 1997, pp. 1-2.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000: **29-30**.

⁵⁴ Isaha'a Boh, Cameroon, Bulletin no. 405.

⁵⁵ See letter from the Bakweri around the World to President Paul Biya of Cameroon, 1 October 1999.

Conference (SWECC) and the South West Elite Association (SWELA),⁵⁶ decided to raise national and international awareness by starting a high-profile public relations campaign through the writing of open letters, petitions and newspaper articles and the use of the Internet. For this purpose, the BLCC was reconstituted and an interim bureau of the BLCC was established in the United States.

During a BLCC general assembly meeting on 15 April 2000 it was decided that only chiefs could occupy the positions of president and vice-president (the four vice-presidents representing each of the subdivisions in the Fako Division of the South West Province). Other traditional rulers would constitute the Chiefs' Advisory Council of the Board of Trustees. The 'modern' elite would occupy positions in the secretariat and act as technical advisors. This division of labour was meant to demonstrate that the chiefs were the leaders of the Bakweri communities and best capable of mobilising and sensitising their subjects, while the 'modern' elite had the bureaucratic and technical capabilities to operate the secretariat and provide the organisation with any necessary advice.

In May 2000, the BLCC interim bureau was set up in the United States to establish an effective, active and visible BLCC presence within the Bakweri and Cameroonian diaspora community and to open permanent lines of communication with all potential buyers of the CDC, donor agencies, NGOs and foreign governments directly or indirectly involved in the sale of the CDC. The BLCC-USA became very vocal, creating its own website on the Internet⁵⁷. Its first action was to send a memorandum to the managing director of the IMF, Mr Horst Köhler, on 16 June 2000. In this memorandum, it warned him about the growing unrest among the Bakweri and threatened legal action should the privatisation of the CDC be pursued without BLCC involvement:

'As the current impasse in Zimbabwe and Kenya demonstrates, land expropriated from African natives by European colonialists a century ago is the source of much contemporary unrest and instability. All Cameroonians of goodwill bear witness that the Bakweri people have over the years opted for a peaceful resolution of the CDC Bakweri land problem. However, should the privatisation of the CDC go ahead without the input of the Bakweri on whose land most of the corporation's agro-industrial activities are located, we preserve the right to seek legal redress against the government of the Republic of Cameroon, the IMF, the World Bank as well as all lessees who derive title to the land by whatever means, in any country of the world where such bodies are located'.⁵⁸

This was followed by massive pro-BLCC demonstrations in New York and Washington during the September 2000 United Nations Millennium Summit that was attended by a huge Cameroonian delegation led by President Paul Biya. As a result of

⁵⁶ For these organisations, see Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998: 328-330, and Eyoh 1998: 338-339.

⁵⁷ <http://www.bakwerilands.org>. Most of the documents quoted in this article can be found on this website.

⁵⁸ Letter from Dr. Lyombe Eko, Executive Director of BLCC-USA, to Mr Horst Köhler, Managing Director of the IMF, 16 June 2000.

these demonstrations and a flurry of other pro-BLCC activities on this occasion, the embarrassed Cameroonian delegation, along with leading donor agencies, were able to gauge the high levels of support for the BLCC within the entire Cameroonian diaspora community in the United States.

In a press release on 5 August 2000, the BLCC revealed that it was going to take its campaign for land restitution and compensation 'a notch higher' by seeking consultative status within the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).⁵⁹ It believed that the granting of consultative status would provide it with a global platform to proclaim its struggle for land rights, 'bringing it into contact with other NGOs which claim to represent the interests of indigenous groups from around the world as well as with sympathetic UN members who have championed the cause of dispossessed people on the floor of the General Assembly and at the numerous ECOSOC meetings over the years'.⁶⁰ Soon thereafter, on 21 August 2000, the Counsel of the BLCC, Professor Ndiva Kofele-Kale, was invited by the United Nations to make a representation on the Bakweri lands issue to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

Following the government's renewed call for tenders for the sale of the CDC in September 2000, the BLCC cautioned prospective buyers in an open letter by saying that:

'(...) it is our duty to advise you to think twice before you commit the resources of your shareholders in a venture that is still mired in controversy and whose promised financial and economic rewards may prove to be illusory in the long run.'⁶¹

During the late 1990s it had become increasingly evident that the BLCC was finding it hard to defend Bakweri interests at the national level. This had been particularly the case when in 1996, 'their own son', Peter Mafany Musonge, had been appointed as prime minister. Without doubt, one of the main reasons for his appointment to this position was that President Biya regarded him, being an ex-CDC general manager and a Bakweri, as the most suitable candidate to handle the delicate issue of CDC privatisation.

The appointment of Musonge had initially raised high expectations among the Bakweri. They were convinced that their son would pay particular attention to the land question and take Bakweri interests into consideration during the eventual sale of the CDC. Their expectations appeared to have had solid foundations because, in his former capacity as CDC general manager, Musonge had publicly declared during a radio interview in 1994 that any privatisation of the CDC should be 'not only

⁵⁹ Press Release no. blc/us/05/08/00, The BLCC to seek consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ BLCC, Open Letter to All Prospective Buyers of CDC Plantations, Buea, 12 October 2000.

economically effective but also socially equitable'.⁶² He expressed his belief that indigenous landowners, workers and investors would be directly involved in this endeavour. Once appointed prime minister however, he came under immense pressure from the IMF and his master, Paul Biya, to champion the economic advantages of CDC privatisation and to forget about the payment of any compensation to Bakweri landowners. Unable to convince his ethnic group to give up its claim to what could possibly amount to tens of billions of CFA francs after more than fifty years of CDC existence, Musonge was eventually reported to have resorted to intimidation by means of the Buea Subprefect and the Fako Prefect.

In March 2000, the Buea Subprefect, Mr Aboubakar Njikam, thus banned a BLCC general assembly meeting for which he had given his approval at an earlier stage. When he learnt that compensation was high on the agenda, the prime minister appears to have quickly ordered a halt to the meeting, but he failed to intimidate the committee that eventually met on 15 April 2000. In June 2000, the Fako Prefect, Jean-Robert Mengue Meka, accused it of being an illegal organisation and the committee was ordered to stop its activities. Two of the newly elected BLCC executives, Chief Peter Moky Efange (President) and Mola Njoh Litumbe (Secretary-General), responded by telling Mengue Meka that he was acting illegally himself by claiming that the BLCC, which was founded as early as 1946, was an unlawful association. The prefect was reminded that the BLCC was a duly incorporated organisation that had been registered in accordance with the laws of the country and had been received by the South West Governor in 1994 and could thus not now have its legality questioned.⁶³

As a result of the high profile BLCC publicity both at home and abroad, the prime minister could no longer ignore the committee and its demands. He invited it to a working session in his Yaoundé office and on 4 October 2000, the BLCC leadership met with Musonge, Chief Ephraim Inoni, the Bakweri Deputy General Secretary at the Presidency and a number of other government officials. During this meeting Musonge conceded that the issues of land ownership and the payment of ground rents were legitimate demands but urged that these demands be pursued separately from the issue of privatisation. He argued that a hostile environment was being created by the BLCC protest campaign which was scaring off potential investors.⁶⁴

The BLCC delegation agreed with the prime minister that privatisation would be successful only in a peaceful atmosphere but it pointed out that the Bakweri protest actions, such as the UN Millennium Summit demonstrations, stemmed from the lack

⁶² See *Cameroon Post*, 26 July-2 August 1994, pp. 12-13.

⁶³ BLCC, 'The BLCC refuses to stand down in the face of threats from Fako administrative authorities', Buea, 15 June 2000.

⁶⁴ Through such manoeuvres, Musonge succeeded, albeit temporarily, to divide the BLCC into two camps: on the one hand, a majority faction led by its president, Chief Efange, which stood its ground, and, on the other, a minority faction led by the Bakweri Paramount Chief, Sam Endeley, which was more sensitive to Musonge's arguments. The latter accused the new BLCC executive of being too 'radical' and opposed its ongoing Internet campaign on the CDC's privatisation compensation.

of government response to their pleas and representations. It stressed that Bakweri protest actions would inevitably continue until ‘justice, equity, and legitimate rights of the Bakweri were met’. The delegation then reiterated the main BLCC demands:

- that the government recognise that the lands occupied by the CDC were private property as defined by Part II of the 1974 Land Law and that the Bakweri were the legitimate owners of these lands;
- that the Bakweri be fully involved in the CDC privatisation negotiations to ensure that their interests were effectively protected;
- that ground rents be paid to a Bakweri land trust fund; and
- that the Bakweri, acting jointly or individually be allocated a specific percentage of shares in each of the privatised sectors of the corporation.⁶⁵

While the BLCC was trying to embark on a dialogue with local and national authorities, it continued to caution potential CDC buyers and the Bretton Woods institutions against any privatisation of the corporation without the involvement of the landowners. The latter, in turn, pressurised the Cameroonian government to settle the privatisation imbroglio. In the wake of the reluctance of foreign companies to invest in the CDC primarily caused by the unresolved land issue, the government was compelled to reissue the CDC bid for tenders first on 1 January 2001 and then again on 1 January 2002.

At the moment the Cameroonian government appears to have accepted a privatisation construction that closely resembles the original proposal launched by Musonge when he was still CDC general manager, involving the landowners, the workers and the investors. It intends to sell a majority stake in each CDC sector (rubber, oil palm, tea and bananas) to foreign companies. However, CDC lands will not be sold but offered on a long-lease basis to soothe the Bakweri landowners who fear loss of their lands in the process. Other shares will be sold to the workers and Cameroonian interests, with the state maintaining a 10 per cent stake in each sector.⁶⁶

Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted the powerful resistance of Bakweri chiefs to the Cameroonian government announcement of the privatisation of the CDC. It would be wrong to conclude that Bakweri chiefs are against privatisation *per se*. In fact, in their 1994 petition to the head of state they clearly stated that:

⁶⁵ Report of the Meeting of Prime Minister Mafany Musonge with BLCC Delegation, Yaoundé, 4 October 2000.

⁶⁶ See Privatisation of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC): International Call for Tenders, Yaoundé: Ministry of Economy and Finance, 1 January 2001.

‘In principle, the Bakweri and other Anglophones have no quarrel with the idea of privatisation or sale of companies in which government enjoys majority control since we fully understand the logic behind such an exercise, i.e. the relocation of the management of inefficiently managed parastatals in more efficient hands. We recognise that government, as the controlling shareholder in these companies, has an obligation to the majority shareholders and the Cameroonian taxpayer to ensure that their tax revenues are not wasted in failing parastatals’.

I have argued that the strong opposition **of Bakweri chiefs** to the privatisation of the CDC derived from the following factors:

- **They regarded the CDC privatisation as a provocation to the Anglophone community.** They pointed out that the CDC had the reputation of being one of the rare parastatals in Cameroon that **has both** played a significant role in regional development and **performed relatively well until the economic crisis.**
- **They** claimed ownership of the CDC lands. Since the 1940s they have been engaged in a fierce and protracted struggle for the retrieval of the Bakweri lands that were expropriated by the Germans for plantation agriculture. They therefore bitterly complained that they, as the custodians of the Bakweri lands, were never consulted prior to the announcement of the corporation’s privatisation and they demanded compensation for any sale or lease of CDC lands to multinational companies.

The oppositional role of Bakweri chiefs to the establishment and privatisation of the CDC has important implications for current debates on their position in the local society and in the national arena. Geschiere has pointed out two reasons for the integration of chieftaincy,⁶⁷ which was more or less a colonial creation, into Bakweri society: chieftaincy was strengthened during British indirect rule and, even more significantly, it became a potential rallying point against the ‘strangers’ who invaded the Bakweri territory in large numbers, attracted by the plantation economy created by the Germans. My study suggests that the persistent struggle of the Bakweri chiefs since the 1940s for justice with regard to the expropriated Bakweri lands may have been an even more important factor for rooting chieftaincy in local society. While chiefs in Anglophone Cameroon have been officially transformed into ‘auxiliaries’ of the state in the aftermath of independence and reunification and most chiefs maintain close links with the ruling party,⁶⁸ my case study proves that Bakweri chiefs cannot be characterised as mere puppets of the regime.⁶⁹ As in other parts of

⁶⁷ 1993: 165-166

⁶⁸ Geschiere 1993: **166-169**, Fisiy 1995: **57-59**.

⁶⁹ Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1996: **39**.

Africa,⁷⁰ large-scale state expropriation of the local community's land has been a permanent source of conflict between the state and Bakweri chiefs.

In their long-standing struggle to retrieve ancestral lands and in vehement opposition to the current privatisation of the CDC, the Bakweri chiefs have been continuously assisted by the whole Bakweri elite at home and in the diaspora, irrespective of their political affiliation. This elite has placed its bureaucratic and technical competence at the disposal of the BLCC, the legitimate representative of the Bakweri people in seeking the restoration of their ancestral land rights. It makes use of modern communication lines, including the Internet, to caution potential investors and the Bretton Woods institutions against any privatisation without Bakweri consent and compensation. While this has had the effect of scaring off foreign capital, the government has been unable to control this form of 'modern' resistance.

The Bakweri chiefs have also been supported by the newly created Anglophone associations that are inclined to perceive the Bakweri land issue as part of their struggle to redress the marginalisation and subordination of their region within the Francophone-dominated state.

The combined force of Bakweri and Anglophone 'traditional' and 'modern' elites has compelled the government to repeatedly postpone the actual privatisation of the CDC and to take Bakweri interests into consideration in a new privatisation construction.

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⁷⁰ Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1998: 80-87.

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