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## **The politics of neoliberal reforms in Africa: State and civil society in Cameroon**

Konings, P.J.J.

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# The Politics of Neoliberal Reforms in Africa







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The Politics of Neoliberal Reforms  
in Africa

State and Civil Society in Cameroon

Piet Konings





Langaa Research and Publishing Common Initiative Group  
PO Box 902 Mankon  
Bamenda  
North West Region  
Cameroon  
Phone +237 33 07 34 69 / 33 36 14 02  
LangaaGrp@gmail.com  
<http://www.langaa-rpcig.net>  
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African Studies Centre  
P.O. Box 9555  
2300 RB Leiden  
The Netherlands  
[asc@ascleiden.nl](mailto:asc@ascleiden.nl)  
<http://www.ascleiden.nl>

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## Abbreviations

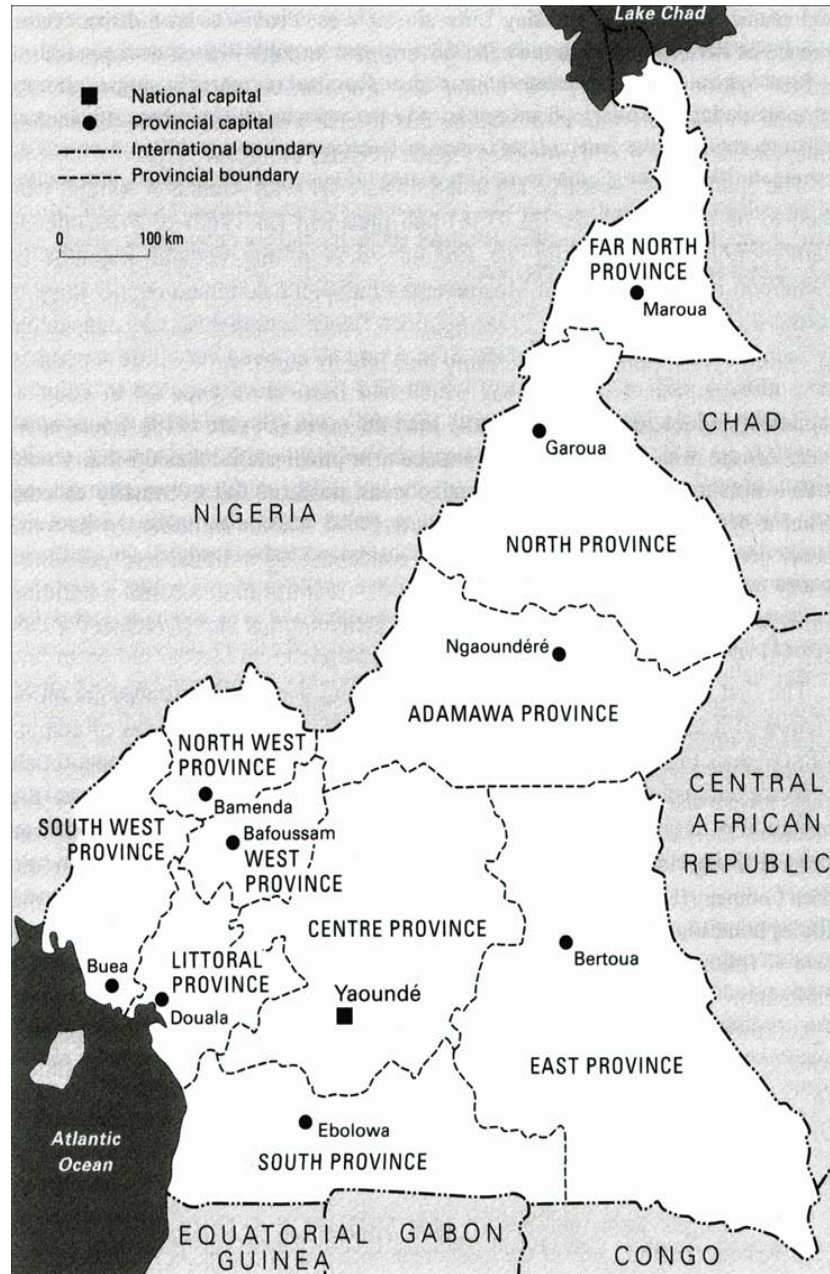
AAC	All Anglophone Conference
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
ADB	African Development Bank
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
AM	Ambazonian Movement
AU	African Union
BEAC	<i>Banque des États de l'Afrique Centrale</i>
BLC	Bakweri Land Committee
BLCC	Bakweri Land Claims Committee
CAM	Cameroon Anglophone Movement
CAPTAC	Confederation of Anglophone Parents-Teachers' Association of Cameroon
CCCE	<i>Caisse Centrale de Coopération Économique</i>
CDC	Cameroon Development Corporation
CFDT	<i>Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles</i>
CGTL	<i>Confédération Générale des Travailleurs-Liberté</i>
CNMC	Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission
CNU	Cameroon National Union
COMDEV	Commonwealth Development Corporation
CPDM	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement
CRBC	China Road and Bridge Corporation
CRTV	Cameroon Radio and Television
CSAC	<i>Confédération des Syndicats Autonomes du Cameroun</i>
CSTC	<i>Confédération Syndicale des Travailleurs du Cameroun</i>

CTE	Cameroon Tea Estates
CUPIAW	Cameroon Union of Plantations, Industrial and Agricultural Workers
DUAW/DM	Divisional Union of Agricultural Workers of Donga-Mantung
EAC	Estates and Agency Company Ltd
ECOSOC	(United Nations) Economic and Social Council
FAWU	Fako Agricultural Workers Union
FCFA	<i>Franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine</i>
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
FRSC	Federal Republic of Southern Cameroons
GCE	General Certificate of Education
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KNC	Kamerun National Congress
KNDP	Kamerun National Democratic Party
MDR	<i>Mouvement Démocratique de la République</i>
MFA	Multi-Fibre Arrangement
NEPAD	New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development
NFC	Non-Ferrous Metal Industries Corporation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OSTC	<i>Organisation Syndicale des Travailleurs du Cameroun</i>

PRESBY	President Biya's Youth
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SCAPO	Southern Cameroons People's Organisation
SCARM	Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement
SCNC	Southern Cameroons National Council
SCYL	Southern Cameroons Youth League
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SMIC	<i>Société Mobilière d'Investissement du Cameroun</i>
SNH	<i>Société Nationale des Hydrocarbures</i>
SNI	<i>Société Nationale d'Investissement</i>
SODECOTON	<i>Société de Développement du Coton</i>
SONEL	<i>Société Nationale d'Électricité</i>
SOTUC	<i>Société des Transports Urbains du Cameroun</i>
SWECC	South West Chiefs' Conference
SWELA	South West Elite Association
SYNES	<i>Syndicat des Enseignants du Supérieur</i>
TAC	Teachers' Association of Cameroon
UN	United Nations
UNDP	<i>Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès</i>
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation
UNTC	<i>Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Cameroun</i>
UPC	<i>Union des Populations du Cameroun</i>
USLC	<i>Union des Syndicats Libres du Cameroun</i>
WTO	World Trade Organisation



## Map of the Republic of Cameroon



# Contesting Neoliberal Reforms in Africa

## Introduction

Neoliberal globalisation has swept unevenly but steadily across the world, including Africa. Harrison (2010: 26-27) offers a definition of neoliberalism that appears appropriate to the African experience. In his view, the term encompasses a diverse set of interventions over a protracted period of time that are oriented towards the removal of political control of the economy, the free market and the rational individual. Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has been the dominant development agenda in Africa because of its championing by powerful external agencies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and western neoliberal states that have compelled African states to pursue this agenda (Cammack 2002; Harrison 2004). An important contextual factor in this period was the end of the Cold War, which left African governments with a deep and prolonged economic and political crisis and no obvious alternative source of financial or political support apart from western neoliberalism.

What is particularly striking in Africa is that neoliberal experiments there have displayed such remarkable diversity. This suggests that the global neoliberal agenda has had to negotiate complex internal dynamics despite the growing influence of international agencies (Oya 2007). Substantial differences can be observed not only in historical, economic and political trajectories in Africa but also, and maybe more importantly, in the degree of resistance internal actors have demonstrated to the neoliberal reforms imposed on them. This book focuses on Cameroon, which has had a complex economic and political history and is currently witnessing resistance to the neoliberal experiment by the authoritarian and neopatrimonial state and various civil-society groups.

This introductory chapter is divided into three sections. The first provides an overview of the impact of neoliberal policies on Africa, showing how they have largely failed to generate the socio-economic and political transformations they promised. The second section examines the various forms of resistance by the state and civil society in Africa to neoliberal reforms, while the third offers a concise description of the essays presented in this volume on the contestation of the neoliberal experiment in Cameroon.

### The impact of neoliberalism on Africa

The neoliberal agenda in Africa has deepened and broadened over the years. In the early years, neoliberalism had primarily an economic agenda that included a negative view of the state and the public sector. 'More market and less state' was the prime objective of the macro-economic stabilisation programmes that started in the late 1970s and the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) that were vigorously enhanced and extended in the 1980s (Fernández Jilberto & Mommen 1996; Demmers *et al.* 2004). SAPs were effected through the mechanism of economic conditionality and credit was only forthcoming if governments implemented 'correct' policies.

Although SAPs varied to some extent between countries, all were based on a desire to liberalise economies. Their initial goals were to remove price subsidies within internal markets, abolish quotas and allow exchange rates to flow freely. Beyond these core components, SAPs would also involve policy commitments to privatisation, tariff reduction, the removal of state marketing boards, a reduction in the money supply with a view to curbing inflation, the encouragement of foreign investment, a reduction in the government payroll, and the introduction of user charges for public services. Following considerable pressure on the Bretton Woods institutions to modify their painful neoliberal economic policies, transitory social improvement packages were attached to the core neoliberal reforms of the late 1980s to cushion the social costs of structural adjustment and give it a 'human face'. Subsequently, a series of *ad hoc* debt-reduction and rescheduling packages were introduced, leading to the more rigorous Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative that was inaugurated in 1996 and enhanced in 1999. The HIPC

scheme was premised on demonstrated commitment (if not progress) under SAP (with a minimum of three years of satisfactory adherence to an IMF structural reform programme) with the incentive of attaining a debt write-down to a 'sustainable' level of debt, which was expected to release money for renewed efforts in social expenditure, especially in primary healthcare and education. Also in 1999, and matching HIPC debt relief with a new credit framework, SAPs were replaced by the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and its related funding mechanisms within the World Bank and the IMF (Harrison 2010: 41-42).

It was not until the early 1990s that the neoliberal agenda became more openly political. Attributing the lack of success in the first decade of SAPs to domestic policy issues, in particular corrupt and inefficient governments in Africa, the World Bank introduced the concept of 'good governance' as a solution to the economic and political failures of African states (World Bank 1989, 1992, 1994a). In 1994, it gave its clearest generic definition of governance reform as the promotion of accountability and a more efficient public administration, the establishment of the rule of law and a capable judiciary, and transparency (World Bank 1994b). The discourse of good governance emerged at a time when the promotion of liberal democracy had already become an important element on the development agenda of bilateral donors. Accordingly, it has been argued that there are in fact two governance agendas: an overtly political agenda of bilateral donors calling for multiparty elections, and the World Bank's less political, managerial and administrative agenda that focuses on efficient and accountable government procedures (Abrahamsen 2000: 12; Rakner 2003: 21). However while emphasising different aspects of political liberalisation, a dual conditionality agenda emerged in the 1990s that was supported and promoted by multilateral and bilateral donors alike. International development aid in the 1990s therefore became conditional both on a set of macro-economic performance criteria and issues of governance and democracy. Neoliberalism in Africa has clearly evolved from a set of economic policies primarily concerned with macro-economic stability to be part of a far-reaching agenda of institutional, political and economic reforms aimed at transforming African states and societies into an 'ideal' type that conforms with neoliberal ideology and doctrine.

There is a vast literature criticising the neoliberal experience in Africa on numerous counts (Mkandawire & Olukoshi 1995; Mosley *et al.* 1995; Engberg-Pedersen *et al.* 1996; Mkandawire 2005; Ferguson 2006; Harrison 2010). Several Africanists have provided substantial evidence that the principal tenets of neoliberal economic reforms – a reduced role for the state and the dynamics of the competitive market – have largely failed to generate socio-economic recovery and a broader social well-being, especially between 1980 and 2000.<sup>1</sup> They point to stalled growth, low investment rates, increasing volatility in economic performance, growing aid dependency and a worsening income distribution (Oya 2007). The severe social impact of economic liberalisation is stressed in particular, and the reduction in state expenditure on health and education and the introduction of user fees have exacerbated social hardship. The social costs of SAPs were so pervasive that the various cushioning programmes (‘adjustment with a human face’), which were reluctantly designed by the Bretton Woods institutions to mitigate hardship, have failed to make a significant impact on the continent’s social decline and growing poverty (Olukoshi 2003).

The impact of neoliberal political reforms has proved disappointing as well (Abrahamsen 2000; Ferguson 2006; Harrison 2010). The political liberalisation of many African states, which was taken to mark an optimistic new beginning for the continent, did, however, change Africa’s political landscape in certain respects. Between 1990 and 2004, multiparty elections were held in 42 African countries (Rakner & Svasand 2005: 85) and there was also a wave of constitutional revisions that enshrined rights of expression and association. The so-called ‘second wave of change’ or ‘second liberalisation’ in Africa was underpinned by the establishment of democratic conditionalities by major bilateral donors. Nevertheless, it soon became evident that multiparty elections, where they have occurred, have done little to alter the fundamental dynamics of authoritarian and neopatrimonial regimes in Africa (Chabal & Daloz 1999). For one thing, many African elections have been little more than elaborately staged ceremonies that authoritarian leaders have used to ratify their rule. Rakner (2003) convincingly shows that, in the case of Zambia, the political practices associated with one-party rule, such as centralisation in the presidential office and extensive use of state patronage for political gain, were prevailing

within the formal structures of liberal democracy and a market economy. There are several reasons for the relative failure of neoliberal political reforms in Africa, including the power of incumbency, the acquisitive nature of opposition parties and the lukewarm commitment to democratisation by western states. The West's record of tying aid to democratisation is poor. In cases such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Uganda where civic rights and even party opposition have been denied for extended periods, western states are happy to smooth over difficult political issues regarding democracy in order to support regimes that can boast concerted attempts at neoliberal reform.

Some Africanists are even critical of attempts to introduce neoliberal political reforms in Africa. Nyamnjoh (2005a), for instance, argues that the western-derived institutional framework for multiparty democracy overlooks the social reality of African citizens' multiple identities and their cultural orientation to communal values. In the aftermath of political liberalisation, there has in fact been a resurgence of identity politics and overt tensions over belonging as ethnic and regional groups seek equity, better representation and greater access to national resources and opportunities (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000). Curiously, these developments are seen by neoliberal protagonists as one of the major factors responsible for the limited progress of liberal democracy.

One has to be extremely careful, however, when generalising about the impact of neoliberalism in Africa. There has been substantial diversity in the degrees of intensity, sequencing and manifestation of the neoliberal experiment on the continent. I myself have carried out extensive research in two African countries, Ghana and Cameroon, which are good examples of this diversity.

Ghana has earned the reputation among western donors of being one of the relative success stories in Africa regarding economic and political liberalisation. Several authors (cf. Rothchild 1991; Nugent 1995; Hutchful 2002; Boafo-Arthur 2007) have highlighted the spectacular adoption of a neoliberal economic reform package in 1983 by the radical populist military regime, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), albeit without totally abandoning its populist rhetoric. Following rigorous execution of its SAP, there was a relatively peaceful transition from the military



PNDC regime to the civilian National Democratic Congress (NDC) in 1992, with Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings being promoted from PNDC chairman to President of Ghana's Fourth Republic. Not only has the Fourth Republic outlasted earlier democratic interludes, it has even spawned the institutionalisation of some of the rules and procedures of the democratic game that are manifest, among others, in a significant degree of autonomy for the press and the judiciary, and the resurgence of civil society. In sharp contrast to Ghana, Cameroon has gained a reputation of being a disappointing 'adjuster' after the government of Paul Biya reluctantly agreed to implement an SAP in 1988/89. Several authors (cf. van de Walle 1993; Konings 1996a; Gabriel 1999) have argued that the neopatrimonial nature of the Cameroonian post-colonial state forms a clear obstacle to neoliberal economic and political reforms that threaten the ruling elite's control of state resources and rent-seeking activities. As a result, the process of economic and political liberalisation has been slow and erratic in Cameroon.

This diversity, which does not contradict the immanent aspects of neoliberalism, is the result of several factors. Firstly, there have been different economic and political trajectories in the African post-colony. Secondly, differences have emerged in the neoliberal policies being implemented in African countries and, thirdly, there have been different degrees of contestation of neoliberal reforms by the state elite and civil-society groups in Africa.

### State and civil society opposition

There is the risk that any discussion of the impact of the global neoliberal agenda on Africa tends to be deterministic. When there is mention of agency, the emphasis is likely to be on external actors, all the more so because they are viewed as having largely shaped the continent's neoliberal transformation. Of course, this position is justified to a certain extent. Nowhere else today are neoliberal agencies like the IMF and the World Bank as influential and determinant as they are in Africa (Oya 2007; Harrison 2010).

Despite the obvious role of external actors, that of the internal actors who have actually contributed to the erratic and uneven expansion of the neoliberal project in Africa should not be

overlooked. Neoliberal progress has proven to be complex, halting, contested and contradictory and social groups and organisations that feel threatened or marginalised by neoliberal reforms have been inclined to contest them in a variety of ways (Mkandawire & Olukoshi 1995; van de Walle 2001).

Analysis of Africa's political economy underscores the pivotal oppositional role of two social groups: the state elite and civil-society groups. Remarkably, these are precisely those that are supposed to play a significant role in the neoliberal 'good governance' agenda, and are seen by external agencies as vital channels in the implementation of neoliberal reforms. Which of these two groups has been the dominant obstacle to reform seems to be a continuous point of debate and the question is unlikely to be resolved because of the important variations between African states. Van de Walle (2001), for instance, claims that few pressures have been placed on the state in Africa by a weak civil society and that the major opposition to neoliberal reform has come from the state elite. Bond (2005), on the contrary, highlights the dominant role of 'organised civil society' movements in Africa in its struggle against neoliberal reform on the continent, perhaps influenced by the peculiar South African experience. What both scholars seem to have ignored is the spread of mass protest movements in Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the so-called 'bread' or 'IMF' riots. These often spontaneous mass demonstrations and strikes highlight the widespread resistance to economic reform and the growing discontent with regimes that had given in to the demands of external agencies. They also became a powerful tool in the democratisation process, especially when combined with the obvious role that external agencies were playing in using the carrot of aid flows to demand multiparty elections from recipient regimes.

Given the neopatrimonial nature of African states (Chabal & Daloz 1999), the external imposition of neoliberal reforms has posed a real challenge to the state elite. On the one hand, there was strong pressure to comply with the measures imposed, thereby considerably reducing their ability to nourish their clientelistic networks, which have been of great significance in bringing about national unity and political stability as well as obviating the need for coercion. On the other hand, the state elite had to fear the wrath of the population



that was suffering from economic austerity measures. One of the immediate threats to these rulers was the possibility that disaffected clients with networks of their own would tap popular discontent and defy the regime. Faced with this dilemma, many African rulers initially sought to evade, postpone or manipulate the reforms being pushed on them (van de Walle 2001; Rakner 2003; Ferguson 2006). As the crisis progressed, African leaders have increasingly sought to instrumentalise the reform process in order to derive political benefits from it. They have learnt to protect their own interests, while implementing sufficient reforms to maintain donor support.

Privatisation offers an interesting example of the state elite's initial oppositional role and its subsequent attempts to protect its interests during the reform process. In the 1980s, privatisation appeared to have been stalled by a combination of political opposition and the technical difficulties of arranging the sale of public enterprises. Governments were particularly worried about the implications of large retrenchments and the possible purchase of public enterprises by members of hostile ethnic groups or foreign business interests. However, privatisation transactions rapidly increased in a number of African countries in the 1990s. According to Bennell (1997: 1789), the period from 1980 to 1987 witnessed some 227 privatisation transactions, while 657 occurred between 1988 and 1995, and over 300 in 1994-1995 alone. Initial resistance to privatisation appears to have been overcome partly by the growing unwillingness of African rulers to bear the burden of subsidising loss-making parastatals, combined with the attraction of revenues generated by the selling off of public assets. An even more important factor is that transactions seem to have benefited members of the political class, usually by demanding substantial kickbacks from potential buyers or by significantly undervaluing assets and selling them off at fire-sale prices (Mkandawire 1994).

One of the most spectacular recent developments is that African rulers are increasingly calling upon another external actor, namely China, to assist them in their attempts at economic recovery and growth. What is particularly appealing to them is that China seems to provide an alternative to the painful neoliberal economic and political reforms espoused by the Bretton Woods institutions and western states: it offers assistance without any political or economic

conditionalities, with the exception of recognising the One-China principle. The impact of China's rapidly growing presence in Africa is still somewhat contradictory as it is affecting countries in different ways. The question still remains as to whether its direct and indirect consequences for African economies, states and societies will provide the foundations for a gradual departure from neoliberalism and the influence of neoliberal agencies (Alden 2007; Alden *et al.* 2008; Konings 2007b).

One of the major objectives of the neoliberal agenda is not only to roll back oppressive and overbearing states but also to liberate and empower civil society. Neoliberals seem to have reinvented the notion of civil society to serve their neoliberal doctrine, seeing it as the missing link between citizens and the state and the prime mover in the desired neoliberal economic and political reforms. In their view, participation by civil-society groups and associations in the design and implementation of neoliberal reforms would make African states more democratic, transparent and accountable, and ensure ownership, credibility and sustainability of the reform process (World Bank 2000; Harbeson *et al.* 1994; Kasfir 1998). I have recently criticised such neoliberal views in some detail (Konings 2009b, 2011) and so mention here only those shortcomings that are relevant to the discussion in this book.

Firstly, neoliberals tend to base their argumentation on western notions of civil society and have been inclined to define civil society in terms that are too narrow for the African context and to demand too much of it. Although there may be differences of opinion as to the exact definition of civil society, they usually agree that the core of civil society consists of modern, largely urban, middle-class professional associations, organisations of workers, women, students and churches, and non-governmental organisations with external links, such as groups advocating human rights and civil liberties. Such formulations tend to exclude not only unorganised protests and demands from civil society in Africa (cf. Monga 1995, 1996; Berman 1998; Mbembe 1992, 2001) but also much of associational life. Obviously, as Abrahamsen (2000: 53) notes, civil society in Africa and elsewhere is much more heterogeneous, including 'a diverse set of traditional, ethnic, professional, class, local, regional and national interests'. In sharp contrast to neoliberal

definitions, it is evident that ethno-regional associations may be of even greater significance in the African context than conventional civil-society organisations that are based on horizontal bonds and solidarities. This is due not only to the largely underdeveloped nature of most African economies, which has delayed the crystallisation of class differentiation and professional groups, but to an even larger extent to the power of ethno-regional identity in Africa. While there is ample evidence that political liberalisation has provided more space for ethno-regionalism and the politics of belonging, neoliberals nevertheless continue to exclude ethno-regional groups and associations from their definition of civil society, mainly because they are thought not to function according to neoliberal values, and to present an obstacle to liberal democracy.

Secondly, neoliberal scholars, like Putnam (1995) and Harbeson *et al.* (1994), seem to be convinced that civil society carries enormous democratic credentials. Two critical remarks are in order here. Given the importance of ethno-regional identities in Africa, civil-society organisations are more likely to become agents of ethnic and parochial interests than of liberal democracy. Furthermore, although the relatively few pro-democracy groups may have been instrumental in pioneering and achieving democratic governance, they have often been constrained by a host of limitations, particularly fragmentation and divisions, extreme dependence on donor funding and internal democratic deficit, even though they are struggling to overcome these flaws (Hearn 2001; Tar 2009).

Thirdly, neoliberals tend to define civil society strictly in terms of the autonomy of and confrontation with the state. This presupposes a sharp division between the constituents of civil society and the state, and forecloses an examination of the wide range of relations between state and civil society, varying from confrontation to cooperation, bargaining and mutual exchange. Several Africanists have stressed that there is usually no strict dichotomy between the state and civil society in Africa, but constant interpenetration and straddling instead. According to Chabal & Daloz (1999: 21-22), state and society are linked to sustain the vertical, intra-institutional and neopatrimonial networks that underpin politics in Africa. Through strategic offers of power, privilege and wealth to the leaders of the various interest groups, the state is often successful in stifling civil society.

Fourthly, neoliberals are convinced that the empowerment of civil society could constitute an important way of realising neoliberal reforms. They seem to exclude altogether the fact that such empowerment could have the opposite effect: civil-society groups and organisations may contest neoliberal reforms, particularly when prospects for improvement of their members' marginalised position in the short term appear bleak. This study focuses on ethno-regional associations and movements that are fighting for recognition and representation of their members' deeply entrenched feelings of communal injustices, as well as on the youth and workers and their organisations, two groups that have been among those most seriously affected by the economic crisis and economic liberalisation.

Since the newly created opposition parties have mostly failed to represent the ethno-regional interests of their members effectively during political liberalisation, ethno-regional associations have in some cases come to serve as the new intermediaries between the state and the electorate in Africa (cf. Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998). Their leaders are usually determined to represent and defend ethno-regional interests in economic and political reforms, and tend to strongly oppose any neoliberal reforms that are seen as harmful to their region. Moreover, they often strive for a larger degree of ethno-regional autonomy and self-determination. And some even champion secession.

Youth have emerged as a central concern in African Studies (cf. Honwana & de Boeck 2005; Abbink & van Kessel 2005) and scholars are extremely worried about them in the current period of neoliberal reforms, referring to a 'lost' or 'abandoned' generation (Cruise O'Brien 1996). Generally speaking however, young people in Africa have been inclined to resist marginalisation and have reacted either collectively by calling for political and economic change or individually by mapping out new pathways to achieving adulthood, finding an anchor in a context of uncertainty. Many participated in the struggle for democratisation, hoping that the removal of predatory and authoritarian regimes would alleviate their precarious existence. When such hopes failed to be realised to a large extent, they resorted to individual survival strategies, particularly in the informal sector, varying from those with a long history, such as petty trade and production, prostitution, crime and smuggling, to recent imaginative innovations like the use of motorbikes as taxis

and transnational migration (Fokwang 2003; Jua 2003a; Nyamnjoh 2005b; Konings 2006c). One of the most politically active groups among the youth has been university students who used to see themselves as the elite-in-waiting and their countries' future leaders. By the 1980s, however, their fortunes had declined on account of economic liberalisation. Their living and study conditions seriously deteriorated and they had difficulty finding employment after graduating. They have been at the forefront of the struggle for a democratic transition and they and their organisations have continued to resist their growing marginalisation.

Workers, too, have suffered hugely during the economic crisis and structural adjustment, as can be evidenced by the massive retrenchments, job insecurity, the introduction of flexible labour relations and falling real wages in the formal sector, the rising cost of living, and the painful withdrawal of public welfare provisions. In addition to individual survival strategies, workers have regularly relied on informal, collective and institutional modes of resistance against their increasing exploitation and subordination in the labour process (Konings 2011). Although there has been a large variation in trade-union performance in Africa (cf. Konings 2000; Rakner 2001; Beckman & Sachikonye 2001), Africanists tend to be pessimistic about the unions' representation of their members' interests during the neoliberal economic and political reforms. Some specialists in the field question this widespread pessimism by referring to the role of African trade unions in the democratic transition. Kraus (2007) has convincingly shown that trade unions in several African countries were important in launching, sustaining and sometimes even shaping processes of democratisation. Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that the role of African trade unions has become more problematic since the democratic transition when newly elected 'democratic' governments continued to implement harsh neoliberal reforms. Zambia is a remarkable example of the decline in union influence under a democratic regime that came to power thanks to mass mobilisation by the unions, and was even led by a former union leader (Rakner 2001, 2003).

Despite the transition to democracy, trade unions are likely to continue operating in a hostile political environment. The logic of structural adjustment is constraining their ability to defend their

members' rights, especially with mass retrenchments of labour in both the public and private sectors that are leading to a substantial decline in union membership and revenues. With government abolition of legislative provisions concerning job security and participatory and guaranteed collective bargaining rights and its outright oppression of any opposition to union actions, trade unions have been finding themselves with their backs to the wall (Thomas 1995). There is little they can do for their members in these circumstances. As a result, trade unions are facing a deep crisis of identity, having not yet devised any new strategies to deal with these dramatic changes. Members are losing faith in their leadership and are seeking new ways of defending their interests either individually or collectively.

### Organisation of the book

This book focuses on the neoliberal experiment in Cameroon. The country offers an interesting case study as the design and implementation of its neoliberal project has been influenced by the nation's complex historical socio-economic and political trajectories (Bayart 1979; Mbuagbaw *et al.* 1987; Ngoh 1996; Takougang & Krieger 1998).

Cameroon is one of Africa's most diverse countries with over 250 different ethnic identities, which has led to animated intra- and inter-group relations. In addition, it has one of the most complex colonial histories in Africa, having been colonised and/or administered by three European powers, namely Germany, France and Britain. There is general agreement that the roots of what came to be called the 'Anglophone problem' in Cameroon can be traced back to the partitioning of the erstwhile German Kamerun Protectorate into French and British mandates and trust territories after the First World War. Separate colonial state formation and the development of territorial differences in languages and cultural legacies laid the spatial and historical foundations for the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003).

Following independence and reunification in 1961, the predominant task of the post-colonial regime was to construct a nation-state and develop the country. Cameroon has proved to be one of the few post-colonial states whose leaders have never been

disposed by the military or civilian groups. Its leadership has instead demonstrated long-term stability with only two presidents – Ahmadou Ahidjo (1961-1982) and Paul Biya (1982 to the present) – having held power. Ironically, what seems to be perhaps the country's greatest asset, namely stable leadership, has been to the detriment of citizens' public expression and participation. Cameroon soon became a one-party state, and civil-society organisations were either suppressed or subordinated to the state.

Cameroon's post-colonial governments have been characterised by authoritarianism and neopatrimonialism, and these characteristics have remained major obstacles to neoliberal reform. Ahidjo's neopatrimonial policies led to a unique system of 'ethnic balancing' (Nkwi & Nyamnjoh 1997) in the sense that they succeeded in co-opting the various ethnic fractions of the Cameroonian elite into the regime. However, the political stability of these neopatrimonial policies was negatively affected when Ahidjo's successor, Paul Biya, began to undermine his predecessor's 'ethnic balance' policies by favouring members of his own ethnic group, the Beti, in political and economic positions of power and politicising ethnic identities.

Cameroon's political leaders have, however, had to accept that some of the country's historical legacies have contributed to its spectacular failure in national integration. There is a widespread feeling in Anglophone Cameroon that reunification with Francophone Cameroon in 1961 led to a growing marginalisation of the Anglophone minority in the post-colonial nation-state project, which has been controlled by the Francophone political elite and endangers Anglophone cultural heritage and identity. This has fuelled Anglophone protests and an increasing number of the Anglophone elite have started calling for the return to a federal state, or even outright secession (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003).

Cameroon's political leaders chose a variant of statism, which was initially called 'planned liberalism' (Ahidjo) and then 'communal liberalism' (Biya), as the country's development model. The state was assigned the leading role in strategic sectors of the economy while encouraging the development of a strong, mainly foreign-controlled private sector. In the absence of sufficient foreign investment, the state, through the *Société Nationale d'Investissement* (SNI), became the sole operator in much of the import-substituting industrial sector.



This development model, together with the country's impressive development potential due to its wealth of natural resources, particularly oil, a diversified production base and well-developed, albeit neglected, infrastructure and a favourable external environment, made Cameroon one of the few 'economic successes' in Africa until the mid-1980s, with an average real growth rate of 7 per cent annually.

Despite this success, Cameroon was essentially no different from other African countries. Its dependence on primary commodities, especially oil, left the country vulnerable to external shocks (Hugon 1968). Moreover, the *dirigiste* approach to economic development, which entailed state participation in key sectors of the economy, allowed Cameroonian governments to use public enterprises as instruments of patronage, which contributed to inefficient management, substantial financial losses and neglect of the private sector (Fonge 2004). The worldwide recession in the early 1980s, combined with a sharp drop in commodity prices on the world market, sent Cameroon's economy into a downward spiral and eventually forced the government to call on the Bretton Woods institutions in 1988/89 for assistance and the implementation of a SAP.

This volume consists of eleven essays that are based on articles I have written over the last two decades. All of them deal in one way or another with the impact the neoliberal agenda has had on Cameroon and the various forms of resistance there were against the neoliberal experiment by the state elite and the above-mentioned civil-society groups and associations.

Chapter 2 offers evidence that the Cameroonian state elite has tried to contest the neoliberal economic and political reforms imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions and western donors, which they perceive as a direct threat to the authoritarian and neopatrimonial foundations of the post-colonial state. The most important reasons for their relative success in this endeavour have been the regime's proficiency in the game of what van de Walle (2001) rightly came to call 'partial reform' and the apparently ambivalent and inconsistent attitude of external neoliberal agencies towards the regime, due in large part to the fact that they had become heavily dependent on the state elite for the implementation of their neoliberal policies. Consequently, there would seem to be more



continuity than change and the political practices associated with one-party rule, such as the centralisation of power in the presidential office and the extensive use of state patronage for political gain, continued to prevail within the formal structures of liberal democracy and the market economy.

Chapter 3 assesses the role of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), one of the largest and once most popular opposition parties in Africa, in Cameroon's democratic transition. Several explanations are offered as to why the SDF has failed to seize power and effect social-democratic change and why, even though it is based in Bamenda the capital of the North West Province of Anglophone Cameroon, it displays a lack of consensus on the Anglophone problem. The regime's repressive and divisive tactics, the Bretton Woods institutions' lack of recognition of the SDF out of fear that support for this initially militant party would upset cooperation with the ruling regime that was vital for the implementation of neoliberal reforms, the party leadership's deep divisions on future lines of action and strategy, and its growing involvement in prebendal politics are all discussed.

Chapter 4 analyses the effects of two key policy prescriptions of the neoliberal reform package, namely privatisation and global open markets, on relations between the Cameroonian state and private capital accumulation. It demonstrates that these relations have become marked by both change and continuity. On the one hand, privatisation and global open markets have enhanced the scope of the private sector, producing a desirable change in the balance of power between the state and the private sector. The privatisation of former state-owned enterprises has strengthened the role of foreign private capital in the most strategic sectors of the national economy, allegedly resulting in a recolonisation of the country. Global open markets have given rise to the emergence of transnational criminal networks as an avenue to rapid private capital accumulation, particularly among Cameroon's marginalised youth. On the other hand, privatisation and global open markets seem not to have altogether foreclosed the regime's neopatrimonial logic, despite international pressures for good governance. Well-known neopatrimonial practices such as patronage, lack of transparency and accountability, and a variety of rent-seeking activities continue

to influence the privatisation process. And, last but not least, Cameroonian state officials have often protected new, young criminal entrepreneurs for personal gains and have even tried to co-opt them into the ruling regime.

Chapter 5 examines the historical process leading to the emergence of secessionist movements in Anglophone Cameroon in the current liberalisation process. In sharp contrast with most other secessionist movements in Africa, the Anglophone leadership has been trying to achieve an independent Anglophone state through peaceful negotiation with the Francophone-dominated state rather than by using force. Indisputably, the Anglophone movements have booked certain successes in their struggle for international recognition and in their regional awareness and mobilisation campaigns. Nevertheless, the prospects of them achieving their ultimate aim, namely the creation of an independent state, remain bleak because international organisations are usually opposed to any secessionist claims, the Cameroonian government has persistently refused to enter into any negotiations and is instead engaged in divisive and repressive tactics, the Anglophone leadership is split into factions, and the Anglophone community itself is characterised by ethno-regional divisions and differences of opinion about policies and strategies for redressing the Anglophone problem and the nature of a future Anglophone state.

Chapter 6 explores the link between privatisation, good governance and identity conflicts. Clearly, the external neoliberal agencies tend to see privatisation as one of the cornerstones of their good-governance agenda because it tries to free state enterprises from politics, in particular from the post-colonial state's neopatrimonial logic that is largely responsible for their poor performance, to introduce transparency, accountability and the rule of law in policy-making and implementation as a precondition for the efficient operation of market forces, and to encourage private-sector development. However, privatisation can also trigger identity (ethno-regional) conflict. Several ethno-regional organisations in Anglophone Cameroon have vehemently opposed the privatisation of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), a huge agro-industrial parastatal that is of major importance to regional development. They consider its privatisation a renewed onslaught

by the Francophone-dominated post-colonial state on the cultural and economic heritage of Anglophones.

Chapter 7 analyses one of the most protracted border disputes in Africa: the conflict between Cameroon and Nigeria over sovereignty of the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula. The eventually peaceful settlement of this conflict was hailed by the international community as proof that African states have become more inclined to rely on the rule of law than on armed struggle to solve potentially explosive interstate boundary disputes. This chapter criticises this position in two respects. First, it provides ample evidence that the 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in favour of Cameroon faced serious implementation difficulties and that other mechanisms of conflict resolution were needed to arrive at a peaceful settlement between the two states. Second, it clearly shows that the 2002 ICJ verdict overlooked the stakes of other parties in the dispute. Two stakeholders, namely the Nigerian population and the Anglophone Cameroon secessionist movements, both claim ownership of the peninsula and thus create a persistent threat to sustainable peace in the area.

Chapter 8 discusses the impact of the growing Chinese presence in Africa in general, and in Cameroon in particular, in the era of neoliberal globalisation. Subsequently, it evaluates the ambivalent response of various African stakeholders to China's new engagement with the continent. On the one hand, the state elite has come to believe that China is offering Africa an attractive alternative to harsh neoliberal reforms, namely a straightforward business relationship between equals based on mutual interest and non-interference in the internal affairs of its allies. On the other hand, there are rising concerns among certain civil-society groups and organisations, notably business groups, labour unions and civic associations, concerning the apparently less positive aspects of China's presence in Africa.

Chapter 9 documents the protracted student strikes at the University of Yaoundé between 1990 and 1996. Political liberalisation provided space for students to organise and voice their multiple grievances about the poor living and study conditions on campus during the economic crisis and economic liberalisation, which blocked their pursuit of upward mobility. The unprecedented

degree of violence that accompanied these strikes could be attributed not only to the persistent refusal of the university authorities and the regime to enter into any meaningful form of dialogue with the students, but also to the internal divisions among the students along party and ethno-regional lines. The major lines of division were between two groups: the 'stranger' students organised in the Students' Parliament who were closely allied to the radical opposition, and the 'autochthonous' Beti students organised in the Committee for Self-Defence and the Beti militia that had close relations with the regime in power. In their fight with Parliament, the latter groups resorted to violent forms of ethnic exclusion to re-establish control over what they considered their university and to keep their regime in power.

Chapter 10 focuses on the youth of New Bell, one of the largest yet poorest immigrant quarters in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. They have devised two innovative activities to cope with the economic crisis and economic liberalisation: one, known as 'bendskin', is the use of motorbikes as taxis; the other, *pousse-pousse*, is the use of handcarts to transport merchandise. These activities not only secure a sustainable livelihood and feelings of self-esteem but also make a significant contribution to solving the neighbourhood's transportation problems. Bendskin drivers and *pousseurs* (handcart operators) are usually organised in small groups along ethnic and friendship lines, and form a social and spatial 'neighbourhood' within New Bell. Nevertheless, they have proved themselves capable of transcending group boundaries and will rally round when outsiders, such as other road users and even the police, threaten their colleagues or common interests.

Chapter 11 shows that the neoliberal economic and political reforms appear to have weakened rather than strengthened the political power and bargaining strength of organised labour in Cameroon after many years of subordination to the state. The Cameroonian trade-union movement is in deep crisis due to continuing state intervention in unions and divisions within and between unions that are leading to growing fragmentation, weakened collective bargaining strength and a dramatic decline in union membership and revenue. Given this situation, trade-union leaders need to devise innovative strategies to revitalise trade unionism in

Cameroon, cut existing links with the authoritarian, neopatrimonial state, organise the unorganised, cement alliances with other civil-society organisations, and strengthen existing contacts with international labour organisations.

Finally, Chapter 12 deals with the profound changes in the position of workers and trade unions during the economic crisis and economic liberalisation on the Ndu Tea Estate, which was established in the North West Province of Anglophone Cameroon at the end of the British Trusteeship era. Local male peasants, who were excluded from inheriting family property, used to have a high stake in plantation labour, perceiving it as an avenue to accumulating wealth and gaining status in the local community. They identified strongly with the local trade union, relying on it to protect their interests. The severe economic crisis and the subsequent SAP in the late 1980s led to a dramatic deterioration in workers' conditions of service, and they rapidly lost whatever confidence they still had in their union leadership, accusing it of collaborating with the management in the planning and implementation of a series of anti-labour measures. As a result, they now tend to bypass the union and defend their own interests by engaging in informal, collective modes of resistance.

## Notes

1. Of late, some Africanists have drawn more optimistic conclusions on the basis of socio-economic developments in Africa. Dietz (2011), for instance, points to the current high growth rates in some African countries, like Angola and Nigeria, that are characterised by rich natural resources, particularly oil. See also Ellis (2011).

## The introduction of neoliberal economic and political reforms in the Cameroonian post-colonial state

### Introduction

For a long time Cameroon was lauded by many observers, including World Bank staff, as one of the most prosperous and most stable countries in post-colonial Africa. Following the unprecedented economic and political crisis in the 1980s, this rosy assessment has been replaced by gloom. After some initial hesitation, the Cameroonian government could not escape during the deteriorating economic situation from calling upon the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for the implementation of a structural adjustment programme (SAP). It was soon required to conform to the new standards of these financial institutions, linking structural adjustment to democratisation. So, in addition to the economic conditionality that plagued African states during much of the 1980s, it was also obliged to accept 'political conditionality'.

The IMF and World Bank are, in fact, the spearheads of the neoliberal project that has become the hegemonic ideological project of our time following the collapse of the socialist-oriented states in Eastern Europe. The major tenets of neoliberalism are: (a) the belief that rolling the state back and liberalising the economy will induce economic development, and (b) the belief that there is an intrinsic connection between capitalism and democracy. Democracy is thought to enhance the prospects for economic development, while economic liberalisation is thought to enhance the prospects for democracy (Beckman 1993: 20-33; Jeffries 1993: 20-35; Mkandawire 1994: 155-173). Several World Bank reports have been signaling a major shift in the Western donors' perspectives, from a preference for technocratic-authoritarian regimes to an endorsement of

democratic government. Democracy is said to be capable of legitimising the imperatives of adjustment. It can also improve governance and state capacity to implement the austere adjustment measures. These reports, however, equally stress that sustainable democracy cannot be achieved without the empowerment of civil society.

Like elsewhere in the world, the SAP imposed upon Cameroon by the IMF and the World Bank has involved the application of a standard package of measures to stabilise the domestic economy, to minimise state intervention in the economy, and to give the market a freer hand in the allocation of resources. These measures include reduction of public expenditure, removal of public subsidies, dismantlement of public sector, privatisation and promotion of private enterprise (both national and foreign), trade liberalisation, producer prices reforms, devaluation, restructuring of state institutions, and legal reforms aimed at supplying an enabling environment. It is beyond dispute that the SAP has yielded some results in Cameroon: the labour and investment codes have been liberalised, several price controls have been abolished, many import and export duties have been reduced, the commercialisation of export crops has been liberalised by withdrawing the buying monopoly of the cooperatives, restricting the activities of the National Produce Marketing Board to quality control, and allying local to world market prices, and, in 1994, the *Communauté Financière Africaine* (CFA) franc has been drastically devalued. What is most striking in the Cameroonian situation, however, is that most of these results in economic liberalisation have been accomplished after initial government opposition.

There is, in fact, ample evidence to demonstrate that the Cameroonian government has constantly attempted to undermine the economic and political reforms advocated by the western donors and international financial institutions. As a result, the process of economic liberalisation has been slow and inconsistent. The necessary institutional reform in the public and parastatal sectors, for example, has been largely thwarted by government delaying tactics and half-hearted implementation. This is particularly grave as the reform of these sectors marked by excessive costs and inefficiencies has been a cornerstone of the SAP. Political

liberalisation has hardly gone beyond the introduction of a multiparty system and a larger measure of press freedom. The government's weak commitment and limited implementation has led to protracted conflicts with the western donors and international financial institutions, sometimes followed by suspension of financial aid.

It will be argued in this chapter that the government's persistent opposition to the neoliberal economic and political reforms can be explained by the class character of the Cameroonian post-colonial state. In his seminal book on Cameroonian politics, Bayart (1979) has claimed that the first President of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo, was instrumental in creating a highly centralised, authoritarian and neopatrimonial state and in shaping a hegemonic alliance out of the various elite groups in society which were given access to state resources and rent seeking activities so as to cement their loyalty to him. This hegemonic alliance has a vested interest in the status quo and is inclined to resist any economic and political liberalisation measures which threaten its control over state resources and rent-seeking activities. Apparently, its resistance has been successful: none of the reforms implemented so far seems to have struck at the roots of the authoritarian and neopatrimonial state as yet.

It will be shown in this chapter that one of the reasons for this success has been the regime's proficiency in the game of token implementation of economic and political reforms. Another is its proven ability to play donors off against one another so that conditionality has remained largely illusory. This was facilitated by the fact that the major western donors and international financial institutions have continuously displayed a rather ambivalent and inconsistent attitude towards the regime. While they have sometimes blamed and 'punished' the regime for its lack of implementation of economic and political reforms, they have nevertheless continued to side with the regime against the opposition and to provide it with financial aid, for mainly economic and political reasons. The IMF and World Bank have never accepted the opposition parties in Cameroon as equal discussion parties, as they feared that any recognition of the opposition might have a negative impact on its established cooperation with the ruling regime needed for the implementation of the SAP. Moreover, the opposition's initial boycott of the economy, its fragmentation and its apparent



incapacity to present a clear alternative to the ruling regime contributed to their decision to negotiate with the ruling regime exclusively. Given its enormous economic interests in its previous trusteeship territory, it is not surprising that France has been even less inclined than other western donor countries to insist on the strict implementation of the neoliberal project.

### The nature of the post-colonial state in Cameroon

From the very start, the Federal State of Cameroon which came into being in 1961 following the achievement of independence and reunification of the previous French and British trusteeship territories, faced enormous problems (Le Vine 1964, 1971; Johnson 1970; Bayart 1979). There was the problem of underdevelopment and dependency. The economy was largely dependent on the export of a few agricultural products – in order of value: cocoa, coffee, bananas and palm oil. The tiny industrial sector, dominated by French capital, was mainly involved in the transformation of agricultural produce for export (Hugon 1968). France's predominant role in the national economy was clearly indicated by import-export statistics. In 1961 it accounted for 59 per cent of Cameroonian exports and 55 per cent of its imports. Membership in the CFA Franc Zone tied Cameroon monetarily to France; moreover, while it had the advantage of promoting economic stability and allowing an open trade regime, it established a tendency towards overvaluation of the currency and encouraged the development of imported consumer tastes (Vallée 1989). Through the various agreements of cooperation signed by France and Cameroon before independence, France remained in a position to influence Cameroon's domestic and foreign policy strongly.

There was the problem of ethnic fragmentation and regional divisions exacerbated by a colonial history that had split the country into English-speaking and French-speaking groups. And, last but not least, a civil war was going on at the time of independence and reunification, particularly in the Bassa and Bamileke areas. This bloody and destructive battle was the direct consequence of the determined efforts of the Cameroonian government and the French to suppress the radical nationalist party, the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) (Joseph 1977).

The challenge of solving these problems devolved on Ahmadou Ahidjo, the first President of the federal state. He was a Muslim and a Fulbe, the dominant ethnic group in Northern Cameroon (Azarya 1978). Initially, he was considered by many to be a mere puppet of the French and an intermediary figure at most. Indeed, he owed his ascendancy to power to a large extent to the French and he enjoyed hardly any support in the southern part of the country which had been more subject to colonial capitalism, education and Christianity than the north (Bayart 1979). Soon, however, Ahidjo displayed an unexpected political craftsmanship which enabled him to strengthen his originally weak position and eventually to construct a system of personal rule. Centralisation, nation-building and repression were his major strategies to concentrate political and economic power in his office and person (DeLancey 1989).

The first strategy, centralisation, had numerous aspects. There was the concentration and administrative decision-making in the capital, Yaoundé, and the use of the Constitution to funnel authority to the President. There was the formation of a single party, the Cameroon National Union (CNU), which was completed in 1966 after a two-step process of forging a single party in the Francophone area and then merging this with the remaining parties of the Anglophone area. As Bayart (1979) has shown, the party was firmly subordinated to the state, an arm of the government and particularly of the President: 'it is the party that emanates from the person of Mr Ahidjo, not the other way round'. There was also the dissolution of the federation in 1972 to form a unitary system of government. Centralisation was enhanced by the elimination of autonomous forms of organisation. Previously independent organisations became subordinated to the political party through the party's women's, youth and labour wings or through domination by or incorporation into government agencies (as had occurred with the Anglophone cooperative movement). Related to this were policies to destroy any limited autonomy enjoyed either by local governments (more a reality in Anglophone Cameroon) or by traditional governments.

The second strategy was coalition-building. In his study of the Cameroonian post-colonial state, Bayart (1979) highlights Ahidjo's pursuit of building a 'hegemonic alliance' out of different elite groups on the national and regional levels. This hegemonic alliance

comprised not only of politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen but equally the traditional elite, the chiefs. From this heterogeneous coalition, a new dominant class was slowly emerging around the state. Ngayap (1983) asserted that the ruling class in Cameroon consisted of approximately 1,000 people. But if Bayart's contention that the traditional elite has also been co-opted into this alliance is valid, I would submit that this number is rather conservative. This hegemonic alliance was pulled together by several means, including the development of an extensive patron-client system. Clients were supposed to owe total allegiance to Ahidjo. Attempts by any of them to build a power base of their own were construed as betrayal that sanctioned removal from office. Ahidjo selected his clients on the basis of ethnic arithmetic or ethnic balancing (Nkwi & Nyamnjoh 1997). He was conscious that representation in the cabinet, national assembly, and so on, would reflect the various ethnic groups in society. As a matter of fact, the government's hand-picked elite or *barons* served as transmission belts between the President and the ethnic groups. Thus every important ethnic group felt represented within the regime and thus able to exercise some influence on government policy (Jua 1991: 162-170; van de Walle 1990).

Loyal followers in the ethno-client network were rewarded by appointments and nominations to state offices, access to state resources, and rent-seeking opportunities. Beyond the numerous appointments Ahidjo could make to the cabinet and elsewhere in the system, he had a variety of other techniques to allow individuals to profit, even though they might not receive a lucrative appointment. For some associates of the President there were special loans from the banks, loans without interest or any expectation of repayment. Overall, the existence of smuggling and corruption provided a major avenue for the President to allow supporters to receive rewards. Special efforts were also made to appease and maintain support among the civil servants or bureaucrats. They received excellent pay compared to the average income of the Cameroonian citizens, as well as numerous perks such as free housing. Despite these advantages, they were allowed to convert their posts into monopoly rent-seeking opportunities. They considered the state to be a resource base, from where they could explore various pathways of capital accumulation (Geschiere &

Konings 1993). The expansion of the state, particularly into the economic arena, was promoted to manipulate and sustain the alliance. It would be wrong to argue that rent-seeking and patronage were the only reasons the state promoted state expansion after independence and reunification. Extensive public ownership conformed to prevailing development doctrines, was warmly supported by the donors, and responded to real development needs. Still, the scope that state ownership was to achieve (by 1988/89, when the SAP commenced, the state had more than 200 parastatals in its portfolio) was helped by the fact that it afforded leaders like Ahidjo positions of prestige and power to distribute. In the context of the neopatrimonial state, these parastatals were converted into prebends for Directors-General or to serve other exclusive interests of the hegemonic class (Joseph 1978). Given this penchant of the parastatals to promote political rather than economic goals, it is not astonishing at all that, for the most part, they performed inefficiently. Their dependence upon the state for subsidies became a permanent rather than transient feature. This furthered ischemia at the state treasury; by 1988, annual parastatal subsidies amounted to about FCFA 150 billion (van de Walle 1990; Konings 1993a).

While Ahidjo constantly emphasised the need for ethnic balance and national unity, there is nevertheless sufficient evidence that two ethnic elite groups enjoyed a privileged position in opportunities for capital accumulation. There were, first of all, the Muslim Fulbe elite, especially those originating from Garoua, the home town of Ahidjo, the so-called 'Garoua barons'. And second, the Bamileke elite, renowned in Cameroon for their 'spirit of capitalism' (Warnier 1993). The Bamileke territory was until about 1970 one of the most important areas of UPC resistance against the regime. It is widely believed in Cameroon that Ahidjo was ready to grant the Bamileke elite ample room for capital accumulation on condition that they would not meddle in politics. Ultimately, in spite of the variety of incentives for cooperation and agreement used by Ahidjo, the stability of the regime was based on the widespread use of repression and the suppression of human rights.

Ahidjo did not only succeed in gradually and imperceptively stabilising his regime, he was even able to achieve a certain degree of autonomy from the French. Over the years, Ahidjo has developed

relations with trading partners other than France. In 1985, France accounted for only 35 per cent of Cameroonian exports and 44 per cent of its imports. The regime's apparent political stability, its lack of ideological posturing and its liberal investment code appealed to the western donors and business milieus. With an annual growth rate of some 7 per cent from 1970 to 1985, the Cameroonian economy was long considered one of the success stories in Sub-Saharan Africa. While not without foundation, this view of the country's economy has proved to be excessively optimistic as it failed to take note of several disturbing trends by the end of Ahidjo's tenure. Much of the country's success was based on its rich resource base, yet the agricultural sector was stagnating: the growth registered was due mostly to increased acreage under cultivation brought about by expensive government and donor programmes, and it disguised the absence of sustained productivity growth. Moreover, infrastructural problems were daunting. The most disturbing trend, however, was the rapid growth of a costly and ineffectual public sector, though quite understandable from political efficiency considerations. Cameroon's seemingly impressive growth rate until 1986 was inflated by the discovery of oil in 1977. Strikingly, oil output and oil revenues have remained a state secret under Ahidjo's administration. Apparently, the bulk of oil revenues has been placed in foreign banks as extra-ordinary accounts. The official justification given by Ahidjo for this strategy was the elimination of the boom mentality that had crippled agricultural production in other African countries following the discovery of oil. Nevertheless, in conformity with the regime's neopatrimonial logic, the primary function of these extra-ordinary accounts soon became to cover parastatal deficits (van de Walle 1990; Jua 1991: 162-70).

Ahidjo stunned the Cameroonian population on 4 November 1982 by announcing that he was resigning as President of the country and turning his office over to his constitutionally designated successor, the Prime Minister, Paul Biya; the transfer to take effect on 6 November 1982. Unlike Ahidjo, Biya was a Christian from the southern part of Francophone Cameroon. He belonged to an ethnic group which is loosely classified as Beti. Although there were promising signs of change at the start of the Biya regime, it soon turned out that in all essential respects Ahidjo's system was

continued under Biya's leadership. Soon after his assumption of power, Biya promised a New Deal. He spoke of a certain liberalisation of the political system, an internal democratisation of the single party, and the need of 'rigour, integrity and moralisation', thus challenging the autocratic and neopatrimonial state (Takougang 1993: 91-101). At first, many Cameroonians were skeptical. Biya was a product of his predecessor, Ahmadou Ahidjo, and owed his political fortunes to him. Moreover, although Ahidjo resigned as the Head of State, he still retained the powerful position of chairman of the only party in the country, the CNU. Despite the initial skepticism, Biya's many speeches following his accession to power helped to convince many Cameroonians that he was serious about instituting change. This conviction was strengthened by a certain relaxation of police state controls in 1983.

Whether the concept of New Deal was simple a public relations ploy to extricate himself from Ahidjo's shadow, as some now argue, or whether it was a genuine attempt to forge a new direction for the country, the implementation of economic and political reforms would be extremely difficult within the existing political system. Ahidjo had spent more than two decades as Head of State and, during that tenure, had filled most of the top party and government positions with loyalists or people who believed in his political philosophy. Many in the government and the business community, especially the Muslim Fulbe, were not only unwilling to accept the fact that Ahidjo had handed over power to a southern Christian, but also perceived Biya's call for rigour, integrity and moralisation as an effort to deprive them of the rights and privileges they had long enjoyed under Ahidjo's administration. Adding to the difficult situation Biya faced, was the fact that the former President continued to play a highly visible role in national politics until 1983-84, when he was accused of being involved in an assassination attempt on Biya (Bandolo 1985).

Therefore, in order to implement his New Deal programme, Biya had to replace these men with people who were loyal to him and committed to reform. However, it soon became apparent that he was either unwilling or simply lacked the resolute, tough and uncompromising leadership of his predecessor to do so. For one thing, any immediate wholesale replacement of experienced, albeit

reactionary officials in the upper echelon of the government might have seriously impeded the smooth running of the administration. Moreover, many of the men in these positions were colleagues with whom Biya had served in government and who, like him, owed their political fortunes to Ahidjo. Consequently, even though some of them did not believe in his New Deal, he did not immediately replace them. Certain well-known 'barons' of Ahidjo were forced to resign, but within a few years they were back in government positions again, often as heads of parastatals. After an attempted *coup d'état* by the Republican Guard, which was still composed of Ahidjo loyalists, on 6 April 1984, the police state was reimposed in full, with censorship, secretive government, and a powerful secret police.

Given that his hold on power had become even more precarious after this failed *coup d'état*, Biya was compelled to raise the costs of maintaining the loose ruling alliance. He needed to please the state apparatus, notably those parts of the army which had supported him during the *coup d'état* attempt, and he wanted to meet the heightened expectations of his fellow Beti. A direct consequence was the acceleration of budgetary and state employment growth. The Beti elite saw the transfer of power from Ahidjo to Biya simply as an opportunity to, in Bayart's words (1989), promote ethnofascism. By implication, therefore, the fact that the President hailed from a specific ethnic group, should automatically give his ethnic fellowmen the right to monopolise power. Encountering great difficulties in consolidating his power, Biya started to give in to these ethnic pressures and to co-opt the Beti elite in the ruling alliance. The northern and Bamileke businessmen who had enjoyed a privileged position during Ahidjo's administration were increasingly replaced by Beti businessmen, the so-called Beti Maffia. Out of protest against their discrimination, Bamileke businessmen withdrew their savings from the banks and transferred them to informal saving circuits called *tontines* (Henry *et al.* 1991). This contributed to the growing liquidity problems of the banks. The Biya regime increased the number of civil servants from about 80,000 in 1982 to about 180,000 in 1988; the majority of the new employees being recruited among the Beti. The Beti also increasingly monopolised the pivotal positions in the government and security organs. Takougang (1993: 95-96) reports that as of August 1991,



thirty-seven of the forty-seven senior prefects (heads of administrative divisions), three-quarters of the directors and general managers of the parastatal corporations in the country, and twenty-two of the thirty-eight high-ranking bureaucrats who had been appointed in the newly created office of the Prime Minister, were from the President's ethnic group. The new regime's barons appeared to be much bolder in staking out claims on the state's resources than Ahidjo's supporters had been. Corruption and rent-seeking had always been fundamental characteristics of the regime (Joseph 1978; Médard 1977); after 1984 they increased to the point of becoming dysfunctional. When this political conjuncture was combined with a severe exogenous shock, the system started to crumble.

### The post-colonial state and structural adjustment

From the mid-1980s the post-colonial state was confronted with a severe economic crisis (Körner 1988: 77-94; van de Walle 1990). This crisis posed a severe threat to the economic base of the neopatrimonial state as well as to the system of prerogatives and privilege of the hegemonic alliance. A sharp downfall in commodity prices and the slide in the value of the American dollar against the CFA franc resulted in a 70 per cent deterioration in the country's terms of trade during the period 1986-1993. The state's oil revenues, for example, decreased from US\$ 350 million in 1985 to US\$ 207 million in 1988. The crisis was aggravated by massive capital flight estimated at FCFA 150 billion a year which was almost a quarter of the annual national budget. The free flow of currency between the CFA Franc Zone and France encouraged the Cameroonian elite to transfer their capital to French banks which, moreover, supplied higher interest rates than the Cameroonian banks. As a result of the crisis, several government projects proposed or started in the boom days of the New Deal were either suspended or abandoned because of severe financial constraints. The deteriorating economic crisis also forced many foreign companies that had invested in Cameroon to leave the country, further exacerbating the employment situation. The regime also experienced great difficulties in paying cash-crop farmers. Cocoa and coffee farmers responded by switching from cash-crop production to food-crop production.



The government's initial response to the trade shock of the mid-1980s was to rely on external financing in the hope of favourable commodity prices or exchange rate changes. As a result, external debt rose from US\$ 2.7 billion in 1984 to US\$ 4.7 billion in 1989. The IMF and the World Bank had been negotiating with the government on and off since mid-1986, without reaching agreement. At this time, Biya staked the national prestige on refusing the tough austerity programmes of those two institutions. Through 1986 and 1987, he insisted that Cameroon would undertake an adjustment of its own, and seek only non-conditional capital from bilateral donors and the private banks. He announced a cut of several hundred billion CFA in the 1987 fiscal year budget, a hiring freeze, new taxes on luxury goods and, in late 1987, the creation of a new anti-crisis ministry, the Ministry for the Stabilisation of Public Funds.

Notwithstanding Biya's tough rhetoric, the crisis continued to worsen, with expenditure overruns of FCFA 450 billion in 1986-87 (out of a total budget of FCFA 800 billion) and of FCFA 150 billion in the next fiscal year. Recourse to the international institutions became inevitable. Agreement was reached with the IMF on a stabilisation plan in September 1988 and with the World Bank on a structural adjustment loan in May 1989. The World Bank and IMF adjustment strategies have contained the conventional prescriptions of important cuts in public expenditures, increased state revenues and the compression of consumption, coupled with the promotion of selective investments to foster long-term growth. They have also called for the privatisation, rehabilitation or elimination of almost all of the nation's parastatals, as well as thoroughgoing liberalisation (van de Walle 1990).

Given the nature of the Cameroonian post-colonial state and the vested interests of the state elites in the status quo, it is not surprising that the Biya regime's implementation of the adjustment policies tended to be half-hearted and erratic. As van de Walle (1990: 54) perceptively observes, 'it has attempted to cut off some fat, to excise some of its patrimonial tendencies while maintaining its core logic'. It had little choice but to cut public expenditures, since state coffers were empty, but personnel expenditures were initially left untouched. To take one example, only 5 per cent of the Ministry of Agriculture's total budget of FCFA 39 billion was set aside in the

1988-1989 budget for non-personnel related expenditures. The absurdity of this approach from a developmental point of view is well compensated by the political logic of placating the administration. Despite his constant exhortations against corruption, Biya continued to distribute rents so as to regulate and dominate the different factions of the hegemonic alliance. He also attempted to delay the reform of the costly and inefficient public and parastatal sector, which was the cornerstone of the World Bank's adjustment programme. In May 1987, he appeared to side with the World Bank when he appointed a National Commission to review the performance of the parastatal sector (Tedga 1990), but, subsequently, he took no action on the Commission's report. It was only under constant pressure from the World Bank that he started to restructure the parastatal sector. In the end, five parastatals were privatised, forty-four were liquidated, and the remaining 104 were required to sign 'performance contracts' with the government in 1989-90 which aimed at their self-sufficiency and eventual profitability. These performance contracts often gave rise to severe cuts in workers' wages and fringe benefits as well as mass-lay-offs (Konings 1993a).

Cameroon's IMF standby agreement programmes, signed in September 1988 and December 1991, expired without having fully disbursed authorised funds and without a follow-on programme in place, due to the Biya government's failure to comply with programme conditionality. In September 1992, IMF programming, World Bank project assistance, and Paris Club debt relief was suspended because of accumulating debt arrears. It was its continuing friendly ties with France that saved the regime from the disastrous consequences of falling into the status of non-accrual, which would have destroyed the country's financial credibility throughout the world: France was ready to pay Cameroon's accumulated debt arrears with the World Bank, amounting to FCFA 60 billion. The important role of France in Cameroon's structural adjustment programme is manifest in its financial aid to Cameroon during the period 1990-92: this totaled FCFA 181 billion, representing 36 per cent of all aid.

For a long time, the Biya regime strongly refused to give in to the World Bank's demand of laying off about 40,000 civil servants and state agents, the more so as most of them were Beti. It was, however,

ready to reduce personnel costs. In 1991 it announced further cuts in the salaries and benefits of government employees. For instance, there was a 50 per cent cut in out-of-station and other allowances that civil servants could receive and a 7 per cent pay cut for most government workers. It also eliminated free housing, except to very high-ranking government officials such as ministers, directors and secretary-generals. The government, however, experienced increasing difficulties in paying its civil servants. Rather than laying off a certain proportion of the 'overdeveloped' civil service, it decided to implement two draconian salary reductions of respectively 30 per cent in January 1993 and 50 per cent in November 1993. Remarkably, in October 1993 France agreed to allocate a loan of FCFA 15 billion to Cameroon to help the government in coming to terms with the salary arrears owed to civil servants.

France and Cameroon used to resist any pressures of the IMF and the World Bank to agree upon a devaluation of the currency in the CFA Franc Zone. In January 1994, however, they consented to a 50 per cent devaluation of the CFA franc. In return, the IMF ratified a standby credit of US\$ 114 million to Cameroon on 15 May 1994 so as to support the government's economic policies for the next eighteen months. The disbursement of this loan was made conditional upon the government's termination of the contracts of 20,000 civil servants. The devaluation seems to have had a positive effect on the production and exports of cash crops, especially cocoa, coffee, and cotton (Pelzer 1994: 205-215).

In 1990 van de Walle concluded as follows about the politics of structural adjustment in Cameroon:

The inconsistent pace of reforms, its recurring breakdowns and betrayals suggest Biya is manoeuvring to placate the country's creditors while gingerly testing the political limits of the reform process. Ambiguity is an asset for Biya, as it keeps potential foyers of opposition off guard while cuts are made surreptitiously. Donor pressure and threats can be used to maintain pressure on recalcitrant allies. Still, Machiavellian machinations explain only a part of the reform's uneven progress. Some of the manoeuvring may be little more than delaying tactics: time may after all solve some of the problems while a rebound in world commodity prices could defer the crisis at least temporarily (van de Walle 1990: 70-71).

This conclusion seems still to be largely valid in 1994. In its political manoeuvring and delaying tactics the Biya regime has continued to be supported by France. One of the reasons for France's persistent support seems to be the concentration of organised opposition in Cameroon around a 'hard' Anglophone core. Another reason seems to be the strong belief in French government circles that the shadow of Washington is behind the IMF, the World Bank and the Cameroonian opposition.

### The post-colonial state and democratisation

By 1990 one could observe widespread popular discontent within Cameroonian urban areas with the regime in power and growing dissent within the hegemonic alliance. Various internal and external factors are responsible for this situation. The majority of the population held the corrupt, authoritarian regime responsible for the serious economic crisis, resulting in its loss of legitimacy. Moreover, straight after his ascendancy to power, Biya had started to project himself as an advocate of greater political freedom and democratic reforms. He, however, believed that both should occur, at least in the short term, under the auspices of the single party which had been rebaptised Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) in 1985. In other words, the party was supposed to define the extent to which freedom and democracy were going to be allowed in the country. Nevertheless, his limited political reforms encouraged the people, waking up after years of submission, to demand more political freedom and democracy than the Biya regime was willing to grant. The traditional propaganda, equating a single party with peace and harmony and a plural system with strife and discord, fell on increasingly deaf ears. In addition, with the end of the Cold War and the move towards democratisation in Eastern Europe, Cameroonians, like Africans elsewhere on the continent, looked upon these changes as an added incentive to demand greater political reforms, including the introduction of multiparty democracy. Some of the elite, particularly those who had become dissatisfied with the regime because of its promotion of Beti domination, began to give expression to general discontent and even tried to organise the urban masses into political parties. They were

joined by some members of the middle class who had become increasingly critical of the authoritarian and neopatrimonial state, such as members of the Cameroon Bar Association, intellectuals and journalists. Their critical attacks and organisational efforts, however, met first severe repression on the part of the state which wanted to keep the democratisation process under control.

On 19 February 1990, ten prominent Cameroonians in Douala were arrested and charged with organising secret meetings with the aim of undermining state authority and forming an alternative party. The leader of the group, Yondo Black, a renowned lawyer, received a three-year sentence from a military tribunal. Before and after his condemnation there were massive protest demonstrations. Following this event, the call for democracy and multipartyism became louder and louder. In reply, the government staged anti-democratisation marches throughout the national territory in which participants shouted slogans like 'No to Precipitate Democratisation'. On 9 April 1990, Biya said calls for a multiparty system were manoeuvres for diversion, intoxication and destabilisation. In Bamenda, the capital of the North West Province in Anglophone Cameroon, a new party, the so-called Social Democratic Front (SDF), had been founded by then and, according to its leader, John Fru Ndi, had given details of its formation to the authorities on 16 March 1990. When no reply was received, the SDF organised a huge rally at Bamenda on 26 May 1990, at which police opened fire, killing six people (see Chapter 3).

During the following weeks there was a remarkable change in President Biya's attitude towards the growing demand for multipartyism. In a nation-wide address in early June 1990, he claimed that Cameroonians had nothing to learn from abroad with regard to democracy. He himself had initiated perestroika and glasnost in his country long before Gorbachev did in the Soviet Union. However, during the CPDM Congress that took place at Yaoundé a few weeks later, he surrendered to the multiparty system demand. On that occasion, he declared that the party must be ready to face competition and added: 'Consider also that other schools of thought exist which must be taken into account, fought against or integrated' (Derrick 1992: 172).

What happened in those weeks? Even though that was the very time that Cameroonians were absorbed in the good showing of their national soccer team during the World Cup competition in Italy,

and seemed to think of nothing but football, in fact decisive pressure was brought to bear during these weeks. There was the pastoral letter from the Catholic bishops at Whitsun, which attributed the economic and political crisis mainly to the egoism, corruption and authoritarianism of the state elites, and called for an end to single-party rule (Konings 2009b). There was the resignation of John Ngu Foncha, the former Prime Minister of Anglophone Cameroon who had led it into federation in 1961, as an honorary Vice-Chairman of the CPDM. Foncha condemned the shooting during the launch of the SDF in Bamenda and expressed the demand being made by Anglophone Cameroonians for a return to a federal system. There was the pressure from the IMF and World Bank as well as from other international aid organisations. Financial assistance and loans were suspended, leaving the Cameroonian government with hardly any alternative but to open up grudgingly to the opposition. There was also pressure from France, which a regime so close to France for thirty years could not ignore. At the Sixteenth Summit of France and African states, held on 20-21 June 1990 at La Baule in France, the declaration agreed on by those attending, including Biya, spoke of 'the need to associate the relevant population more closely with the construction of their political, social and economic future'. François Mitterand, speaking for himself, went further and said French aid would be 'less enthusiastic to regimes which behave in an authoritarian fashion and fail to accept the move towards democracy' (Derrick 1992: 172).

After the surrender in principle, months passed before a new law was passed by the National Assembly on 5 December 1990, formally allowing creation of several parties on certain conditions. But, in the meantime, there was relaxation in many other ways. Many demonstrations and meetings were held in the Cameroonian cities. They expressed the new-found freedom and pent-up feelings about decades without freedom. Similarly, a free press blossomed, until after a few months, there were about sixty newspapers in circulation, including about fifteen dailies. The government did not take all this unrestrained freedom and met it with repression, but fitful repression that failed to check it. So as soon as new parties were formed, hundreds of thousands of people were waiting to rush to join them.

In the first months of 1991 new parties received their registration. The major new parties were:

- **The Social Democratic Front.** This was originally largely an Anglophone party, but it was capable of gradually extending its membership to the Francophone area, notably to the neighbouring Francophone provinces. For example, it enjoyed great support among the Bamileke in the West Province, an ethnic group that was closely related to the people in the Bamenda area, the cradle of the SDF. The party's chairman was John Fru Ndi, a bookseller by profession, who had failed to win a seat in the National Assembly on a CPDM ticket during the 1988 elections. He soon achieved an immense popularity among the urban masses because of his great courage and populist style of leadership.
- **The *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC).** This radical pre-independence party which had been suppressed by the French and Ahidjo government, was refounded and was capable of rewinning strong support in its original areas of operation, Douala, the economic capital, and the Bamileke-Bassa regions. Its leadership consisted partly of ex-CPDM leaders and partly of old UPC leaders who had returned from exile. The party was soon marked by internal divisions based on personal, ideological and ethnic considerations.
- **The *Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (UNDP).** This party enjoyed most support among the Fulbe of Northern Cameroon, Ahidjo's ethnic group. Its leadership had held prominent positions in the party and the government during the Ahidjo period and early Biya period. It claimed the Ahidjo heritage.

These three parties were the main contenders with the CPDM by mid-1990. Many other parties were authorised, making a total of no less than forty-eight (with about twenty others operating but not legally registered) by early 1992. The legalisation of many small parties was suspected in Cameroon to be intended to split the opposition to the government party. Strikingly, none of the parties



had worked out a well-defined programme, except maybe the SDF. Most of them did not go beyond generally calling for better social justice, cleaning up of public life, an end to secretive government, and measures to restore the economic situation. In this respect, it is worthwhile to mention that nearly all of them supported the implementation of the SAP in Cameroon. Apparently, their main concern was to devise strategies for the seizure of power from the ruling CPDM government. Like the ruling party, they usually tried to recruit their members through the creation of an ethno-client network (Schilder 1993: 115-122). Of course, the charisma of the leadership, too, tended to be an important asset in the expansion of their membership.

The formation of the new parties was accompanied by a rise in popular protest in the cities. The growing number of unemployed, taxi-drivers, students and other social groups took to the streets to air their own specific grievances and their general discontent with the regime in power. Contrary to many other African countries, the trade unions refused to join and lead this popular protest as they were still state-controlled. There were several bloody clashes between the demonstrators and the forces of law and order which led to several people being killed in April 1991. By April 1991, party leaders and their followers were uniting around the claim for a national conference. This claim was inspired by the national conferences that had been previously organised in Benin and Congo during the transition to new multiparty regimes. Such conferences aimed at bringing together political, religious, business, trade union and other leaders in society, and assuming power to decide radical constitutional and other changes. In Benin the conference assumed sovereign power and ordered implementation of the changes decided, and this was what the opposition wanted in Cameroon. It wanted to force the authoritarian state to accept possibly radical constitutional changes and to expose misgovernment and corruption without fear. Such ideas, which were a challenge to the authoritarian, neopatrimonial state, enjoyed massive popular support.

Unsurprisingly, the Biya regime strongly opposed the organisation of such a conference which was most likely to be transformed into a national tribunal. In a broadcast on 11 April 1991 Biya said that Cameroon did not need a national conference because 'democracy



is already a reality'. His refusal to consider a national conference gave rise to a long period of confrontation between the regime and the opposition. This confrontation was launched by a demonstration demanding a national conference at Bamenda on 11 May 1991, and the start of mass civil disobedience on 13 May 1991; there was also a general strike on 16-17 May 1991, widely followed in the western and northern provinces. From 24 June 1991 the most intense phase began, with the opposition's extension of civil disobedience to become a total shutdown in the cities, the so-called 'ghost town' campaign. This campaign involved the stoppage of all work, all trade, all traffic in the cities, except for Friday evenings and Saturdays, resulting in huge personal and public financial losses and an aggravation of the economic crisis. The government responded by not giving in (Mbu 1993).

For various reasons this ghost town campaign was not successful. It was not backed in the Beti region which remained loyal to Biya. This brought about a dangerous polarisation on ethnic lines (the Beti versus the rest) which nearly led to a civil war. The state apparatus might have broken down if Biya had not had that solid regional backing. In the event it never broke down altogether. The government kept control over the forces of law and order and used them regularly to clamp down on the opposition.

The IMF and the World Bank had regularly expressed their disapproval of the ghost town campaign. Greatly concerned about the adverse effect of this campaign on the national economy and SAP, they had regularly appealed to the government and opposition to arrive at a negotiated settlement. Both sides, however, ignored these appeals until October 1991 when it became evident that the ghost town campaign and, above all, the strength of the sympathetic population had exhausted themselves. Moreover, by that time there were tense conflicts among the opposition leaders about future strategy.

The offer of talks by Biya on 11 October 1991 was accepted by the opposition parties and the ghost town campaign petered out. A tripartite conference held at Yaoundé from 30 October to 17 November 1991, attended by government and opposition representatives and other prominent personalities who mediated and advised, led to agreements on 17 November 1991 which confirmed the government victory under a polite disguise. It was

agreed that elections for a new National Assembly would soon be held and that, in the meantime, all protest campaigns would be called off. Some opposition parties even dropped the national conference idea. This, and the failure to arrive at a programme for change, were the main reasons why other opposition parties, like the SDF, declined to sign the agreements.

Among those satisfied with the agreements were the IMF and World Bank as well as the government of France. Biya attended a Francophone state summit in Paris soon afterwards and was said to have had a good reception and approval from Mitterrand. Although some of Mitterrand's Africa policy-makers seemed to have favoured a national conference in Cameroon, a delegation of Cameroonian opposition leaders had failed to win support in Paris in late August 1991.

Of the major opposition parties, the SDF decided to boycott the National Assembly elections which were held on 1 March 1992. Its chairman, John Fru Ndi, said that the new election code, which was promulgated on 16 December 1991, was bad and that there was no guarantee of just and fair elections. Moreover, the election date was too early as most parties had not had sufficient time to organise and to prepare themselves for the coming elections. The government could afford to remain unmoved by such criticisms backed up by no more than the threat of a negative and self-defeating boycott. In the event, the elections distributed the 180 National Assembly seats among four parties only: the CPDM won 80, the UNDP 69, the UPC 18 and the *Mouvement Démocratique de la République* (MDR) 6.

The MDR was a party not considered important before the elections. It was headed by Dakole Daïssala, former chairman of the city bus corporation *Société des Transports Urbains du Cameroun* (SOTUC), arrested as a Northerner after the April 1984 *coup d'état* and held for six years without trial. He is one of the Kirdi, the ethnic minority groups in Northern Cameroon which were historically subordinate to the Fulbe and remained pagan or became Christian rather than Muslim (Motaze 1990). Most of the Kirdi declined to join the Fulbe-dominated UNDP and, during the elections, tended to cast their votes in favour of either the CPDM or the MDR.

For a party which had the full support of the government and its local officials, and which was the only party to field candidates in all forty-nine constituencies, the CPDM's showing was not too impressive. Eventually, it was three seats short of a majority in the National Assembly, but after several weeks of discussion it agreed on a coalition with the MDR. This first coalition-government in Cameroon was headed by an Anglophone from the North West Province, Simon Achidi Achu. A former Minister of Justice under Ahidjo, he is the first Anglophone Cameroonian to be Prime Minister of Cameroon. Biya indeed owes Anglophones many thanks, for their following the SDF call to boycott the polls ensured the CPDM's victory.

Soon afterwards, Biya announced that presidential elections were to be held on 11 October 1992 and that he would stand again as the government candidate during these elections. During the subsequent negotiations, the opposition parties failed to unite on the selection of one common candidate. A mixture of personal and ethnic animosities impeded any agreement. Eventually, approximately thirty opposition parties decided to support the SDF candidate, John Fru Ndi. After the elections which were marked by massive fraud, Biya was declared to be the victor. He was said to have won 39.9 per cent of the votes cast, 4 per cent more than John Fru Ndi. This was far short of the almost 100 per cent he had received in each of the two previous elections in 1984 and 1988 respectively, when he was the only candidate running for the post. He only won in the South, Centre and East Provinces (partly coinciding with the Beti area), but woefully lost in the other provinces.

After the elections, there were violent protests in Bamenda and the entire North West Province against 'Biya's theft of John Fru Ndi's victory'. Biya then imposed a state of emergency on this province for three months and John Fru Ndi was kept under military surveillance in his house at Bamenda. Many political activists, journalists and students, particular Anglophones and Bamileke, were arrested and tortured. The United States, Germany and the European Common Market had denounced the fraudulent elections and the state of emergency in the North West Province and threatened to abandon their aid programmes to Cameroon until

‘there was a clear advancement in the democratic process’. Particularly the United States has often expressed its disapproval of Biya’s authoritarian regime and has openly supported John Fru Ndi. The critical attitude of the United States towards the regime encouraged France to display its support for Biya, who appeared to be more likely to safeguard French interests in Cameroon than the Anglophone, John Fru Ndi.

Biya’s victory was a pyrrhic one. Still desperately seeking for legitimacy because of his rejection by over 60 per cent of the population, and with the economy in shambles and the civil service in a state of general apathy, the President was more isolated than ever. To broaden his base of support, Biya formed a government of national unity after the elections. Some individual members of the UNDP and the moderate faction of the UPC accepted ministerial posts. The SDF, on the contrary, refused to collaborate with a government of national unity.

It would appear as if the democratisation process in Cameroon has stagnated. The power of the President is still relatively unlimited; the separation between the state and the CPDM party is still insufficient, censorship of the press, violation of human rights and military excesses are still commonplace.

## Conclusion

This chapter has tried to demonstrate that the neoliberal project, which has been propagated by the Western donors and international financial institutions and largely supported by opposition parties, has not yet made much progress in Cameroon. This is not altogether surprising. Given the class character of the Cameroonian post-colonial state, the slow and inconsistent pace of economic liberalisation was to be expected. The neopatrimonial logic on which the post-colonial state is built forms a clear obstacle to the institutional changes needed to carry through a transformation to market-oriented and private sector-led growth.

The rather limited political reforms introduced by the Biya regime in 1990, especially the legalisation of multipartyism, seem not to have stimulated economic liberalisation but rather to have further eroded the authoritarian and neopatrimonial state’s capacity and

willingness to undertake economic reforms. The Biya regime rightly feared that the implementation of economic reforms, such as the dismantlement and privatisation of the costly and inefficient parastatal sector and the reduction of the public service, would fuel popular discontent and augment the membership of the opposition parties. Moreover, it was obliged to proceed with the supply of privileges, in the form of rent-seeking opportunities, so as to maintain the hegemonic alliance and to stave off opposition. In addition, the regime's loss of legitimacy and the increasing political instability encouraged capital flight and deterred foreign and national private investments.

The Biya regime appears to have been quite successful in resisting the internal and external pressures to speed up the process of economic and political liberalisation. As a result, the post-colonial state remains very much as it always has been. Several reasons have been given in this chapter to explain the paradox of the evident lack of commitment to economic and political reform and the remarkable survival of the authoritarian, neopatrimonial state during the present economic and political crisis. First, the Biya regime has continued to control the (shrinking) state resources, which enables it to buy the loyalty of the state elites and to co-opt some of the opposition leaders into the hegemonic alliance. It also continues to control the forces of law and order, which enables it to intimidate and oppress the opposition. Moreover, it continues to monopolise some pivotal mass communication media like the television, which enables it to preclude the opposition parties from presenting their leaders and programmes to the public. Second, the Biya regime has continued to enjoy the firm support of the Beti elite who feared that their privileged access to state resources would come to an end with the opposition parties' seizure of power. Third, the opposition parties seem hardly to differ from the ruling party, using similar ethno-client networks for the expansion of their power base. And, above all, their leadership is divided by personal and ethnic animosities.

And finally, the Biya regime has exploited to the full the ambivalent and inconsistent role of the Western donors and international financial institutions in the execution of the neoliberal project. The IMF and World Bank depend upon the ruling regime's

continuous cooperation for the successful implementation of the SAP to such an extent that they tend to confine themselves to quiet diplomacy, except in cases of extreme violations of human rights. Conversely, they decline to negotiate with the opposition. They have even expressed their strong disapproval of certain oppositional actions, such as the 'ghost town' campaign in 1991, which they perceived as a further onslaught on the already shattered national economy and an obstruction of the SAP. Undoubtedly, in its struggle for survival, the Biya regime owes a particular debt to France. France has tried to safeguard its economic interests in Cameroon by regularly assisting the Biya regime in overcoming any internal and external oppositional action. In January 1992, it did not even hesitate to supply the Biya regime with arms for the maintenance of public order.

Gradually, however, there were some indications that the western donors and international financial institutions were losing patience with the slow and inconsistent pace of economic liberalisation in Cameroon and becoming more determined to impose upon the Biya regime the rough choices it had so far avoided. In 1994, the World Bank forced the regime to lay off 20,000 civil servants and to announce the privatisation of a first batch of fifteen important parastatal enterprises, notably in the transport and agro-industrial sectors.

It is most unlikely that the eventual achievement of greater political liberalisation in Cameroon will enhance the prospects for any thorough economic liberalisation. Political liberalisation may even strengthen the neopatrimonial features of the Cameroonian post-colonial state. Although most opposition parties claim to champion economic liberalisation, their capacity to implement the necessary economic reforms is very much open to question, since they appear to resemble closely the ruling regime in their frequent resort to neopatrimonial practices.

Much of the current thinking about political liberalisation in Africa implies that institutional and economic change will be effected via the emergence of stronger civil societies. As a result, successful economic reforms require not only increased levels of state capacity but also higher levels of 'civil society capacity', that is, the effective and sustained organisation of social interests over time. Generally

speaking, however, civil society capacity tends to be weak in Cameroon. Every organised group in Cameroonian civil society used to be co-opted or destroyed by the post-colonial state, from ethno-regional associations to conventional civil-society organisations. These groups therefore still often lack the power to call the regime to account for its policies (van de Walle 1990).

The experience in Cameroon, and elsewhere in Africa, suggests that there is no automatic linkage between political and economic liberalisation. In African countries where autocratic and neopatrimonial regimes are still struggling for their political survival during the democratisation process, economic reforms tend to be slowly and partially implemented and political reforms tend to create political instability which scares away national and international investors. Indeed, at least in the short term, there may be conflicts between the two objectives. There is thus an increasing tendency to emphasise the longer-term relationship between political and economic liberalisation, as well as to view democracy as an end in itself, rather than a means to development.

## Opposition and social-democratic change in Cameroon: The Social Democratic Front

### Introduction

The functioning of opposition parties in Africa's current democratic transition appears still to be understudied and the existing literature usually presents a rather negative picture of their role (cf. Olukoshi 1998b; Mbaku & Ihonvbere 1998; van de Walle & Smiddy 2000; van Walraven & Thiriot 2002; Salih 2003). Opposition parties are assumed to be small, badly organised, fragmented, ethnocentric and dominated by personal and clientelist relations of power that are claimed to be characteristic of African politics (Chabal & Daloz 1999; van de Walle 2003). And, even more importantly, they are said to lack any clear, well-articulated, socio-economic project that can serve as a viable and credible alternative to existing policies and deepen and consolidate the democratic process. Most electoral campaigns appear to be conducted on the basis of the personality of the opposition leaders, and ethno-regional solidarities.

Opposition parties have to operate in what has been described as 'illiberal democracies' (van de Walle & Smiddy 2000; van de Walle 2001). In most African countries, the opposition has been faced with incumbents who have only reluctantly conceded to a multiparty system but have stopped at nothing in their attempts to obstruct, weaken, harass and divide the opposition. The latter have not hesitated to employ the public media and the various apparatuses of the state – including the security forces – against the opposition and to extensively rig election results. Today, the opposition is in a state of crisis and disintegrating in the majority of those countries where it has not yet managed to unseat the incumbent regime.

In this chapter, I focus on the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in Cameroon that was founded in May 1990.<sup>1</sup> Initially, this party appeared to form a notable exception to the generally negative



assessment of the functioning of opposition parties in Africa and actually raised high expectations among the urban masses of imminent political and economic change for two main reasons.<sup>2</sup> First, there was the charisma of its leader, John Fru Ndi, and second, there was its social-democratic message that seemed to be different from the authoritarian and neoliberal economic policies of the ruling regime. Though never well defined, its message of establishing a truly democratic and just society – translated into simple slogans such as ‘Power to the People and Equal Opportunities for All’ – was easily understood. In the early 1990s, the SDF was so popular among the masses that many observers came to believe that it was only a matter of time before the party would replace the ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM). Today, more than two decades after its launch, prospects of a SDF takeover of power appear bleak. Even worse, and similar to most other opposition parties in Africa, the party has lost most of its initial appeal and its leadership is deeply divided on policy issues and strategy, and characterised by opportunism and ‘prebendal politics’.

In the first part of this chapter, I describe the rapid expansion of the SDF, its message and its major actions during its heyday in the early 1990s. In the second part, I explain the reasons for the loss of the party’s initial momentum and its failure to capture power.

### The birth and growth of the SDF

Following independence and reunification in 1961, Cameroon moved quickly towards the establishment of a one-party state and the concentration of power in the president that was justified by the ruling regime in terms of essential prerequisites for national unity and development (Bayart 1979; DeLancey 1989; Takougang & Krieger 1998). This political system remained largely intact until 1990 when widespread popular discontent emerged with the deepening economic and political crisis (see Chapter 2). With the move towards democratisation in Eastern Europe, Cameroonians, like Africans elsewhere on the continent, began to demand political reforms including the introduction of a multiparty system, rule of law, and freedom of association and of the press. This went far beyond the modest political reforms introduced earlier by the Biya government (Konings 1996a; Takougang & Krieger 1998).

It was in these circumstances that the first opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), was formed in Bamenda, the capital of North West Province in Anglophone Cameroon. Its charismatic leader, John Fru Ndi, a bookseller by profession, defied government orders prohibiting the founding of the party and chose 26 May 1990 as its launch date. On the same day several decades before, Martin Luther King had led a march on Capitol Hill in Washington where he made his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech, setting the stage for the liberation of blacks in American society. In his short speech to the massive rally in Ntarikon Park in Bamenda, Fru Ndi declared:

Today is the most significant day in the struggle for democracy in Cameroon.... Democracy has never been handed down to a people on a platter of gold...We have set as one of our goals to rid the Cameroonian society of a system that deprives people from being free men or otherwise punishing them for daring to think freely, associate freely, assemble peacefully and freely.... We call upon you to stand up and be counted amongst those who share our democratic ideal. You have nothing to lose but the straight jacket in which you, as freeborn citizens, have been cast (quoted in Gwellem 1996: 12).

Following this ceremony, six young Anglophones – who became known as the 'May 26 martyrs' – were killed by the security forces. The state-controlled media tried to distort the facts and to deny government responsibility for this bloody event and a demonstration by Anglophone students at the University of Yaoundé in support of the SDF and the introduction of a multi-party system was brutally suppressed (Konings 2002a). Leading members of the ruling party, the CPDM, strongly condemned the Anglophones for their 'treacherous actions' and what they considered as the premature birth of multipartyism in the post-colonial state. Their reaction to these peaceful demonstrations shocked many people, particularly because alternative political parties were not prohibited by the 1972 Constitution (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 77-78).

The government's overreaction to the launch of the SDF and its continual persecution of the party must be understood in the context of what is called the 'Anglophone problem'.<sup>3</sup> The deepest roots of this problem can be traced back to 1961, when the political elite of

two territories with different colonial legacies – one French and the other British – agreed on the formation of a federal state. Contrary to Anglophone expectations, this did not provide for the equal partnership of both parties, let alone for the preservation of the cultural heritage and identity of each, but turned out to be merely a transitory phase to the total integration of the Anglophone minority into a strongly centralised, unitary state. Gradually, this has created an Anglophone consciousness: the feeling of being marginalised, exploited and assimilated by the Francophone-dominated state, and even by the Francophone population as a whole. It was not until political liberalisation in 1990 that various associations and pressure groups were created or reactivated by members of the Anglophone elite to represent and defend Anglophone interests in the Francophone-dominated state. Although the most important organisations initially called for a return to the federal state, the persistent refusal of the Biya government to discuss any related constitutional reforms eventually forced them to adopt a secessionist stand. Unsurprisingly, the government has devised various strategies to safeguard the unitary state, including attempts to minimise or even deny the existence of an Anglophone problem, to create divisions among the Anglophone elite, to remunerate some Anglophone allies with prestigious positions in the state apparatus previously reserved for Francophones only, and to repress all actions designed to change the status of Anglophone Cameroon (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003).

There is general agreement that the launching of the SDF was a decisive factor in changing the political landscape in Cameroon. Under considerable internal and external pressure, the government introduced a greater measure of political liberalisation (Derrick 1992). In December 1990 it announced the advent of multipartyism, as well as a certain degree of freedom of mass communication and association, including the right to hold public meetings and demonstrations. As a result, several political parties, pressure groups and private newspapers were set up in Cameroon and began to oppose the regime.

Like most other opposition parties that have emerged during the current political liberalisation process in Cameroon and other African countries (Mehler 1997; Takougang & Krieger 1998;

Olukoshi 1998b), the SDF never appears to have developed any elaborate political or economic programme. The charisma of the party leader is more likely to attract a mass following than any explicit ideology. Since the tragic death in 1958 of Ruben Um Nyobe, the legendary leader of the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) (Joseph 1977; Mbembe 1996), no other politician in Cameroon has captured the imagination of the masses with such enthusiasm as John Fru Ndi, the chairman of the SDF. His populist style of leadership has had a wide appeal. Unlike most other Cameroonian political leaders, he usually wears customary dress, he predominantly speaks Pidgin English (the *lingua franca* of the masses), and is admired for his courage and outspokenness. As a result of Fru Ndi's growing popularity, the party was able to extend its membership from the Anglophone to the Francophone area, notably in the neighbouring West and Littoral Provinces. In fact, Francophones soon outnumbered Anglophones in the originally Anglophone party. Most of the party's approximately 60-per-cent Francophone membership belongs to the 'entrepreneurial' Bamileke, who are closely related to ethnic groups in the North West Province (Warnier 1993; Tabappsi 1999). The Bamileke are inclined to see the SDF as a springboard to political power.

Examination of the party's most important initial documents, the 1990 *Constitution* and *Manifesto* and the 1991 *Proposals on Devolution of Power*, reveals an ideologically fluid mixture of populist, liberal and social-democratic elements. The composition of the initial party leadership may be a significant explanatory factor for this ideological blend. In addition to the populist Fru Ndi, the party leadership consisted of members of the radical intelligentsia and other sectors of the middle classes, particularly teachers and lawyers, as well as some businessmen and entrepreneurs. The major tenets in the SDF basic documents are the following:

- the establishment of a 'healthy and true' democracy. In this respect, the SDF has championed the achievement of a transparent and accountable form of governance, the separation of executive, legislative and judiciary powers, free and fair elections, freedom of expression and association, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

To introduce fair and free elections, the SDF has continuously advocated the introduction of an independent electoral commission.

- the need for participatory democracy. In its 1991 Proposals on Devolution of Power, the SDF attempted 'to put into concrete form and detail its avowed slogan of Power to the People'. By introducing a large measure of decentralisation, the party proposed 'to put an end to the former system bedevilled by overcentralisation of decision-making with a huge bureaucracy at the centre' and 'to get the common people themselves directly involved in their own governance'.
- the promotion of a market economy, free enterprise, and the right to private property.
- the creation of a welfare state, with particular concern for the underprivileged in society. The SDF promised the introduction of free health care and education, an improvement in the living and working conditions of urban and rural workers (better housing, electricity and roads), the creation of employment for the youth, and an improvement in the position of women in society.

Although these basic documents failed to provide a credible political and economic blueprint for achieving these objectives, they succeeded in attracting not only the urban masses – formal and informal-sector workers and the unemployed – but also business people and entrepreneurs.

The party's message – embodied in simple slogans like 'Power to the People and Equal Opportunity for All', 'Change' and 'Suffer don Finish (SDF)', a Pidgin English expression meaning 'your suffering has come to an end' – was well understood by the masses. They came to believe that by voting the SDF into power, they would finally obtain a say in the decision-making process and would be freed from exploitation and oppression.

The first years of political liberalisation raised high expectations among SDF members of an imminent change in regime and a reconfiguration of state power in their favour. The party's enormous expansion and growing confidence put the government on the

defensive, being unsure of how to handle the sweeping force of the new political upstarts. The SDF's weekly rallies and demonstrations, its fiery rhetoric and violent threats, and its bold defiance of the regime were all phenomena unimaginable in the three long decades of predictable and colourless one-party politics.

The leaders of the SDF helped to turn most of the country, with the notable exception of the Beti region, into a veritable hotbed of rebellion, leading to several vehement confrontations with the regime in power. This was particularly the case during the 1991-92 'ghost town' campaign, which was essentially a prolonged demonstration of civil disobedience organised by the SDF and allied opposition parties to try to force the Biya government to organise a sovereign national conference like those previously held in other African countries such as Benin, Congo-Brazzaville, Mali and Zaire (see Chapter 2). The slogan adopted by the opposition alliance in favour of a sovereign national conference was '*fait quoi, fait quoi, il y aura*' ('nothing will prevent it being held'). When Biya replied in a speech before the national assembly that it was '*sans objet*' (pointless), the whole country reportedly went up in flames.

By October 1991, however, the 'ghost town' campaign had run out of steam, and the regime then found it opportune to organise what it called a 'tripartite meeting' involving the incumbent government, the opposition and well-known public figures (Takougang & Krieger 1998: 141-42). With the meeting masquerading as a forum in which to reach a compromise on the main political issue – namely the holding of a sovereign national conference – the regime used the occasion to assess the strength of the opposition and, if possible, to divide it.

It soon became manifest that the opposition was unable to maintain a united front in the absence of a common objective and programme. As elsewhere in Africa (Olukoshi 1998b), the overwhelming majority of the opposition parties in Cameroon existed only on paper, usually having been created by political entrepreneurs to serve personal and ethno-regional interests rather than to mobilise popular forces for genuine change (Fonchingong 1998). As a result, the regime eventually succeeded in manipulating and blackmailing most of their leaders. Subsequently, it was able to largely determine the agenda and control the meeting to its own

advantage. On 13 November 1991, no fewer than forty of the forty-seven then legalised opposition parties signed the so-called Yaoundé Declaration. They agreed to abandon the 'ghost town' campaign and to defer the sovereign national conference demand pending elections in response to the regime's offer of further discussions on electoral and constitutional reform. The SDF was not prepared to cooperate with the regime and refused to sign the document.

Having split the opposition during this meeting, the regime simply refused to create an independent electoral commission, as had constantly been demanded by the SDF. With a promised reward of FCFA 500 million for each party participating in elections, it lured the majority of the opposition parties into the ill-conceived parliamentary elections of March 1992. There have been disputes ever since about the wisdom or folly of the SDF boycott of these elections. It is beyond any doubt that SDF participation in these contested elections would have given the opposition a majority vote in the national assembly, thus posing a serious challenge to the regime (see Table 3.1).

The SDF, however, did participate in the October 1992 presidential elections. Although the opposition parties failed to agree on a single candidate, the SDF chairman, John Fru Ndi, performed extremely well in these fraudulent elections. In fact, many Cameroonians and international observers believed that he had won the presidency. It was therefore not surprising that Biya's declared victory was a traumatic experience for the SDF membership, resulting in violent protests against the 'theft of Fru Ndi's victory' throughout the North West Province. The regime then imposed a state of emergency on the province for three months and Fru Ndi was kept under house arrest in Bamenda.

Following the party's failure to accede to political power through either violent confrontation or the ballot box, a number of issues arose that created serious divisions among its leadership, leading to growing disillusionment among the rank and file. Moreover, having survived the most difficult years in its existence, the incumbent regime used all the means at its disposal to contain the SDF threat.

Table 3.1 *Results of Legislative Elections in Cameroon*

Parties	Number of Seats		
	1992	1997	2002
Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM)	88	116	149
Social Democratic Front (SDF)	0	43	21
National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP)	68	13	1
<i>Union des Populations du Cameroun</i> (UPC)	18	1	3
Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU)	0	5	5
Movement for the Defence of the Republic (MDR)	6	1	0
<i>Mouvement Libéral des Jeunes du Cameroun</i> (MLJC)	0	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>

*Note:* The SDF and the CDU boycotted the 1992 legislative elections.

*Source:* Compiled from various Cameroonian newspapers.

### The Anglophone-Francophone divide within the SDF

Paradoxically, although the SDF and Fru Ndi contributed immensely to Anglophone consciousness and action, the party increasingly presented itself as a national rather than an Anglophone party, as is evidenced by its growing membership in Francophone Cameroon. As a consequence, it adopted an ambivalent attitude towards calls



from the newly emerging Anglophone movements for a return to a two-state (Anglophone-Francophone) federation. Its leadership tried to avoid alienating either its Anglophone or its Francophone members but this was not an easy task. The party's Anglophone members tended to be simultaneously supporters of Anglophone movements and were therefore inclined to bring pressures to bear upon the party's leadership to place federalism on the political agenda.

Like most other Francophones (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 154-62), the Francophone party members tended to oppose the Anglophone pursuit of a federal state – often equating federalism with secession – and strongly adhered to the preservation of the unitary state. They rightly pointed out that some of the party's basic documents, like the 1990 *SDF Manifesto* and the 1991 *SDF Proposals on Devolution of Power* stressed the importance of national unity, allowing only for a large measure of decentralisation within the unitary state. The Francophone position was even largely backed by the party's Anglophone secretary-general, Dr Siga Asanga, who maintained close ties with the Francophone intellectuals in the SDF leadership, most of them, like he himself, lecturers at the University of Yaoundé. On some occasions, Asanga publicly stated that the party's embrace of the Anglophone cause and federalism would endanger its social-democratic ideology and national appeal.<sup>4</sup> The issue became even more pertinent when the Francophone majority demanded a more equal representation in the still predominantly Anglophone party executive. Since the party chairman was an Anglophone, the Bamileke, who formed the largest part of the Francophone membership, claimed to be entitled to the post of secretary-general, which was second in the party's hierarchy.

The party chairman, John Fru Ndi, was under pressure from both sides to clarify his position on the growing Anglophone-Francophone divide in the party and he eventually appeared to yield to Anglophone pressure. He openly declared himself to be opposed to Francophone domination of the SDF since the party owed its existence to courageous initiatives and sacrifices by Anglophones. He bluntly added that 'it was unacceptable that a Bamileke would ever become secretary-general of the SDF' – a statement reminiscent of a similar declaration by Joseph Owona, one of the leading Francophone CPDM officials, during his term as secretary-general at the

presidency: 'A Bamileke as President? Never!' (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 152). Fru Ndi's clarification reinforced Anglophone influence in the party's decision-making organs but served to temper enthusiasm for the party among the Bamileke elite.

At the SDF's Bafoussam Convention in July 1993, some Anglophones explicitly raised the issue of Anglophone marginalisation in the Francophone-dominated post-colonial state, and the delegates subsequently endorsed in principle the idea of a federal form of government. To appease the Francophones, the party refused to adopt the two-state federation as advocated by the Anglophone movements, leaving it instead to the people themselves to decide on the exact form of federation at a future sovereign national conference. Only one year later, on 22 August 1994, the SDF national executive committee modified the Bafoussam declaration of federalism. It now clearly opted for a four-state federation (an Anglophone state and three Francophone states). Partly as a result of his disagreement with the party's endorsement of federalism, Secretary-General Siga Asanga was expelled from the party in 1995. A number of Bamileke and other Francophone party leaders also left the party voluntarily or were forced out. One of them, Dr Basil Kamdoum, then founded the Social Democratic Party (SDP) that was intended to offer a social-democratic alternative to the SDF. However, it never really got off the ground, nor did the Social Democratic Forum created by Siga Asanga to protest his expulsion from the SDF. These leaders simply lacked Fru Ndi's charisma.

From the mid-1990s onwards, there were also repeated, and sometimes serious, conflicts between the leadership of the umbrella organisation of the Anglophone movements, the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) and the SDF. While the SDF continued to cling to the idea of a four-state federation, the SCNC had in the meantime adopted a secessionist stand following the Biya government's persistent refusal to enter into any meaningful negotiations about a return to a two-state federation. The SCNC's new objective obliged the SDF leadership to distance itself from the Anglophone cause in order to assure the party's survival among its Francophone members. Evidently, it thereby ran the risk of losing support among its Anglophone members.

When SCNC leaders proposed boycotting the 1996 municipal elections, claiming that any elections called by the Francophone-dominated state were irrelevant to an independent Southern Cameroons state,<sup>5</sup> the SDF leadership refused to comply. Relations rapidly deteriorated after the proclamation of the restoration of the independence of the Federal Republic of Southern Cameroons (FRSC) by a SCNC leader, Justice Frederick Alobwede Ebong, on 30 December 1999. On 6 May 2000, the party executive met to discuss the new developments on the Anglophone scene. During a stormy debate it decided to demand the resignation of some important party leaders. Dr Nfor Ngala Nfor, who used to be the chairman of the SDF Constitutional and Political Affairs Committee, was asked to resign because of his recent acceptance of the positions of vice-chairman of the SCNC and vice-president of the FRSC. Dr Martin Luma, the second vice-president of the SDF, was asked to step down because he had chaired the historic meeting on 1 April 2000 at which Justice Ebong was proclaimed president of the FRSC and Dr Nfor Ngala Nfor was appointed as vice-president. Albert Mukong, a human rights activist and SDF founding member, was also asked to resign because of his persistent militancy in Anglophone organisations. Their departures were clear proof of the SDF leadership's determination to purge the party of 'extremist' and separatist elements in order to maintain the support of its Francophone membership.<sup>6</sup>

Professor Carlson Anyangwe, another SDF founding father and former SCNC leader who is still working abroad, also distanced himself from the party, identifying himself more closely with the SCNC struggle for an independent Southern Cameroons state. That the SDF leadership is under strong pressure from its Francophone membership to maintain a certain distance from the Anglophone separatist tendencies was manifested again in June 2000 when Mr Chrétien Tabetsing, a Bamileke member of the SDF living in France and who had failed to unseat John Fru Ndi as party chairman during the SDF's 1999 convention, called for an extraordinary convention. The purpose of this convention, he said, was to debate the Anglophone problem that had become such a sensitive issue in Cameroon and was dividing the party into two opposing camps. He claimed that the SDF would collapse and cease to exist should Anglophone wishes prevail.<sup>7</sup>

On 7 May 2000, the chairman of the SDF, John Fru Ndi, openly confessed that his party was at variance with the SCNC over the strategic options for solving the Anglophone problem. While his own party continues to view a four-state federation as a panacea for the Anglophone problem, the SCNC was, he lamented, beating the drums of outright secession. He strongly condemned some SCNC activists who were issuing threats against the SDF 'in a bid to persuade the party to dance to their independence song'. Instead of combating the Biya regime, the SCNC, he alleged, was now engaged in fighting the SDF.<sup>8</sup> A few weeks later, a new clash between the SDF and the SCNC occurred when the SDF decided to participate in the 20 May demonstrations – to commemorate the creation of the unitary state – while the SCNC had called for a boycott.<sup>9</sup>

Dissatisfied with the party's position towards the Anglophone problem, an increasing number of both Anglophone and Francophone members have left the party and many former Anglophone members have committed themselves exclusively to the Anglophone cause.

### The regime's repressive and divisive tactics and its international support

The regime has done everything possible to control the expansion and influence of the SDF and other opposition parties. One of its main strategies has been repression and SDF leaders and militants have found themselves continuously exposed to harassment, intimidation and violence. A well-publicised example occurred on 3 November 1993 – the day set aside to celebrate eleven years of Biya's presidency – and involved a confrontation between a SDF convoy led by John Fru Ndi and the police in Yaoundé when the police attacked the convoy with water canons. Fru Ndi was injured and his car damaged but he escaped and took refuge in the residence of the Dutch ambassador, subsequently giving an ultimatum for the release of the thirty SDF militants arrested. The police were rumoured to have been intending to kill him (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 135-36).

Strikingly, the North West provincial governor, Bell Luc René, a Francophone, became nicknamed ‘Bend Look Grenade’ for the excessive use of tear-gas grenades by the security forces under his command to disperse SDF demonstrators, especially during the 1991 ‘ghost town’ campaign and the 1992 state of emergency in Bamenda in the wake of ‘Biya’s theft of Fru Ndi’s victory’ in the presidential elections. The government regularly prohibited the SDF from holding rallies and meetings, and the security forces often broke up those that did take place. Contrary to the SDF credo, ‘Suffer don Finish’ (SDF), the suffering was clearly *not* finished and another reading for its acronym emerged ‘Suffer dey (for) Front’ (SDF).

Other strategies by the regime to frustrate SDF members’ hopes of ever gaining power included the almost complete barring of opposition parties from access to the public media, the constant refusal to introduce free and fair elections, and the extensive rigging of election results.<sup>10</sup> Any appeal by the SDF leadership to the courts against such practices was likely to fail since the national judiciary continues to serve the interests of the incumbent regime and not those of the citizens. Indeed, as Nyamnjoh (1996: 20) aptly observed, ‘Today Cameroonians have multipartyism but the one-party logic persists’.

The regime’s most important strategy has undoubtedly been divide-and-rule. In the Anglophone region in particular, it has capitalised on the existing ethno-regional tensions between the coastal forest (the present South West Province) and the Grassfields (the present North West Province) people. As argued elsewhere (Konings 2001), a number of factors are responsible for this situation. First, the large-scale labour migration from the North West to the South West where a plantation economy was created during German colonial rule (Konings 1993a), and the subsequent local settlement of northwestern workers. Gradually, these settlers have come to form the majority in many local towns and villages, proving their reputation as entrepreneurs and achieving, along with Nigerians of Igbo descent, a dominant position in the southwestern economy (Rowlands 1993). Second, the transfer of political power from the South West to the North West in 1959, when the North West-based Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) defeated the ruling South West-based Kamerun National Congress (KNC) meant that

the North West elite started dominating the political scene at the regional and national levels (Ngoh 1996). Consequently, although supporting most of the Anglophone grievances about Francophone domination, the South West elite have felt more disadvantaged than their northwestern counterparts in the post-colonial state.

Political liberalisation in the early 1990s fanned the rivalry between the South West and North West elites in their struggle for power at the regional and national levels. The rapid growth of the SDF immediately alarmed the South West elite who feared renewed North West domination over the South West as the SDF was clearly a party organised and controlled by the North West elite. Moreover, although the party, like the former KNDP, enjoyed less popularity among the autochthonous population in the South West than in the North West, it could nevertheless count on massive support from northwestern workers and settlers in the region. In addition, it soon became manifest that the SDF's frequent, and often violent, confrontations with the regime had the paradoxical effect of advancing the political careers of northwestern politicians. The year 1992 witnessed first the appointment of a North Westerner, Simon Achidi Achu, as prime minister – an apparent attempt by the desperate regime to contain the enormous popularity of the SDF in the North West – and later the spectacular performance of the charismatic SDF chairman, John Fru Ndi, in the presidential elections.

Given the intensification of the power struggle between the South West and North West elites during the political liberalisation process, the Biya government found it increasingly lucrative and politically expedient to tempt the 'peaceful and conciliatory' South West elite away from Anglophone solidarity with strategic appointments and the idea that their real enemy was the 'unpatriotic, ungrateful and power-mongering' North West elite.

In response to South West complaints of North West domination, Biya began to appoint South Westerners to key positions in their own province. For example, Dorothy Njeuma was appointed vice-chancellor of the newly created Anglophone University of Buea and Becky Ndivé was transferred from Yaoundé to head the Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) station in the South West. Nevertheless, South Westerners still felt underrepresented in higher

government positions and constantly requested that a South Westerner succeed the North Westerner, Simon Achidi Achu, as prime minister. So when in September 1996, Biya appointed the South Westerner Peter Mafany Musonge as prime minister and kept more South Westerners than North Westerners in key cabinet positions, 'the South West people ... went wild with excitement and jubilation and loudly praised the Head of State' for having at last listened to the cries of despair of South Westerners, who for over thirty-six years had been 'confined to the periphery of national politics and socio-economic development'.<sup>11</sup>

Government divide-and-rule tactics culminated in the 1996 Constitution that promised special state protection for autochthonous minorities (Melone *et al.* 1996; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000). Not unexpectedly, the new constitution boosted South West identity and fuelled existing tensions between South Westerners and North Westerners.

The timing of its release was hardly an accident: it was promulgated only a few days before the 21 January 1996 municipal elections. The South West pro-CPDM elite was shocked when the SDF won most key urban constituencies in their region. South West Governor Peter Oben Ashu immediately blamed the northwestern settlers, who outnumbered the indigenes in most urban areas of the province, for the CPDM's poor performance in the urban areas, and on several occasions he and other members of the southwestern elite ordered them 'to go home'. Before the elections, Nfon Victor Mukete, the Bafaw Paramount Chief in Kumba, had used Bafaw vigilante groups to 'encourage' northwestern settlers in the Kumba municipal areas not to vote for the SDF. The South West elite immediately started demanding state protection for the autochthonous southwestern minority against the dominant and exploitative North Westerners.

Straight after the elections, the government provided the required protection by appointing indigenous CPDM leaders as urban delegates in the municipalities won by the SDF. It is beyond doubt that the Biya regime also rendered assistance after the municipal elections to the so-called Grand Sawa movement<sup>12</sup> – an emerging alignment of the ethnically related coastal elite in the South West Province and neighbouring Francophone Littoral Province on the



basis of common feelings of exploitation by northwestern and ethnically related Bamileke settlers who were believed to constitute the backbone of the major opposition party, the SDF (Yenshu 1998; Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998).

To those who sought protection as minorities, the price to pay would increasingly be stated in no uncertain terms: Vote for the CPDM. This is exactly what the new prime minister, Peter Mafany Musonge, and other members of the southwestern elite have been telling the people in the region.

During elections, the southwestern pro-CPDM elites have become accustomed either to excluding northwestern settlers from voting in the South West or to bringing pressure to bear upon them to vote for the CPDM. According to the Cameroon Electoral Code (Republic of Cameroon 1997), every citizen may vote in a locality where s/he has been resident for at least six months or where his/her name is on the income-tax assessment list for the fifth consecutive year. Despite such rules, northwestern settlers, especially those known to be SDF supporters, were frequently barred from voting in their area of residence and were requested to do so in their region of origin (only to discover on their arrival that they were supposed to vote in their place of residence). During a meeting of the South West elite in Limbe in February 1997 it was decided that settlers had to obtain a residence certificate as a precondition for being registered as a voter – a decision which North Westerners immediately condemned as favouring the party in power (Yenshu 1998). Although this rule was in clear contravention of the Electoral Code, pro-CPDM officials and chiefs, like Governor Peter Oben Ashu and Chief Mukete of Kumba, continued to insist on the obtaining of these permits. Northwestern workers, the majority of whom are SDF supporters, have also been subjected to persistent CPDM pressures to support the new southwestern prime minister Peter Mafany Musonge by voting CPDM.

And last but not least, the regime could count at the last moment on international support, despite the donors' regular criticisms of the slow progress of economic and political reforms in Cameroon. France in particular has continued to defend the Biya government, seeing a takeover of power by the SDF as a severe threat to its long-standing vested interests in the country (Joseph 1978). Its



support for the regime was even reinforced by hostile declarations and actions on the part of the SDF chairman. During the SDF's early years, Fru Ndi regularly declared that his party was fighting not only a local dictator but also French imperialism, even calling upon his followers to boycott French goods. France, therefore, did everything it could to make sure that Biya remained in power during the controversial October 1992 presidential elections. A few months afterwards, the French minister of interior, Charles Pasqua, justified French actions by declaring that 'an Anglophone cannot be president of Cameroon' (Fonchingong 1998: 130). When international donors decided to suspend their allocation of structural adjustment loans to the regime after these elections, Cameroon became first on the list of French aid beneficiaries in 1993 and France rescued the regime with two new loans.

According to Fonchingong (1998: 130-31), the French also sought to discredit the SDF and its Anglophone leadership in various ways. For instance, the French secret police are said to have fabricated incriminating documents linking Fru Ndi to illegal arms imports. Moreover, the French ambassador, Gilles Vidal, and other French embassy officials undertook several missions to the Francophone stronghold of the SDF, the West Province, to persuade the Bamileke elite and traditional rulers to distance themselves from the SDF. In addition, they encouraged the regime to create satellite parties with Bamileke leadership so as to weaken local support for the SDF. There are even secret reports that France and the CPDM regime were sponsoring a Bamileke front within the SDF in a bid either to grab the chairmanship of the Anglophone Fru Ndi or spark disorder in the party.

Curiously, the other international donors have never publicly contested French partisanship, most probably out of consideration for the longstanding close relations between France and Cameroon. While continuously stressing the need for 'good governance', they themselves have actually displayed a rather ambivalent attitude towards the regime, often justified in terms of 'realpolitik'. The United States is a good example in this respect. By the end of 1994, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) decided to stop its activities in the country after having concluded that 'the undemocratic political climate in Cameroon did not permit

aid to be utilised in the most judicious manner' (Fonchingong 1998: 131-32). This drastic action, however, does not alter the fact that the United States has been of great assistance to the regime through regular debt rescheduling agreements, without which it might have collapsed.

The Commonwealth performance has been particularly disappointing to the Anglophone population.<sup>13</sup> Following Cameroon's application for Commonwealth membership in 1989, the SDF and the Anglophone movements have frequently appealed to the Commonwealth authorities to keep Cameroon out of the Commonwealth until the Biya government had realised significant democratic reforms, improved upon its poor human rights record and accepted the Anglophone proposal for a federal structure. To the consternation of the Anglophone leaders, it was announced on 16 October 1995 that Cameroon had been admitted into the Commonwealth.

There appear to have been two reasons for its admission. First, the Commonwealth found it hard to reject Cameroon's application on the basis of the 1991 Harare Declaration as there was ample evidence that the democratic records of some of its African member states, like Nigeria and Kenya, were even poorer than that of Cameroon. Second, the Commonwealth generally believed that admission would be a more effective option than non-admission in terms of the advancement of the democratisation in Cameroon. Once in, Commonwealth members would bring pressures to bear on the Cameroonian government to introduce political reforms.

After admission, the Commonwealth has sent regular missions to Cameroon, urging the government to speed up the democratisation process, including the introduction of fair elections. All these efforts appear to have had minimal effects in spite of repeated promises by the Biya government that it would execute certain Commonwealth reform proposals and seek financial assistance for their implementation.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the Commonwealth authorities have not yet resorted to any punitive measures, such as the withdrawal of financial assistance, to oblige the Biya government to comply with the Harare Declaration.

## The SDF in disarray

Of late, the SDF appears to have lost much of its initial appeal. Many party members who have continued to support the party in the face of frequent harassment by the security forces are becoming disillusioned with the party's apparent abandonment of its initial social-democratic ideals, as well as with its leadership's growing disunity, opportunism and struggles for power. The party that once stood united behind Fru Ndi is now deeply divided and in shambles.

Most observers agree that important divergences began to occur within the party when its leadership took the controversial decision to enter into state institutions after the fraudulent 1996 municipal and 1997 parliamentary elections. It justified its decision in terms of 'opening a new front against the regime'. Many party members, however, specifically contested the party's entry into parliament, which they perceived as an act of legitimisation of the very regime that the party had continuously confronted for seven years. Moreover, they wondered how the tiny SDF parliamentary group, which occupied only 43 out of a total of 180 seats (see Table 3.1), could pretend to 'cause an earthquake in a parliament dominated by the CPDM'. They became more and more convinced that the party leadership's eagerness to enter parliament was first and foremost motivated by its growing tendency to sacrifice vision and principle for expediency or for what John Fru Ndi himself has called 'belletics', the 'politics of the belly' (Bayart 1989). They claimed that their leaders had lost hope of ever taking over power since elections continued to be rigged by the regime, and they were therefore seeking a share of the 'national cake' as a form of compensation for their multiple sacrifices for the sake of the party. In June 2000, the former SDF press secretary, Mr Larry Eyang Echaw, charged that 'the moral high ground on which the SDF stood to criticise the CPDM government had been lost as its parliamentarians are mired in the muddy nature of *Ngoa-Ekelle gombo* (that is the prebendal politics in parliament)'. He even alleged that the party's chairman, John Fru Ndi, was involved in 'belletics' himself because he 'had cast his greedy eyes on the salaries and budgets of SDF parliamentarians'.<sup>15</sup> His serious allegation was supported a few years later by Sani Alhadji, the former SDF chairman

of the Centre and South Provinces. The latter claimed that the party did not keep proper accounts, which facilitated Fru Ndi's entry into the 'bourgeoisie', as is evidenced by his current ownership of the largest plantations and herds of cattle in the North West. Sani Alhadji also revealed how Fru Ndi spent the public subsidy of FCFA 456 million for financing the party's participation in the 2002 elections: he used most of the money to recover his twelve-month salary arrears and to buy two luxury jeeps for private use while allocating only a meagre sum of FCFA 75,000 to each of the constituencies for campaigning purposes.<sup>16</sup>

There was also growing resistance to the party's lack of internal democracy and tolerance towards dissenting views. Real power in the party was increasingly concentrated in its chairman John Fru Ndi and a small group of clients, most of them originating from the same ethnic group in the North West as Fru Ndi, namely the Meta (Dillon 1973). Its most prominent members include Joseph Mbah Ndam, leader of the SDF parliamentary group, Professor Clement Ngwasiri, SDF founding member and since 2002 member of Parliament, Emmanuel Yoyo, SDF questor in parliament, and Martin Fon Yembe, SDF chairman of the North West Province. It is widely believed that they have been largely responsible for the party's shift from confrontational politics to rapprochement and have been regularly advocating an extension of the already overwhelming powers of Fru Ndi, which is clearly at odds with the emphasis on collegiality and democratisation of power in the party's statutes. This group of hardliners strongly oppose any fundamental criticism of the party's current power structures, policy lines and strategies.

A group of progressive party leaders condemns the increasing concentration of power in the hands of the chairman and his inner circle as being detrimental to the development of a democratic culture within the party and the democratic image the party advertises. The most prominent reformers originate from the South West Province and Francophone part of the country, including Professor Tazoacha Asonganyi, the SDF secretary-general, Professor Ndiva Kofele-Kale, chairman of the SDF Foreign Affairs Committee, Chief Alex Taku, SDF secretary for propaganda and education, Sani Alhadji, former SDF chairman of the Centre and South Provinces, and Samuel Tchwenko, former Fru Ndi's personal

physician and member of the SDF national executive committee. They particularly opposed the tendency of Fru Ndi to personally recruit new party leaders, selecting them almost exclusively from his group of clients. They were shocked when he decided to violently intervene in the election of the party's provincial chairmen in 2000/2001 so as to forestall the election of his critics. They therefore looked for instruments to curtail his powers in these matters.

In the course of 2001 Professor Ndiva Kofele-Kale tabled a motion during a national executive committee meeting in which he proposed the creation of an independent investiture committee responsible for the selection of candidates for party leadership. Not surprisingly, Fru Ndi and his inner circle strongly disapproved of his bold initiative. Two of its members, Joseph Mbah Ndam and Emmanuel Yoyo, used the North West Provincial Conference held at Batibo on 13-14 July 2001 to expose what they called the diabolic intentions of Professor Kofele-Kale and his group in proposing a motion that would strip the national chairman of his powers and thus facilitate his overthrow.<sup>17</sup> In an interview with Radio France International on 20 August 2001, Fru Ndi said that the Kofele-Kale group formed a threat to the unity of the party and were out to destroy it.<sup>18</sup> During the SDF convention in Bamenda in October 2001, Fru Ndi and his group succeeded in persuading delegates to vote against the motion.<sup>19</sup>

The conflict between the two camps exploded after the 30 June 2002 municipal and parliamentary elections. On 6 July, the party's national executive committee decided to boycott all the municipal and parliamentary seats the SDF had won at the polls. This decision was taken to protest against renewed massive rigging of the elections and to force the regime to conduct new elections.<sup>20</sup> Four days later, however, Fru Ndi unilaterally lifted the embargo and it was soon discovered that his action was part of a secret peace accord with the CPDM that would enable the SDF to negotiate the appointment of some of its leaders into positions in the Biya government.<sup>21</sup> In protest, a number of reformers, mostly Francophones, then decided to resign from the party. They accused Fru Ndi of being 'more dictatorial than Stalin' and a staunch tribalist who aimed at transforming the SDF from a national into a North West party.

Above all, it is no longer clear what the party stands for. Members are confused by the repeated changes in policies and strategies propagated by the party's chairman, Fru Ndi. A few examples will suffice here. In the first years of the party's existence, Fru Ndi condemned French imperialism and called for a boycott of French goods. A few years later, he was eagerly seeking French support after having painfully realised that he could not do without it in his attempts to seize power. In 1997, he declared: 'No good laws, no elections'. Without having been able to revise the electoral system, he nevertheless called for participation in the 2002 elections. During the October 2001 party convention in Bamenda, he declared in his policy speech that his party would resume its confrontational policies of the early 1990s. A year later, however, he concluded a peace treaty with the CPDM and sought his party's participation in a broadly based Biya government. Party members were astonished when, at the end of 2002, he tried in vain to enter into negotiations with the CPDM about the creation of an independent electoral commission despite the fact that earlier negotiations on this issue had utterly failed in 1998.<sup>22</sup>

As a result of these developments, SDF membership has declined catastrophically and the party's current position is indeed serious. Since the 2002 parliamentary elections, its influence has been largely restricted to its traditional stronghold, the North West Province. The huge crowds attending SDF rallies and demonstrations have decreased in numbers considerably. Most intellectuals inside and outside the party no longer take Fru Ndi seriously, having come to consider him as a major obstacle to democratic change. Increasingly they are asking for his resignation to save the party from total collapse.

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show that the SDF, led by John Fru Ndi, has achieved significant success in mobilising the people for social-democratic change in Cameroon, with the party rapidly becoming one of the largest and most popular opposition parties on the African continent. Paradoxically, the party has failed to either capture power or force the Biya regime to bring about any political transformations that could have deepened and consolidated the

country's democratic transition. The euphoria that characterised the early period following the SDF's appearance on the political scene has been greatly reduced and has made way for disillusionment. The party appears to have lost most of the dynamism that made it a critical force in the country's politics in the early 1990s (Mbaku 2002; Takougang 2003a).

Several reasons have been given in this chapter to explain the SDF's failure to seize power and effect social-democratic change in the country. First, the party was unable to reach consensus on the Anglophone problem, leading to frequent confrontations between Anglophone and Francophone party leaders and, eventually, to several defections, dismissals and resignations. Second, the incumbent regime has used its control over the state apparatus to set increasing limitations on the freedom and functioning of opposition parties. Moreover, it has been able to divide the opposition, thereby capitalising on existing ethno-regional tensions and conflicts. It has also exploited to the full the ambivalent and inconsistent role of western donors and creditors towards democratic governance in the country. The IMF and the World Bank depend upon the ruling regime's continuous cooperation for the successful implementation of the structural adjustment programme to such an extent that they tend to confine themselves to quiet diplomacy, except in cases of extreme violations of human rights. Conversely, they decline to negotiate with the opposition. They have even expressed their strong disapproval of certain oppositional actions, such as the 1991 'ghost town' campaign, which they perceived as a public onslaught on the already shattered national economy, and as obstructing structural adjustment (Konings 1996a). Undoubtedly, in its struggle for survival in the early 1990s, the Biya regime owes a special debt to France, which has tried to safeguard its economic interests in Cameroon by regularly assisting the regime in overcoming internal and external opposition to its rule.

And last but not least, following its failure to seize power, the SDF leadership has become increasingly divided about future lines of action and strategy. It appears to be becoming more and more trapped in the regime's logic of *démocratie apaisée* – the transformation of confrontational politics into participation in state institutions – providing ample space for opportunism and prebendal politics. In



many respects, the party has come to resemble the ruling CPDM party: patron-client relationships, a lack of internal democracy, intolerance of dissenting views, and the absence of any clear vision or programme for Cameroon's 'future' (Nyamnjoh 1999).

It is interesting to observe that two recent studies based on extensive samples of election results have come to totally different conclusions about the future of multiparty systems in Africa. On the one hand, van de Walle's study presents a rather pessimistic view, emphasising the illiberal nature of most of the new African democracies, their characteristic centralisation of power around the presidency, and the pervasive clientelism that structures the relationship between the state and the citizenry (van de Walle 2003). On the other hand, Lindberg's study offers a more optimistic view, claiming that there have been significant improvements in the democratic quality of competitive elections in Africa in terms of participation, competition and legitimacy (Lindberg 2004). In my study, I have provided substantial evidence that Cameroon belongs among what Lindberg calls 'deviant cases' in a generally more promising trend in Africa. While Lindberg largely fails to account for such deviant cases, my study shows that van de Walle's explanatory framework appears to be more helpful in explaining why liberal democracy in Cameroon has stalled.

## Notes

1. For recent studies of the SDF written from a different perspective, see Fombad & Fonyam (2004); Nguini (2004); and Krieger (2008).
2. Similar to other parties in Africa, the SDF has continued to attract a predominantly urban membership. See Buijtenhuijs & Thiriot (1995: 89-91).
3. For a more detailed discussion of the Anglophone problem, see Chapter 5.
4. See, for instance, *Today*, 20 March 1995, pp. 1 and 5; *Weekly Post*, 26-31 July 1994, p. 4;
5. Southern Cameroons was the name of the Anglophone territory in the period preceding reunification in 1961. Following political liberalisation in the early 1990s, it was reintroduced by the newly created Anglophone movements.



6. SCNCforum, 19 May 2000, 'Can the SDF solve the Anglophone problem?' by N.N. Susungi.
7. *The Herald*, 11 June 2000.
8. SCNCforum, 19 May 2000, 'Fru Ndi dissociates SDF from Southern Cameroons independence'.
9. *Ibid.*, 18 May 2000, 'SDF disagrees with SCNC over May 20 boycott'.
10. The SDF pursuit of power was reflected in slogans like 'Biya Must Go' and 'Sangmelima don Fall (SDF)'. Sangmelima is the town where Biya was born.
11. See 'Significance of P.M. Musonge's Appointment' by a member of the South West elite, Kome Epule, in *The Star Headlines*, 20 November 1996, p. 5.
12. The term Sawa was generally employed by the 'native' Duala to refer to themselves as coastal people. The term was subsequently extended to related coastal people in the Francophone Littoral Province and Anglophone South West Province. Of late, ethnic groups in the Littoral and South West Provinces living at a distance from the coast have also come to identify themselves with this appellation. See Yenshu (1998).
13. For a detailed account of the tense relations between the Anglophone movements and the Commonwealth, see Konings & Nyamnjoh (2003: 96-99).
14. For some reports on Commonwealth missions to Cameroon, see, for instance, *The Herald*, 28 August 2000, and 26 June 2003.
15. Quoted in *The Post*, 5 June 2000, pp. 1-3.
16. See *The Herald*, 26 July 2002; and *Le Messenger, World Edition*, 23 August 2002.
17. *The Post*, 20 July 2001, p. 3.
18. *Le Messenger, World Edition*, 29 August 2001.
19. *The Herald*, 12-19 October 2001.
20. *Ibid.*, 17 July 2002.
21. *Ibid.*, 26 July 2002.
22. *Ibid.*, 20 December 2002.

## The neoliberalising Cameroonian state and private capital accumulation

### Introduction

Faced with deep and prolonged economic and political crises, African governments have been compelled by international financial institutions and donors to adopt neoliberal reform packages. Some of the major tenets of neoliberalism are the call for less and better government, usually framed in terms of ‘good governance’, and the promotion of both domestic and foreign private enterprise, which should act as the motor of economic growth and development. Despite converging tendencies, the outcome of this neoliberal agenda appears not to have been uniform because of variations in the neoliberal policies of the different African regimes and the existing structures of economic and political power. This study focuses on Cameroon and explores the continuities and changes in the relations between state and private capital accumulation as a result of neoliberal globalisation.

Curiously, although there is a growing body of literature on neoliberal globalisation in Africa in general, and Cameroon in particular, its effects on private capital accumulation and state-capital relations appear not to have been widely studied (Pitcher 2002). This is surprising because, since the 1970s, there has been a lively debate on these issues in Africa, especially in Kenya, inspired by the dependencia theory (Leys 1994). The dependistas (the majority) sought to show that African private capital was weak economically and politically, and that the subsequent alliance between the African ‘comprador’ elite and foreign capital was responsible for the drain of capital from the periphery to the metropolis. The anti-dependistas, in contrast, argued that while private African capital was relatively weak, it had grown significantly and relatively quickly after independence thanks to close links with

the state apparatus, and could be expected to become still stronger. Although the dependency-inspired literature suffered serious limitations in theoretical and empirical terms, it has had the merit of drawing the attention of researchers to the importance of state-capital relations in the process of capitalist development.

Of all the neoliberal policy prescriptions, two – namely privatisation and global open markets – appear to have had the greatest effect on relations between state and private capital accumulation in Cameroon and in many other parts of Africa. Privatisation called for a re-evaluation of relations between public and private sectors on the continent. Under pressure from international donors, African governments have been urged to reduce the scope of state ownership and enhance private-sector development. International donors tended to attribute the massive growth of state enterprises after independence and their generally poor performance to the ‘bad governance’ of African neopatrimonial regimes. They claimed that statist conceptions of development resulted in the widespread politicisation of economic decision-making and the rent-seeking behaviour of the parasitic political elite.

Their criticism is undeniably justified to a certain extent but, as I have argued elsewhere (Konings 2004a), it tends to underestimate the importance of a series of other factors responsible for public-sector expansion. The view that the state should be the prime motor of development was widely shared in the 1960s, and ownership and intervention by the state were accepted as the dominant development paradigm. Public-sector expansion was also encouraged by the fact that, at independence, Africa’s economies were characterised by a weak and subordinate domestic private sector and foreign control. Most post-colonial governments tried to forestall the development of a national bourgeoisie, which they regarded as a potential political threat, and to reduce foreign dominance. Attaining greater ownership and control of the ‘commanding heights’ of the economy would enable them to influence the broad direction of national development. Subsequently, the parastatal sector came to be viewed as ‘national patrimony’ and sales to foreigners were regarded negatively. And, last but not least, state expansion was an essential element in the maintenance and

consolidation of power of African neopatrimonial regimes. It created ample space for patronage politics that laid a solid foundation for co-opting the various ethno-regional factions into the 'hegemonic alliance' (Bayart 1979) and thus secured a considerable measure of political stability for the post-colonial state.

Paradoxically, as this chapter attempts to demonstrate, most of these factors continue to influence the privatisation process in Cameroon. Privatisation has been slow, not only because of numerous technical constraints but also because of the regime's neopatrimonial logic. It has often been marked by a lack of transparency and accountability, enabling the parasitic political elite to engage in a variety of rent-seeking activities. It has also led to fierce conflict between ethno-regional factions within the hegemonic alliance about lucrative takeovers. In the absence of a well-developed domestic capitalist class and in an effort to discourage any takeovers by dominant ethnic entrepreneurial groups, the regime has sought an alliance with foreign capital, which it considered to be of mutual advantage. It has brought about a concentration of foreign capital in the most strategic sectors of the economy and minority participation of the Cameroonian state and private investors in foreign concerns. While there is growing resistance in Cameroonian society to what is called 'recolonisation', the government claims that such joint ventures will make a significant contribution to economic recovery, guarantee some measure of national control over the operations of transnational enterprises, and offer the political elite and allied entrepreneurial groups new opportunities for capital accumulation.

A second neoliberal prescription – global open markets – has had the unintended effect of stimulating transnational criminal activities in African countries that suffer from the nefarious effects of the economic crisis and economic liberalisation. Engagement in transnational criminal networks has become a new form of rapid private capital accumulation. Despite a lack of clear figures, it is becoming increasingly evident that Africa's share in transnational criminal activity has expanded on an unprecedented scale (Bayart *et al.* 1999; Shaw 2002; Bayart 2004), having conquered a substantial part of the most profitable markets of developed economies, such as those in drugs, diamonds, illegal immigration and high-value

minerals. International donors have often blamed the predatory African political elite for the enormous increase in the parallel economy and criminal activities during the economic crisis and economic liberalisation. However, Bayart *et al.* (1999) allege that the African political elite itself has become increasingly involved in transnational criminal networks.

This chapter focuses on the emergence of transnational criminal networks outside the state, in particular among young, poorly educated Cameroonian men (and increasingly also women) who have been the major victims of neoliberal policies. Through involvement in such networks, they have succeeded in amassing fabulous wealth in a short space of time. Interestingly, they are inclined to re-invest their ill-gotten gains in a variety of legal entrepreneurial activities and even in the pursuit of political power. They form one of the exceptional examples of autonomous domestic private capital accumulation in Africa's post-colonial history. As Sklar (1979: 531-52) already pointed out many years ago, politics became the primary mechanism of class formation in Africa, as national accumulation was closely linked to political power. Little wonder then that the Cameroonian regime has devised several strategies to bring this autonomous mode of private capital accumulation under state control, including attempts to co-opt these young entrepreneurs into the hegemonic alliance.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the pattern of economic and political power prior to neoliberal globalisation. The second section analyses the continuities and changes in the structure of economic and political power as a result of privatisation, and the third section concentrates on transnational criminal networks as a new avenue to domestic private capital accumulation.

### The post-colonial state and capital accumulation

At independence and reunification in 1961, Cameroon inherited an economy characterised by foreign control, especially French capital, and the almost complete absence of any domestic private capital (Hugon 1968). Given this situation, those now in positions of power, and headed by President Ahmadou Ahidjo (1961-82), soon launched

a development strategy called planned liberalism (cf. Ndongko 1985; Fonge 2004), which championed both an intensification of state intervention, notably by establishing state-owned companies, and the encouragement of private investment. Similar development strategies were implemented in most other African states, albeit under different names. In this section, I intend to explore the socioeconomic groups that became the main beneficiaries of this planned liberalism and their relations with the state.

Like their counterparts elsewhere in Africa (cf. Grosh & Makandala 1994; Tangri 1999), the Cameroonian authorities made a formidable effort to stimulate parastatal sector growth (Tedga 1990; van de Walle 1994; Konings 2004a). From the handful of public enterprises inherited from the French and British Trusteeship Authorities, the Cameroonian parastatal sector grew to 219 enterprises by the mid-1980s, employing approximately 100,000 people. Generally, statist conceptions of development, together with economic nationalism and the need for political patronage, led to an excessive growth of state-owned enterprises (Tangri 1999: 19-22).

State expansion afforded prebendal and patronage possibilities and was, therefore, seen by the African political elite as a valuable mechanism in the consolidation and maintenance of political power. According to van de Walle (1994: 155-6), public enterprise in Cameroon 'proved to be an ideal instrument to distribute state resources in the form of jobs, rents, power and prestige, enabling the president to reward allies and co-opt opponents, and thus secure his own power base'. A patrimonial logic existed in many African post-colonial states (Chabal & Daloz 1999), but was particularly forceful in Cameroon, a country with stark ethno-regional cleavages (Gabriel 1999; Nyamnjoh 1999). State resources could be used to forge the ethno-regional alliances among the various elite groups necessary for national unity and political stability and to obviate the need for coercion (Bayart 1979).

In his masterful study *Who Rules Cameroon?*, Ngayap (1983) notes that the managers of the largest parastatals were rarely chosen because of their technical competence; they were instead selected by virtue of their political ties. Thus, according to Ngayap, 79 percent of managers were part of the bureaucratic-political elite, having previously served in top government positions as ministers, senior

members of the president's staff, or secretaries-general (Ngayap 1983: 248; see also Tedga 1990). If public enterprises in Africa have recorded mediocre results, it is almost exclusively due to the fact that they have been systematically plundered for purposes of enrichment and the accumulation of power by members of the bureaucratic and political elite (Hibou 1999; van de Walle 2001).

The political importance of state-owned enterprises is evident from the fact that the Cameroonian government used to subsidise parastatal-sector losses to the tune of FCFA 150 million a year prior to the start of the economic crisis in the mid-1980s. Though much of Cameroon's oil revenue continued to be kept in secret bank accounts, one of its major functions soon became the covering of parastatal deficits. In a 1987 review of the Cameroonian economy, the World Bank summarised its conclusion in uncharacteristically colourful terms: 'The good performance of the Cameroonian economy is badly eroded by the festering sore of the public-enterprise sector' (World Bank 1987: 3).

In addition to increased state intervention, Ahidjo was convinced of the vital importance of private initiative in his pursuit of rapid economic growth and development. Like most other African heads of state, he came to rely more on foreign than on domestic private capital for two main reasons. First, foreign investors were not considered to form an alternative centre of power to the incumbent political elite. And second, private foreign investment was seen as indispensable for Africa's development in terms of capital resources, technology, market access, employment, management and tax revenues. In his efforts to attract foreign private capital, Ahidjo designed an investment code that offered foreign entrepreneurs generous incentives to invest in Cameroon including preferential tax treatment, subsidies for recruiting and training any necessary manpower, government contracts, subsidised bank loans, enhanced access to imported and domestic raw materials, and easy repatriation of profits (Ndongko 1987; DeLancey 1989).

In many ways, a coincidence of interests developed between the African state and foreign investors. Indeed, some authors refer to the 'symbiotic relationship between multinationals and state' in Africa (Tangri 1999: 113). On the one hand, foreign capital enjoyed a considerable measure of autonomy and substantial benefits while



conducting its operations in Africa. On the other hand, foreign investment tended to contribute to economic and social progress and enhance the political legitimacy of African regimes. In addition, foreign business has provided a variety of financial favours to the African political elite in exchange for political support. Some of the other benefits of foreign investment to the African elite include coveted directorships, partnerships and share holdings, all of which can be used for personal or political advancement.

From the late 1960s onwards, many African governments began to adopt a more critical stance towards foreign capital, claiming that it was antithetical to economic development and national sovereignty. Some countries, like Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zaire, pursued policies of nationalisation that specifically targeted Middle Eastern and South Asian businesses (van de Walle 2001: 113). In other African countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria, the governments initiated policies that required specific percentages of ownership of foreign concerns to be placed in indigenous hands (Biersteker 1987; Tangri 1999). In sharp contrast to this widespread resentment in Africa towards foreign domination and exploitation, the Cameroonian government continued to court foreign investment. Being one of the most prosperous and stable countries in Africa (Konings 1996a), Cameroon was able to attract new foreign capital inflows in spite of the drastic decline in direct foreign investment rates in Africa since the 1970s. In 1960, some 17 percent of total direct foreign investment to developing countries went to Africa but by the mid-1980s Africa's share had plummeted to less than 5 percent (Tangri 1999: 116). It was not until the severe economic crisis started in the mid-1980s that a dramatic drop in direct foreign investment in Cameroon could be observed, and even a withdrawal of some foreign concerns from the country.

With a few exceptions, such as Botswana, Ivory Coast and Kenya where local capitalists had achieved a stronghold in the state apparatus (Kennedy 1988; Rapley 1993; Berman & Leys 1994), African governments have failed to actively support domestic private initiatives. The main reason appears to be political. Nearly all African governments viewed the prospect of an autonomous domestic capitalist class with concern, seeing it as a potential threat to their positions of power. Possibilities for private domestic capital



accumulation therefore remained largely restricted to those socioeconomic groups that maintained or developed close links with the state apparatus. Similar to most other African countries (Forrest 1994), there were two main groups in Cameroon that took advantage of state patronage to create or expand private enterprise.

The first group was made up of the parasitic bureaucratic and political elite who had used their position of power to pillage state resources. Most of them were inclined to either squander their newly acquired wealth in conspicuous consumption or to deposit it in foreign bank accounts (Joseph 1987; MacGaffey 1987). Only a small minority tended to invest in productive enterprise. Some tried to combine political office with entrepreneurial activities, while others resigned from office to devote themselves fully to private capital accumulation.

The career of Pierre Tchanque seems to be representative of this group. From modest origins, this bureaucrat from the Bamileke region in Francophone Cameroon rose to the pinnacles of state administration before starting his own business. Having been Secretary-General at the Ministry of Finance from 1966 to 1969, Assistant-Director General in the state investment company *La Société Nationale d' Investissement* (SNI) from 1969 to 1970, and Secretary-General of the *Union Douanière des États de l'Afrique Centrale* (UDEAC) from 1971 to 1977, he left the public sector. In 1979, he launched a major new brewery, *Nouvelles Brasseries Africaines* (NOBRA), with the help of capital from the SNI and significant tax and tariff breaks. To reflect his new status, Tchanque was appointed to the Central Committee of the nation's single party, the Cameroon National Union (CNU) (Ngayap 1983; van de Walle 1993).

The second group consists of a relatively small number of large domestic entrepreneurs. They initially started accumulating capital independently but eventually developed close links with the state and were able to expand their business activities when they were co-opted into the hegemonic alliance by the Ahidjo regime (Bayart 1979). Although Ahidjo constantly emphasised the need for an ethnic balance in the distribution of economic and political power, there is, nevertheless, sufficient evidence that entrepreneurs from two ethnic groups enjoyed a privileged position in opportunities for

capital accumulation (Ngayap 1983; Konings 1996a). These were, first of all, Fulbe entrepreneurs, especially those from Garoua, Ahidjo's hometown. And second there were the Bamileke entrepreneurs who were given ample room for capital accumulation, notably in the era of the UPC rebellion within their territory, on condition that they supported his regime (see Chapter 2).

It is certain that Ahidjo's patronage politics have been of great help in allowing the Bamileke to become the leading force in Cameroonian business. The Bamileke ethnic group is known, and often feared, in Cameroon for its assumed dynamism and entrepreneurial spirit (Dongmo 1981; Warnier 1993). It values a disciplined and ascetic lifestyle, encouraging its members to re-invest any accumulated capital in expanded production rather than squander it in conspicuous consumption. The bibliographies of the older generation of Bamileke businessmen are as edifying as those of the great self-made American business magnates. Being poorly educated, they began their careers as petty traders and artisans during colonial rule. Through hard work and thrift they were able to save money in rotating credit associations, the so-called *tontines* (Henry *et al.* 1991). They used these savings for the gradual expansion of their businesses and by the end of the colonial period they had already succeeded in setting up their first large-scale enterprises. Following independence, they were able to diversify their entrepreneurial activities and to move into industrial production by establishing close links with the state, and foreign capital.

The life-story of Victor Fotso, one of the biggest Cameroonian businessmen, is a good example of the kind of business careers the first generation of Bamileke entrepreneurs enjoyed. Born around 1936, Fotso entered the Catholic school in Baleng at the age of seven but a year later he was forced to leave to help his father grow manioc and bananas. As he recalled later in his autobiography (Fotso & Guyomard 1994), it was at the nearby market in Hiala that he was introduced to basic trading techniques. He soon migrated to the south where he became a travelling petty trader. He spent only a tiny part of his profits on food and clothing in order to save enough money to expand his business. In 1956 he opened a large store in the centre of Mbalmayo, a town near the capital Yaoundé, offering a variety of imported goods. His business prospered and, after

independence, he began to diversify his activities, moving first into transport and later into the import of wine and alcoholic drinks after entering into a partnership with the Frenchman Pierre Castel, the owner of *Brasseries et Glacières Internationales* (BGI). A few years later he set up his first industrial enterprise with the assistance of another Frenchman, Jacques Lacombe, the director of *La Société Industrielle et Forestière des Allumettes* (SIFA). He now owns a large number of factories involved in the production of matches, notebooks, batteries, packing materials, chemicals, food and agro-industrial commodities. He also owns real estate, a hotel (Ibis Douala) and the Commercial Bank of Cameroon (CBC), created with the technical assistance of *Crédit Commercial de France* (Fotso & Guyomard 1994; Ngayap 1983).

Fotso and other prominent Bamileke businessmen such as Kadji Defosso, Paul Monthé, André Souhaing and Pierre Monkam, were co-opted into either the Central Committee or the Political Bureau of the single party, the Cameroon National Union (CNU), during its fifth National Congress in 1980. Their close links with the state apparatus have given them similar opportunities for private capital accumulation as the bureaucratic and political elite, namely, privileged access to public loans and contracts, as well as ample space to engage in a variety of corrupt and illegal practices including the evasion of taxes and import duties. Since the 1970s, this older generation of Cameroonian businessmen has been joined by a younger generation of university-trained professionals.

A significant change in political power and chances for private capital accumulation occurred in 1982 when Ahidjo suddenly resigned from office. His successor, Paul Biya, encountered difficulties in consolidating power (Konings 1996a; Takougang & Krieger 1998). As a consequence, he began to appoint an increasing number of the bureaucratic and political elite from his own ethnic group, the Beti, to pivotal positions in the administration, security organs and public enterprises (Takougang 1993). He also attempted to undermine the dominant position of Bamileke entrepreneurs and Fulbe wholesale traders by promoting a new class of businessmen from his own region. This was only partly successful since the Beti generally lack the business acumen of the Bamileke and Fulbe and tend to squander any accumulated capital (Tedga 1990; Rowlands

1993). Moreover, it would appear that the new regime's *barons* are much bolder in staking out claims to the state's resources than Ahidjo's supporters ever were. Corruption and rent-seeking had always been fundamental characteristics of the regime but after 1984 they increased to the point of being dysfunctional (van de Walle 1993).

Economic liberalisation has thwarted further growth in the domestic private sector. With the removal of, or reduction in, trade restrictions and protection, African markets have been exposed to a flood of foreign exports. Competition from foreign manufacturers has undermined the fortunes of numerous domestic businesses, and many local manufacturing firms have experienced severe financial distress and have had to close down.

### Privatisation and capital concentration

Privatisation has become a crucial issue on the neoliberal globalisation agenda. In 1988-89, the Bretton Woods institutions forced the neopatrimonial regime in Cameroon to adopt a structural adjustment programme, making privatisation a cornerstone of their lending conditions. They claimed that divestiture would bring about a more efficient and productive economy on the grounds that it would depoliticise economic decisions and also end the mismanagement and corruption endemic in enterprises controlled by politicians. Moreover, it would solve the problem of rising budgetary deficits and in the process generate revenue that could be used to pay off government debt. And, above all, it would enhance the scope of the private sector, producing a desirable change in the balance of power between the state and the private sector. In this section, I explore whether privatisation has actually led to a decline in the political elite's neopatrimonial and rent-seeking activities and a significant change in the chances for private capital accumulation. In other words, which of the existing socioeconomic groups has benefited most from privatisation?

There is considerable evidence that the Biya regime has been extremely reluctant to sell state-owned enterprises, which it looks upon as a threat to its patronage politics and the maintenance and consolidation of its power. Consequently, the initiation and

execution of a privatisation programme has been slow in Cameroon. In 1991, a World Bank mission expressed its dissatisfaction with the government's performance, pointing to the delay in establishing effective government agencies to oversee the process, the government's reluctance to sell off anything but bankrupt and inconsequential enterprises, in-fighting over which firms would be the first to be sold or liquidated, and foot-dragging over issuing tenders and devising criteria against which bids could be assessed (Walker 1998: 4). Again, in its 1994 report *Adjustment in Africa: Reforms, Results and the Road Ahead*, the World Bank asserted that little progress had been made in Cameroon in the area of privatisation (World Bank 1994a). The report rated Cameroon in the bottom range of economic policy and adjustment performance and pointed out that the IMF had signed and cancelled three successive stand-by agreements because of the government's failure to achieve its negotiated targets (World Bank 1994a).

The slow progress of privatisation is clear in the number of privatisations that took place between 1989 and 2005. Out of the 219 state-owned enterprises at the start of the process, the government eventually decided to liquidate 87 and to privatise 30. Despite the limited number of enterprises on the divestiture list, no more than 20 had actually been sold by 2005 (see Table 4.1). Compared to some other African countries, such as Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda and Mali (Bennell 1997; Campbell White & Bhatia 1998; Tangri & Mwenda 2001; Pitcher 2002; Rakner 2003), this would seem to be a disappointing result both in number and implementation. However, one should not overlook the fact that privatisation in Cameroon, though limited, is a complex process for technical and political reasons. Many of the Cameroonian parastatals set for divestiture are large and strategic enterprises, notably in the agro-industrial sector, transport, communications and public utilities.

Although the neopatrimonial logic of the regime tended to slow down the privatisation process in Cameroon, it soon became evident that privatisation itself did not altogether foreclose rent-seeking opportunities for the parasitic bureaucratic and political elite. Indeed, some of its members have actually been benefiting from it. For politicians responsible for the privatisation process, privatisation measures have frequently been an opportunity for corrupt practices.

Divestiture has mostly been a far from open and transparent process and, in return for the payment of substantial kickbacks, public enterprises have been sold at prices far below their true value. There are even reports of embezzlement of the proceeds from sales (Kangue Ejangue & Noubissié Ngankam 1995; Nguihé Kanté 2003; Tsafack-Nanfosso 2004). Moreover, privatisation has not necessarily excluded members of the bureaucratic and political elite from occupying top positions in former state-owned enterprises: some have been reappointed and others have been newly recruited.

Table 4.1 *Privatised State Enterprises in Cameroon*

<b>Enterprise</b>	<b>Sector of activity</b>	<b>Buyer</b>	<b>Foreign participation (%)</b>
OCB	agro-industry	Compagnie Fruitière de Marseille (France) in 1991	70
SOCAMAC	harbour handling	CCEI Bank (France) in 1991	51
CHOCOCAM	cocoa industry	Barry SA (France) in 1991	70.7
SEPBC	forest reserve	Delmas (France) in 1992	70
COCAM	plywood	Khoury (Lebanon) in 1992	87.6
SCDM	metallurgy	Hobum Afrika (Germany) in 1994	86.6
HEVECAM	agro-industry	Golden Millennium Group (Malaysia/Indonesia) in 1994	90
REGIFERCAM	railways	SAGA (France) and COMAZAR (South Africa) in 1994	77

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ONDAPB	agriculture and livestock	Fadil/Daniel Yok (Cameroon) in 1995	34
SOFIBEL	forestry	Fadil (Cameroon) in 1995	45
SPFS-SRL	agro-industry	SIPH (France) in 1995	92
CAMSHIP	shipping	several Cameroonian investors in 1997	48.2
CEPER	printing	MUPEC Cooperative (Cameroon) in 1998	0
CAMSUCO	agro-industry	Vilgrain (France) in 1998	98.1
BICIC	banking	Banques Populaires (France) in 1998	52.5
SOCAPALM	agro-industry	PALCAM/COGEPART (France) in 1999	60
CAMTEL	mobile phones	MTN (South Africa) and Telecom (France) in 2000	100
SONEL	electricity	AES-Sirocco (USA) in 2001	56
CDC	agro-industry (tea sector)	Brobon Finex (South Africa) in 2002	65
Douala Port	container terminals	MAERSK (Denmark) and Bolloré (France) in 2004	59

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*Source:* Tsafack-Nanfosso (2004); and Bagui Kari (2001).

The Biya government has regularly expressed its determination to promote the participation of private domestic capital in privatisations and even to give it priority in the process (Atangana Mebara 1997: 62). For example, in a press release on 1 November 1994, the inter-ministerial Commission for Privatisation stressed ‘the need for creating instruments that could guarantee a consistent and balanced participation of nationals in the share capital of any enterprise set for divestiture’ (Nguihé Kanté 2003: 235). A closer look at the privatised parastatals in Table 4.1, however, reveals that very few state enterprises have actually been taken over by domestic private capital.

One reason for this lack of takeovers by nationals is that the government continues to mistrust the development of a national bourgeoisie and is therefore reluctant to give potential national investors the necessary incentives. Entrepreneurs without sufficient capital resources face many constraints, including the absence of a well-established capital market, access to bank loans, and the high costs of credit. But even entrepreneurs with the necessary capital resources are often prevented by African regimes from taking over parastatals out of fear that this might strengthen the dominant economic position of ethnic rivals (Bennell 1997). The Beti-dominated government of Paul Biya has persistently tried to thwart a Bamileke takeover of state assets (Konings 1989; Hibou 1999). For example, when Bamileke entrepreneurs succeeded in obtaining a considerable proportion of the share capital in *La Société Camerounaise de Manutention et d’Aconage* (SOCAMAC) after its privatisation in 1991 (see Table 4.1), prominent Beti politicians declared: ‘SOCAMAC has been a learning process for us and nothing similar will happen again in the field of privatisations’ (Nguihé Kanté 2003: 234; Kangue Ejangue & Noubissié Ngankam, 1995: 89). This proved not to be a mere threat. A few years later, in 1994, the government approved the takeover of *La Société Camerounaise de Métallurgie* (SCDM) by a German company, Hobum Afrika, even though a Bamileke group, Bachirou, had put in a higher bid (FCFA 7 billion against Hobum’s FCFA 3 billion) (Bagui Kari 2001: 67). Discouragement of Bamileke investment was accompanied by attempts to promote Beti participation. In September 1998, the government approved the purchase of *Le Centre d’Édition et de*



*Production pour l'Enseignement et la Recherche* (CEPER) for the sum of FCFA 5 billion by a former Beti Minister of National Education Charles Etoundi and a newly formed cooperative of Beti teachers (see Table 4.1).

Another reason for the striking lack of takeovers by nationals was the failure of the parasitic political elite to purchase strategic public enterprises as a result of conflicts between ethno-regional factions within the ruling class. One example is the failed privatisation attempt of *La Société de Développement du Coton* (SODECOTON) in 1995, which some Cameroonian newspapers described as the year's greatest political scandal. SODECOTON is a huge agro-industrial parastatal in Northern Cameroon that has introduced a contract-farming scheme in which more than 250,000 peasants participate – a clear indication of the company's importance in regional development. A French company, *La Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles* (CFDT), manages the company and owns 30 percent of its share capital.

In January 1995, it was announced that the majority of the company's shares had been transferred to a new domestic enterprise, *La Société Mobilière d'Investissement du Cameroun* (SMIC), with Cameroon's treasury keeping its 22 percent and CFDT its 30 percent. The SMIC turned out to be a small group of politically well-connected elite, most of them originating from Northern Cameroon, who had bought the company at a give-away price (about 10 to 15 per cent of its market value). Prominent members included the *lamido* (chief) of Rey Bouba, the President of the National Assembly Cavaye Yigue Djibril, the Vice Prime Minister Mustapha Amadou, the former Prime Minister and current National Director of the *Banque des États de l'Afrique Centrale* (BEAC) Sadou Hayatou, and the ruling party's Central Committee member Alhadji Baba Danpullo who is an Anglophone businessman with close ethnic and religious ties to the Northern elite. The deal had been approved by the Anglophone Prime Minister Simon Achidi Achu and the Northern Minister of Industrial and Commercial Development Bella Bouba Maigari.

Unexpectedly, a few months later the deal was suddenly cancelled by the Southern Minister of Finance Justin Ndioro with the support of other Southern and mostly Beti cabinet members and President Biya himself. Two factors appear to be particularly relevant in

explaining why the dominant faction in the Biya government declared the SMIC takeover 'null and void'. First, it wanted to protect the government's shaky standing with international financial institutions and France, which were both strongly opposed to the SMIC takeover. The World Bank immediately denounced the disregard for the guidelines about competitive bidding, the non-transparency of the exercise, and the ridiculously low price. France rejected the takeover in order to safeguard CFDT interests. The CFDT, which had not been previously consulted, was extremely hostile to privatisation due to its major economic stake in the Northern cotton industry in general, and in the company in particular. Its 30-percent share capital in SODECOTON took 70 percent of its earnings by controlling invoicing and sales abroad. Moreover, it was afraid that a takeover by politicians would lead to the collapse of the Northern cotton industry.

A second reason for the dominant faction's derailment of the SMIC was to maintain Southern dominance over the North and to avoid the emergence of ethno-regional lobbies for ownership of strategic national enterprises located in their region. If Northerners succeeded in seizing SODECOTON, Anglophones might demand ownership of another strategic agro-industrial enterprise located in their region, namely the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) (Takougang & Krieger 1998: 169-80).

The Northern elite protested vehemently against the government's decision to cancel its previously approved contract of sale. They instituted legal proceedings against the Cameroonian state that dragged on until 7 August 2001 when a settlement was reached and SMIC members were handsomely compensated for the loss of their shares. However, the final settlement could not conceal the fact that the SODECOTON privatisation scandal had resulted in domestic and foreign investors losing confidence in the transparency and even the credibility of privatisation procedures in Cameroon. Despite repeated pressure on the government from the Bretton Woods institutions to privatise the company, the government has so far failed to attract new investors.

Instead of promoting the development of the domestic private sector, privatisation has led to a renewed expansion of foreign private capital. The government has permitted a takeover of most

parastatals by foreign investors for reasons similar to those in the period prior to economic liberalisation: investors such as these bring much-needed capital resources, proven managerial capabilities, new technology and market access. Selling to a foreign investor is also often the only way to avoid accusations of clientelism or tribalism (Campbell White & Bhatia 1998: 32).

Table 4.1 shows that foreign participation in the new share capital of sold parastatals has increased dramatically. As elsewhere in Africa (Bennell 1997: 1794), foreign investment has been concentrated among the larger and strategic parastatals that have been sold. A further concentration of foreign capital in the commanding heights of the economy is to be expected since the remaining ten parastatals on the divestiture list belong to the same category of enterprises and serious negotiations between the Cameroonian government and foreign concerns about their eventual transfer are already underway. There also appears to be a concentration of investors from particular countries rather than a diversification of foreign investors. The table reveals that most parastatals in Cameroon have been taken over by French investors, which is hardly surprising when one takes into account the close links between Cameroon and France, and the existing dominance of French capital in the domestic formal sector. One French consortium, Bolloré, with its subsidiaries PALCAM/GOGEPART and SAGA, has made sizeable investments in the takeover of the Cameroonian railways, agro-industry and Douala port (see Table 4.1). What is also noteworthy is the substantial investment by South African private capital in the privatisation process, which reflects the increasing role of South African investors on the African continent since the abolition of apartheid.

Although privatisation has reinforced the dominant role of foreign capital in the domestic economy, both the government and foreign investors favour minority participation by the Cameroonian state and private capital in privatised parastatals. The government hopes that such joint ventures will guarantee some measure of national control over the policies and activities of multinationals in the domestic economy and stimulate capital accumulation by domestic entrepreneurs with close links to the state. Transnational companies, too, have a vested interest in such joint ventures. These companies have rapidly adapted themselves to the changing business

environment and they are now actively seeking domestic alliances for vertically integrated partnerships that are more suited to their investment and production strategies (Pitcher 2002: 151).

This minority participation by the Cameroonian state and private capital in the privatisation process does not prevent the vast majority of Cameroonian intellectuals from severely criticising foreign dominance. Resurrecting many of the arguments made by the dependency theorists in the 1970s, they insist that the state has relinquished its sovereignty and is now dependent on the dictates of foreign investors and global markets. To the extent that Cameroonian nationals are the beneficiaries of privatisation, they are only the 'comprador' agents for foreign capital, providing a façade of domestic involvement when, in reality, foreign investors control the actual wealth and power (cf. Pitcher 2002: 142). Many Cameroonian critics have, therefore, referred to the current privatisation process as 'neo-colonialism' or a 'bargain-sale of the national patrimony' (Bagui Kari 2001; Nguiché Kanté 2003; Tsafack-Nanfosso 2004). Indeed, though generally in favour of privatisation policies, Nyom (2000: 66) maintains that 'it is unclear why the state is selling off in the process the national patrimony to foreign multinationals for a few dollars'.

It would even appear that resentment of the foreign takeover of strategic parastatals has become widespread in Cameroonian society, all the more so because a number of transnational enterprises have performed far below expectations. A few examples will suffice here.

Since its takeover of *La Société Nationale d'Électricité* (SONEL) in 2001 for US\$ 69 million, the American multinational, AES-Sirocco, has blatantly failed to keep to its promise of guaranteeing an uninterrupted supply of electricity. Various parts of the country have suffered from electricity rationing and regular power cuts, resulting in a reduction in economic output and hardship for consumers. This, together with excessive increases in the price for electricity and massive layoffs of workers, has led to several strikes and boycott actions by its workers and numerous demonstrations and court cases by consumers. Both workers and consumers have regularly demanded the departure of the Americans.

The privatisation of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), a huge agro-industrial parastatal in Anglophone Cameroon, has been frequently postponed (see Chapter 6). This was mainly

due to fierce resistance by the Anglophones who see its privatisation as an attempt by the Francophone-dominated post-colonial state to sell off one of the last-remaining Anglophone economic legacies, and by the Bakweri ethnic group in particular, which claims ownership of the CDC lands. To the consternation of Anglophones, it was announced in October 2002 that the CDC tea sector had been sold to a South African consortium, Brobon Finex PTY Limited, which would run it under the name of Cameroon Tea Estates (CTE).<sup>1</sup>

As with SODECOTON, the privatisation of the CDC tea estates became a national scandal when it became known how the takeover by Brobon Finex had been effected and who was going to benefit from the transaction. On his own admission, it became clear that its privatisation had been masterminded by John Niba Ngu, a former CDC General Manager and Minister of Agriculture, who is generally known to be a close friend of President Biya. He used both his technical knowledge and his many connections in the highest echelons of the regime to arrange the privatisation of the CDC tea estates. While experts had conservatively estimated the estate's value at about FCFA 3.2 billion, Ngu managed to bring the price down to FCFA 1.5 billion. Less than three months later, the CTE sold tea worth FCFA 4.6 billion. In return for his excellent services, the CTE board allocated Ngu 5 percent of the company's share capital and appointed him General Manager with a monthly salary and fringe benefits amounting to FCFA 4 million.

It also came to light that the major shareholder in the CTE was Alhadji Baba Danpullo, a well-known businessman with close links to the state apparatus who, like Ngu, comes originally from the North West Province of Anglophone Cameroon. He had previously been involved in the SODOCOTON privatisation scandal (see above). Danpullo was the one who put Ngu in contact with Brobon Finex and it is alleged that he was able to launder a substantial sum of money by participating in Brobon Finex's takeover. Through this financial transaction he acquired a powerful position within the CTE. By becoming a member of its board of directors he was able to replace the former CDC managers with people from his other companies in Cameroon who were loyal to him but who lacked experience in tea production. He also fired Ngu when the latter

dared to dismiss for incompetence twenty-three of the newly appointed managers. As a result of mismanagement and its inexperience in tea cultivation, the CTE is presently facing a variety of problems. On 15 January 2004, it laid off 585 workers 'in a bid to reduce the company's cost of production which has soared to an unbearable level'.<sup>2</sup> As a result of these developments, popular resistance to foreign takeovers has been strengthened both in the region and in the country as a whole.

### Globalisation and new forms of domestic private capital accumulation

As elsewhere in post-colonial Africa, domestic private capital accumulation has tended to be associated with the possession of political power in Cameroon. During the process of neoliberal globalisation, a new form of domestic private capital accumulation has emerged that appears to be more or less independent of the state and is designated as *feymanía*, a pidgin English expression meaning to 'fool' or 'cheat' someone (Malaquais 2001; Ndjio 2006). It came to refer to a specific mode of rapid capital accumulation as a result of involvement in transnational networks of criminal activities.

Remarkably, *feymanía* emerged among a socioeconomic group that had been badly hit by the economic crisis and economic liberalisation, namely young men living in the slums of Cameroon's largest cities, notably New Bell in Douala and Madagascar in Yaoundé (Konings 2006c). Initially, most of them belonged to the entrepreneurial Bamileke ethnic group. They tended to be poorly educated and they found it hard to get a job in the formal sector during the economic crisis and economic liberalisation. They mostly tried to eke out a livelihood by engaging in a variety of informal and criminal activities, such as petty trade and production, smuggling and theft, and some of them formed criminal gangs that terrorised the local population. Unsurprisingly, they were constantly on the lookout for ways to escape poverty.

The early 1990s was the heyday of political liberalisation when the newly created opposition parties still formed a serious challenge to the ruling party, the CPDM, and the autocratic and corrupt Biya

regime. Feeling, like other Bamileke, discriminated against by the Beti-dominated regime, the young slum residents saw the overthrow of the Biya regime and political change as avenues to socioeconomic advancement. They were, therefore, inclined to support the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) – a party based in the North West Province of Anglophone Cameroon where the population is ethnically related to the Bamileke (see Chapter 3). Many of them participated in the 1991-92 ‘ghost town’ campaign (see Chapter 2). I have mentioned elsewhere that this civil-disobedience action was particularly successful in the opposition stronghold of New Bell where there were numerous violent confrontations between demonstrators and the forces of law and order, resulting in several deaths and numerous injuries (Konings 2006c).

When the opposition eventually failed to overthrow the Biya regime and bring about political change, some of the marginalised youth switched to *feymania* as an avenue to rapid capital accumulation. Existing and newly formed criminal gangs of Bamileke youth joined or created transnational criminal networks stretching from the African continent to Western Europe, where Paris became the main centre of *feymania* activities, the Middle East and South East Asia (Malaquais 2001). For instance, one of the first and most powerful transnational criminal networks was created by the renowned *feyman* Donatien Koagne, nicknamed the King of Cameroon, a young Bamileke man from New Bell in Douala. His group had at least 100 members, the vast majority of whom were Bamileke youth. Ndjio (2006) estimates the number of young Cameroonians involved in *feymania* to be about 2,000.

*Feymen* groups are involved in a variety of criminal activities. They persuade their victims that they are being offered fabulous bargains. They are adept at selling goods, which do not in fact exist, and propose non-existent projects to development and aid agencies so as to defraud foreign embassies. They claim to be able to multiply banknotes, which has become one of their most successful tricks to dupe leading politicians and wealthy businessmen in Africa and elsewhere. They are also engaged in the international trafficking of drugs, diamonds, arms, works of art, human organs, and young girls for organised prostitution. A number of national and



international newspapers connect Cameroonian *feymen* with Nigerian drug traffickers and Congolese and Liberian diamond smugglers who are increasingly active in Western Europe and South Africa (Bayart *et al.* 1999). In addition, they are involved in counterfeiting not only banknotes but also credit cards and passports, money laundering, smuggling, usury, speculation, embezzlement, and the theft of luxury cars and other valuable items.

As a result of these and other criminal activities, they have been able to amass fabulous wealth in a short space of time and, unlike the older generation of Bamileke entrepreneurs, they are not ashamed of displaying their newly acquired wealth. The attitude of the Cameroonian population towards this new mode of capital accumulation would seem to be ambivalent. The older generation is inclined to question the supposedly mysterious origins of the *feymen's* sudden wealth, often associating it with sorcery and witchcraft. In sharp contrast, the younger generation tends to admire their achievements, seeing the *feymen* as role models and national heroes (Malequais 2001; Ndjio 2006).

However, it would be wrong to assume that *feymen*, as the parasitic political elite, are inclined to merely squander their accumulated capital. While they tend to maintain a lavish lifestyle, most of them do reinvest some of their wealth in productive enterprises. Curiously, an increasing number of *feymen* are tending to invest their ill-gotten gains in a variety of legal entrepreneurial activities, albeit without abandoning their criminal activities altogether. In fact, they have come to occupy a dominant position in certain sectors of the national economy, taking advantage in some cases of the government's liberalisation policies.

Without doubt, the current boom in the gambling industry in Cameroon has to be attributed to a large extent to the initiatives of *feymen*. After the legalisation in the early 1990s of what are known in Cameroon as 'games of chance and hazard', a large number of *feymen* invested their illegally acquired wealth in the gambling industry. This form of investment has proved to be of mutual benefit to the new investors themselves and to the state: it has become a major source of private capital accumulation for *feymen* and of tax revenue for the state. One of the largest investors in the gambling industry is Claude Feutheu, alias Claude le Parisien (he owes this



nickname to his *feyman* activities in Paris) who is known in Cameroon as the 'King of Bally-Bally'. This notorious Bamileke *feyman* owns several casinos and gambling houses in the country. His company, Fortuna Cameroon, is the largest enterprise in the country's gambling industry, employing over 100 nationals and about 20 Europeans. His associations with a Dutch company, Holland Casino, have enabled him to broaden his activities and to do business in the neighboring countries of Gabon, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, and Equatorial Guinea (Ndjio 2006).

Some *feymen* have set up large companies that are involved in the import and selling of new and second-hand clothes and cars, mostly in partnership with foreign entrepreneurs. Selling second-hand clothes has become another booming business following the legalisation of such imports in December 1990 and the sharp fall in the purchasing power of a large section of the population since drastic reductions in wages and salaries in 1993 (Konings 1996a). The expanding second-hand clothes market has even threatened local textile manufacturing. *Feymen* who are involved in the car business usually sell second-hand cars, but a few import new luxury cars to sell to the Cameroonian upper classes and to other *feymen*. In addition, almost all *feymen* have invested in real estate in the large cities. Some, like Claude le Parisien, have also set up big construction companies and a few who are based in Paris have moved into music production and catering.

Interestingly, a growing number of *feymen* have begun to use their economic power for the pursuit of political power, standing as candidates in municipal and parliamentary elections. No fewer than 30 prominent *feymen* – accounting for one sixth of all seats in the National Assembly – were elected in the 1997 parliamentary elections.

Confronted with this new and autonomous mode of domestic private capital accumulation, the regime has devised a number of strategies to bring it under state control. Initially, *feymen* were presented as professional swindlers and crooks involved in transnational criminal networks. Some leading Beti politicians were even convinced that *feyman* was a new Bamileke scheme to assert their economic dominance over other ethnic groups and to discredit the country's international reputation, claiming that Cameroon was

now seen as a country of swindlers and criminals (Ndjio 2006). Some *feymen* were arrested and jailed but repression proved unsuccessful, all the more so because some powerful members of the government, including the former Chief of Security Services Jean Fochivé and the former Vice Prime Minister in charge of Territorial Administration Gilbert Andzé Tchoungui, tended to protect the most renowned *feymen* such as Donatien Koagne and Claude le Parisien to ensure personal gains.

In reaction to the rapid expansion of *feymanian* and the growing economic and political power of *feymen*, a shift in government strategies can be observed from the mid-1990s onwards. The first tactic was to make the safety of *feymen* and their success in legal and illegal activities dependent on their allegiance to the regime in power. Consequently, *feymen* who joined the ruling CPDM party were not only assured of state protection and the legitimisation of their ill-gotten wealth but also given similar rent-seeking opportunities as other businessmen with close ties to the state. These *feymen* were now presented in public discourse as young, dynamic Cameroonian entrepreneurs who were making a significant contribution to economic revival, and as role models for the youth. The regime even started actively promoting the emergence of a group of *feymen* among the better-educated youth with close ethnic or family ties to the ruling class. These new *feymen*, mostly of Beti origin, were regularly given lucrative state contracts or import licenses. They became derisively dubbed as 'fake' *feymen* or *feymen du Renouveau* ('*renouveau*' or renewal being the regime's ideological label). Conversely, *feymen* who refused to join the ruling party or were active in opposition continued to be presented as criminals and to be exposed to arbitrary arrest.

A second tactic was to co-opt the most prominent *feymen* into the hegemonic alliance. Some became members of either the Central Committee of the CPDM or were prominent among the leadership of one of the ruling party's satellite organisations. Others were offered the opportunity to be elected as a member of parliament, mayor or local councilor on a CPDM ticket, even at the expense of former politicians. The co-optation of *feymen* has evidently been of benefit to both the ruling party and the regime: they have been of great help in financing party activities and have acted as vote-banks

during elections. Nevertheless, it would appear that the regime is trying to keep them away from the centre of power so as not to enhance their political influence. None of the co-opted *feymen* has yet been appointed to a top position in the party or government.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to analyse the effects of two key policy prescriptions of the neoliberal reform package, namely privatisation and global open markets, on the existing structures of economic and political power in Cameroon. It has shown the continuities and changes in relations between the Cameroonian state and private capital accumulation.

While privatisation has been one of the cornerstones of the neoliberal agenda, linking good governance to private-sector development, it is evident from this study that it has not presented as big a break with the previous dynamic of the post-colonial state as the Bretton Woods institutions and international financiers would have expected. Most African governments have only reluctantly accepted the privatisation of state-owned enterprises and their calculations as to how their political concerns can best be served have shaped the outcome of the privatisation process in a decisive manner.

There is ample evidence to show that privatisation has failed to free the Cameroonian parastatal sector from 'politics', in particular from the government's neopatrimonial logic which is seen as the basic reason for its malfunctioning. State enterprises continue to form an essential element in government patronage politics, which has not only helped to maintain political stability in the country's vulnerable political system but has also been attractive to the political class that has selfishly used it as a clear avenue to capital accumulation.

Privatisation has failed to introduce transparency, accountability and the rule of law in policy-making and the implementation needed for the efficient operation of market forces. Lack of transparency in transactions surrounding the sale of state-owned enterprises has been a major concern among prospective investors. In part, this can be attributed to weaknesses in the management capabilities of those

who have been entrusted to implement privatisation programmes. To a large extent, however, poor transparency has been the direct consequence of the parasitic behaviour of politicians and bureaucrats eager to cream off, perhaps for the last time, sizable rents. Pre-emptive divestitures are particularly susceptible to the underevaluation of assets and the preferential treatment of a particular bidder in return for kickbacks for leading politicians and bureaucrats (Bennell 1997).

Privatisation has equally failed to stimulate domestic private capital. The weakness of domestic private capital and the persistent fear of the Cameroonian post-colonial state of the emergence of a vigorous and autonomous national capitalist class are undeniably the major reasons for the blatant underrepresentation of nationals in the divestiture exercise. The Cameroonian government has particularly discouraged any takeovers by Bamileke entrepreneurs, the dominant economic group among domestic private capital, and ethno-regional elite groups, which it perceives as a severe threat to Beti political power and the nation-state. Privatisation has instead strengthened the role of foreign capital to such an extent that it now dominates the most strategic sectors of the economy. The economic and political benefits to be gained from foreign investment have caused the regime to welcome it and to push aside any negative comments. Foreign capital was expected to contribute to an economic recovery and thus enhance the regime's legitimacy. In addition, through profitable joint ventures foreign investors would promote the business interests of a number of high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats as well as entrepreneurs with close links to the regime. This study, however, has shown that the transfer of the 'national patrimony' to foreign capital and the poor performance of some foreign concerns have led to further erosion of the regime's legitimacy among the local population.

In sharp contrast to privatisation, global open markets have had the unintended effect of offering chances of private capital accumulation to Cameroon's marginalised youth. By engaging in transnational criminal networks and re-investing part of their newly found wealth in legitimate entrepreneurial activities, these young men laid the foundations for their current economic and political power. This new and autonomous form of private capital

accumulation has posed a serious challenge to the existing power structures that are based on close ties between political and economic power. As a result, the government has tried to submit *feymen* to state control by co-opting them into the hegemonic alliance, albeit in a subordinate position.

## Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the privatisation of the CDC's tea estates, see Konings (2011: 149-153).
2. *CTE Press Release*, 15 January 2004.

## Political liberalisation and Anglophone secessionist movements in Cameroon

### Introduction

Secession has been rare in post-colonial Africa and has been strongly opposed by newly independent states and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in an attempt to safeguard territorial integrity. Secessionist claims have, however, been on the rise since the end of the 1980s in the wake of political liberalisation in Africa. Eritrea's independence in 1993, after several decades of a national war of liberation, is, significantly, the only example of a formal reorganisation of the continent's political map.

Of late, some Africanists have been trying to explain the reasons for Africa's remarkable 'secessionist deficit' and to identify the various internal and external factors accounting for the failure or success of past and on-going secessionist claims on the continent (cf. Forrest 2004; Englebort & Hummel 2005; Keller 2007). Curiously, in their critical review of African secessionist movements, they have failed to discuss Anglophone secessionist movements in Cameroon.

This chapter tries to fill the lacuna. It will be argued that the deep roots of current Anglophone secessionist claims can be found in what has come to be called the 'Anglophone problem', which is posing a major challenge to the post-colonial state's efforts to forge national unity and integration. There is a widespread feeling in Anglophone Cameroon that reunification with Francophone Cameroon in 1961 has led to a growing marginalisation of the Anglophone minority in the post-colonial nation-state project that is controlled by the Francophone political elite and endangers Anglophone cultural heritage and identity. Although Anglophone resistance has been a permanent feature of Cameroon's post-colonial biography (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003), it was not until political

liberalisation in the early 1990s that the Anglophone elite began to mobilise the regional population against the allegedly subordinated position of Anglophones. Claims were made for self-determination and autonomy, first in the form of a return to a federal state and later, after persistent refusals by the Biya regime to discuss the federal option, for outright secession. It is important to mention that the Anglophone secessionist movement differs from most other secessionist movements in Africa in that it wants to achieve an independent Anglophone state through peaceful negotiations rather than force.

Since the Biya government is continuing to uphold the unitary state and simply dismisses the secessionist option, the Anglophone leadership has adopted two main strategies to achieve its aim. On the one hand, it is trying to gain international recognition for its cause and, on the other, it is sensitising the Anglophone population to its objectives and strategies and mobilising it for possible action against the Francophone-dominated unitary state.

Finally, the chapter will show why, for a number of reasons, the prospects of Anglophone secession are somewhat bleak. Firstly, the relevant international organisations continue to favour territorial integrity. Secondly, the Francophone-dominated state has devised a series of divisive and repressive tactics that have proved largely successful in containing the Anglophone danger and in controlling Anglophone organisation. One of the immediate consequences has been that Anglophone nationalists have had to resort to less visible and controllable forms of protest. Anglophones in the diaspora have quickly underscored the importance of the Internet for raising Anglophone consciousness and promoting the virtual representation of the Anglophone cause within and outside Cameroon. And thirdly, it has become increasingly evident that there are internal divisions among the leadership of the various Anglophone movements and the Anglophone elite as a whole about the policies and strategies for redressing the Anglophone problem and determining the nature of the state's future form. One of the main cleavages in the Anglophone elite can be attributed to ethno-regional divisions and tensions within the Anglophone community itself, particularly those between the South West Province (the coastal-forest area) and the inland savannah area (the so-called Grassfields), today's North West Province.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first provides an insight into the Anglophone problem; the second describes the Anglophone historical trajectory to secessionist claims in the political liberalisation era; the third deals with the Anglophone leadership's struggle for international recognition of its secessionist stand; and the fourth documents the leadership's sensitisation and mobilisation campaign. And finally, the fifth section explores the future prospects for Anglophone secessionist claims.

### The Anglophone problem

The emergence of Anglophone secessionist movements in Cameroon during the current process of political liberalisation cannot be explained without reference to the so-called 'Anglophone problem' (cf. Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997, 2003; Eyoh 1998a; Jua 2003b). Its roots can be traced back to the partitioning between the French and British of the German Kamerun Protectorate (1884-1916) after the First World War, first as mandates under the League of Nations and then as trusts under the United Nations. As a result of partitioning, the British acquired two narrow and non-contiguous regions in the western part of the country, bordering Nigeria. The southern part, which is the focus of our study, was named Southern Cameroons, and the northern part became known as Northern Cameroons.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, the British territory was much smaller than the French one, comprising only about 20% of the total area and the population of the former German colony.

The partitioning of the territory into British and French spheres had important consequences for political developments, laying the historical and spatial foundations for the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities in the territory. The populations in each region came to see themselves as distinct communities defined by differences in language and inherited colonial traditions of education, law, public administration and world-view. Second, while French Cameroon was incorporated into the French colonial empire as a distinct administrative unit separate from neighbouring French Equatorial Africa, the British Cameroons was administered as an integral part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, which led to the neglect of its socio-economic development and



the increasing migration of Nigerians, notably the Igbo, to Southern Cameroons, where they came to dominate the regional economy (Konings 2005c). There was every indication, particularly in the period preceding reunification, that Britain intended to integrate Southern Cameroons into Nigeria, in spite of its distinct status as a trust territory (Awasom 1998). The dominant position of the Igbo in the regional economy and administration was deeply resented by the local population and resulted in an explosive situation after the Second World War when regional politicians started exploiting the 'Igbo scare' in nationalist struggles (Amazee 1990). It was not therefore surprising that the nationalist struggles in Southern Cameroons had more of an anti-Nigerian than an anti-colonial character.

Southern Cameroonian nationalists started attacking the subordinate position of Southern Cameroons in the British-Nigerian colonial system and the dominant position of the Igbo in Southern Cameroons. They initially claimed a larger representation of the Southern Cameroons elite in the Nigerian administration, and later regional autonomy. In response to their pressure, the British authorities gradually increased Southern Cameroonian representation in the Nigerian administration after the Second World War. And following successive constitutional changes, they granted Southern Cameroons a quasi-regional status and a limited degree of self-government in 1954, and full regional status within the Federation of Nigeria in 1958 (Ngho 2001). For part of the Southern Cameroonian elite, organised by Dr E.M.L. Endeley in the South West-based Kamerun National Congress (KNC) party, this was the reason to shift from an anti-Nigerian stance to a more positive view of Nigeria. From their perspective, regional status seemed a satisfactory answer to the problem of Nigerian domination, the lack of Southern Cameroonian participation in the Nigerian political system, and economic stagnation.

Interestingly, from the late 1940s onwards, the question of reunification had cropped up in the programmes of various Southern Cameroonian pressure groups and newly created parties, raising the possibility of an alternative political option for Southern Cameroons to escape from its subordinate position in the colonial system and Igbo domination. A number of factors underpinned their

reunification campaign. There was the emergence of the 'Kamerun idea' among some members of the Southern Cameroonian elite and the belief that the period of German rule had created a Cameroon identity or nation (Welch 1966: 158-88; Johnson 1970: 42). It has been pointed out that such irredentist feelings of one Cameroon under German administration hardly corresponded with reality since German colonial rule had simply been too short to create a Cameroonian identity among the territory's multiplicity of ethnic groups (Ardener 1967; Chem-Langhëë & Njeuma 1980; Ebai 2009). However Kofele-Kale (1980) argued that it was not the reality of the German experience but memories and myths (factual or otherwise) that inspired the Southern Cameroonian elite to start advocating reunification. To strengthen their arguments, the elite referred to the close relationship between ethnic groups on both sides of the British-French Cameroon border. This boundary, they stressed, was regarded as an unnecessary inconvenience by the people in the area because it restricted the free movement of people belonging to the same ethnic group.

It must nevertheless be pointed out that the idea of reunification was much more popular among Francophones than among Anglophones (Awasom 2000). Its loyal flag bearers were from the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC), the radical nationalist party in French Cameroon (Joseph 1977; Mbembe 1996) and among Francophone immigrants in Southern Cameroons who saw reunification principally as a way of removing their second-class citizenship in Southern Cameroons and discrimination by the British Administering Authority (Amazee 1994; Njeuma 1995). Significantly, the Southern Cameroons elite initially regarded the propagation of reunification as an effective strategy that would encourage the British administration to grant their territory either a larger measure of autonomy within the Nigerian Federation or separation from Nigeria altogether. Dr Endeley's rejection of this idea in 1954 after the Southern Cameroons attained the status of semi-autonomous region attests to the fact that it was not a genuine concern among the people. Even John Ngu Foncha, the leader of the North West-based Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) which was championing reunification, had picked up the reunification idea merely as an electoral slogan to combat Endeley's

new position. And perhaps even more importantly, he saw reunification not as an immediate goal but as an issue to be negotiated after the territory's separation from Nigeria and a period of continued trusteeship or independence. Besides being a slogan in Anglophone Cameroon, the idea of reunification had been rejected by the French colonial administration and most of the Francophone political elite.

With Nigeria approaching independence in 1960, the population of the British trust territory needed to decide on its own political future. It soon became evident that the majority of Southern Cameroonians did not favour joining either Nigeria or Francophone Cameroon, but wanted to form an independent state (Awasom 2000; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). That this expressed wish was eventually not honoured must be attributed to two main factors. First, internal divisions within the Anglophone political elite prevented them from rallying behind the majority option in the territory. And second, the UN refused, with the complicity of the British, to put the option of an independent Southern Cameroons state to the vote in the UN-organised plebiscite on 11 February 1961 (Percival 2008), on the grounds that the creation of another tiny state was politically undesirable (and likely to contribute to a further 'Balkanisation' of Africa) and economically unviable.<sup>2</sup>

Deprived of their preferred option, Southern Cameroonians were given what amounted to Hobson's choice, i.e. a choice they had to accept whether they liked it or not. In this case it was independence by joining Nigeria or reunification with Francophone Cameroon, which had become independent in 1960 under the new name of the Republic of Cameroon. Three smaller Southern Cameroonian parties – the Kamerun United Party (KUP) led by Paul Kale, the Cameroons Commoners' Congress (CCC) led by Chief Stephen Nyenti, and the Cameroons Indigenes Party (CIP) under Jesco Manga Williams – immediately contested the UN limitation of plebiscite options, insisting on the inclusion of an independent Southern Cameroons state as a third option. They sent several petitions to the UN, threatening to boycott the plebiscite if their wish was not honoured. Their protest actions did not, however, bear fruit (Ngoh 1990: 179-80). In the end, the majority of Southern Cameroonians voted for what they considered the lesser of two evils. Their vote in favour of reunification appeared to be more a rejection of continuous ties with Nigeria, which had proved detrimental to

Southern Cameroonian development, than a vote for union with Francophone Cameroon, a territory with a different cultural heritage and one that was then involved in a violent civil war (Joseph 1977). As Susungi (1991) aptly observed, reunification was far from being the reunion of two prodigal sons who had been unjustly separated at birth, but was more like a loveless UN-arranged marriage between two people who hardly knew each other.<sup>3</sup>

By reuniting with the former French Cameroon, the Anglophone elite had hoped to enter a loose federal union as a way of protecting their territory's minority status and cultural heritage (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). Instead, it became evident that the Francophone elite wanted to have a highly centralised, unitary state to promote national unity and economic development. Obviously, the bargaining position of the Francophone elite was far greater than that of the Anglophones. The former French Trust Territory of Cameroon, now renamed the Republic of Cameroon, was already a much larger independent state. Moreover, the Francophone elite received strong support from the French during constitutional negotiations, while the Anglophone elite were virtually abandoned by the British, who deeply resented the Southern Cameroons option for reunification with Francophone Cameroon (Awasom 2000). As a result, a rumour quickly spread that Charles de Gaulle saw Southern Cameroons as 'a small gift from the Queen of England to France' (Milne 1999: 432-148; Gaillard 1994).

During the constitutional talks at Foumban in July 1961, the Francophone elite were only prepared to accept a highly centralised federation, which was regarded merely as a transitional phase towards the formation of a unitary state. Such a federation demanded relatively few amendments to the 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon. Interestingly, Pierre Messmer (1998: 134-35), one of the last French high commissioners in Cameroon and a close advisor to President Ahmadou Ahidjo, pointed out that he and others knew at the time that the so-called federal constitution provided merely a 'sham federation', which was 'safe for appearances, an annexation of West Cameroon' (the new name of the former Southern Cameroons) (Anyangwe 2009). The final version of the constitution was only approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Cameroon on 1 September 1961, just one month

prior to reunification. For this reason, the present Anglophone movements declared in 1993 that ‘the union between the Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon had proceeded without any constitutional basis’ (All Anglophone Conference 1993: 12).

Under its new constitution, West Cameroon lost most of the limited autonomy it had enjoyed as part of the Nigerian federation (Ardener 1967; Stark 1976). Even worse, a few months after reunification, President Ahidjo created a system of regional administration in which West Cameroon was designated as one of six regions, basically ignoring the country’s federal system. The regions were headed by powerful federal inspectors who, in the case of West Cameroon, in effect overshadowed the prime minister with whom they were in frequent conflict concerning jurisdiction (Stark 1976). In addition, the West Cameroon government could barely function since it had to depend entirely on subventions from the federal government that controlled its major sources of revenue (Benjamin 1972).

To achieve his objective of total integration by the Anglophone minority into a strongly centralised, unitary state, Ahidjo used several tactics. One was to play Anglophone political factions off against each other and eventually integrate them into a single party, the Cameroon National Union (CNU). Another was to eliminate from positions of power any Anglophone leaders who remained committed to federalism, replacing them with others who favoured a unitary state. Still another tactic was to create ‘clients’ among the Anglophone elite. By granting top positions in the federal institutions and in the single party to representatives of significant ethnic and regional groups in the Anglophone region, he tried to control these groups. Finally, he did not shrink from repressing opposition. Through these and other tactics he succeeded in abolishing the federation in 1972 in blatant disregard of constitutional provisions. His justification for this ‘glorious revolution’ was that federalism fostered regionalism and impeded economic development.

A growing number of Anglophones were, however, inclined to attribute the emergence of regionalism and the lack of economic development not to federalism *per se* but to the hegemonic tendencies of the Francophone-dominated state. For them, the nation-state project after reunification was driven by the firm determination of

the Francophone political elite to dominate the Anglophone minority and erase the cultural and institutional foundations of Anglophone identity (Eyoh 1998a). Several studies have shown that Anglophones have regularly been relegated to inferior positions in the national decision-making process and have been constantly underrepresented in ministerial as well as senior- and middle-management positions in the administration, the military and parastatals (Kofele-Kale 1986; Takougang & Krieger 1998). There is also general agreement that Anglophones have been exposed to a carefully considered policy aimed at eroding their language and institutions, even though Francophone political leaders assured their Anglophone counterparts during constitutional talks on reunification that the inherited colonial differences in language and institutions would be respected in the bilingual union. And last but not least, the relative underdevelopment of the Anglophone region shows that it has not benefited sufficiently from its rich agricultural potential and its oil resources. Oil revenues were alleged to have been used by those in power to feed 'the bellies' of their allies (Bayart 1989) and to stimulate the economy in other regions. This gradually created an Anglophone consciousness: feelings of being recolonised and marginalised in all spheres of public life and thus of being second-class citizens in their own country.

To reduce the danger of any united Anglophone action against the Francophone-dominated state, Ahidjo decided after the 'revolution' of 20 May 1972 to divide the Anglophone territory into two provinces, South West and North West Provinces. When making this decision, he was well aware of the internal contradictions within the Anglophone community between the coastal-forest people in the South West Province and the Grassfields people in the North West Province (see Chapter 3).

Lack of unity and severe repression precluded the Anglophone elite from openly expressing its grievances about Francophone domination until 1982 when Paul Biya took power. Following the limited degree of liberalisation introduced by the new president (Takougang & Krieger 1998), the Anglophone elite began to voice their long-standing grievances (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). There was vehement Anglophone protest when the new president changed the country's official name from the 'United Republic of Cameroon'

to simply the 'Republic of Cameroon' in February 1984. The new name was not only similar to that of independent Francophone Cameroon prior to reunification but also appeared to ignore the fact that the Cameroonian state was composed of two distinct entities. In Anglophone circles, Biya's unilateral name change seems to have given rise to two different interpretations. Some Anglophones considered this action as the boldest step yet taken towards their assimilation and disappearance as a distinct founding community. For them, the new name was clear evidence that, as far as Biya was concerned, the Anglophone territory and its people had lost their identity and become an indistinguishable part of the former Republic of Cameroon, thus allowing Ahidjo's designs for absorbing and assimilating the Anglophone minority into the Francophone-dominated state to be fulfilled (Biya 1987).

Other Anglophones argued that, by this action, *La République du Cameroun* had unilaterally seceded from the union and thus lacked any constitutional base from which to continue ruling the former Southern Cameroons.<sup>4</sup> They are inclined to appeal to the UN to assist its former trust territory in peacefully separating from *La République* (Anyangwe 2008). This view was first expressed by Fon Gorji Dinka, the eminent Anglophone lawyer and first president of the Cameroon Bar Association. On 10 March 1985, Dinka addressed a memorandum to Paul Biya entitled 'The New Social Order',<sup>5</sup> in which he declared the Biya government to be unconstitutional and called for Southern Cameroons to become independent and be renamed the Republic of Ambazonia.<sup>6</sup> Dinka was arrested and imprisoned without trial until January 1986, which earned him the status of martyr for the Anglophone cause.

As the Biya government was increasingly stepping up repression in a situation of deepening economic and political crisis, it was not until political liberalisation in the early 1990s that Anglophones openly started to organise in defence of their interests.

### The Anglophone movements' struggle for secession

Anglophones have not only played a leading role in accomplishing political liberalisation in Cameroon but have also used the liberalisation of political space to create or reactivate various organisations to represent their interests.



Given Anglophone frustration with the Francophone-dominated state, it is not surprising that the country's first opposition party emerged in Anglophone Cameroon in 1990. Capitalising on Anglophone disenchantment with the regime, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) was formed in Bamenda, the capital of North West Province, under the leadership of John Fru Ndi. Paradoxically and despite its immense contribution to Anglophone consciousness and action, the party soon began presenting itself as a national rather than as an Anglophone party, as was evidenced by its growing Francophone membership of mostly Bamileke living in the Francophone part of the Grassfields and who are ethnically related to groups in North West Province (see Chapter 3). Since the SDF adopted a half-hearted stand towards the Anglophone problem, Anglophone interests came to be first and foremost represented by associations and pressure groups created and reactivated by the Anglophone elite with the introduction of political liberalisation in 1990. Some of them, such as the Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM) and the Ambazonian Movement of Fon Gorji Dinka, advocated outright secession. Most, however, initially championed a return to the federal state, especially the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM). This was the only Anglophone association operating legally in the country and was the most important Anglophone pressure group for some time.

In addition to these associations that aimed to represent broad-based Anglophone interests, a large number of other associations emerged in the hope of representing specific Anglophone interests. These included the Teachers' Association of Cameroon (TAC), the Confederation of Anglophone Parents-Teachers Associations of Cameroon (CAPTAC), the Cameroon Anglophone Students' Association (CANSA), the Anglophone Common Law Association, the Association of Anglophone Journalists, the Cameroon Public Servants' Union (CAPSU), the Anglophone Youth Council and the Anglophone Women's League. Some of these scored significant success in their struggle against the Francophone-dominated state and its subsidiaries. For example, the TAC and CAPTAC forced the government to create a General Certificate of Education (GCE) Board in 1993, which signified an important victory for Anglophones in their ten-year struggle against determined government efforts to abolish GCE exams (Nyamnjoh & Akum 2008).



Besides the different Anglophone organisations and political parties, various social groups in Anglophone Cameroon have played a significant role in sensitising the local population to Francophone domination and mobilising it in defence of its interests, notably writers, journalists and church leaders (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 142-148).

A major challenge to the Francophone-dominated state was the All Anglophone Conference (AAC) that was held in Buea, the former capital of Southern Cameroons, on 2-3 April 1993 'for the purpose of adopting a common Anglophone stand on constitutional reform and of examining several other matters relating to its welfare of ourselves, our posterity, our territory and the entire Cameroon nation' (All Anglophone Conference 1993: 8). Its conveners were the four Anglophone members of the technical committee on constitutional matters that was to determine the outline of a new constitution in accordance with the resolutions of the Tripartite Conference held between 30 October and 18 November 1991 in the wake of the protracted 'ghost-town' campaign. Three members, Benjamin Itoe, Simon Munzu and Sam Ekontang Elad came from South West Province, while the fourth, Carlson Anyangwe, was the only North Westerner in the group.

The AAC turned out to be a landmark in the history of Anglophone Cameroon. It brought together over 5,000 members of the Anglophone elite and all the Anglophone associations and organisations were represented. After two days of deliberations, the conference issued the Buea Declaration that listed the multiple Anglophone grievances about Francophone domination and called for a return to the federal form of government due to the allegedly unbridgeable cultural differences between Anglophones and Francophones after more than thirty years of reunification.

From then onwards, the AAC became the main Anglophone association and its mouthpiece, and was responsible for the representation of Anglophone interests in general. All existing and newly emerging Anglophone associations became auxiliary organisations of the AAC and under its umbrella they continued to carry out their own specific responsibilities. They were represented in the 65-member Anglophone Standing Committee created by the AAC, which submitted a draft federal constitution to the Biya

government on 27 May 1993 (Konings 1999). It was simply ignored by the regime and, in a series of interviews in Cameroon and France, Biya stated that federalism was inappropriate for a country like Cameroon.

The government's persistent refusal to enter into negotiations on the federal option created a growing radicalisation among the Anglophone movements. In the Bamenda Proclamation adopted by the Second All Anglophone Conference (AAC II), which was held in Bamenda from 29 April to 1 May 1994, it was stipulated that 'should the government either persist in its refusal to engage in meaningful constitutional talks or fail to engage in such talks *within a reasonable time*', the Anglophone Council should 'proclaim the revival of the independence and sovereignty of the Anglophone territory and take all measures necessary to secure, defend and preserve the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the said country' (All Anglophone Conference 1994).

After the AAC II, the Anglophone movements provocatively re-introduced the name of Southern Cameroons when referring to the Anglophone territory to 'make it clear that our struggles are neither of an essentially linguistic character nor in defence of an alien colonial culture ... but are aimed at the restoration of the autonomy of the former Southern Cameroons which has been annexed by *La République du Cameroun*'.<sup>7</sup> The Anglophone movements' umbrella organisation was subsequently named the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC).

The Biya government's continued refusal to entertain its federal proposal pushed the SCNC to consider the possibility of outright secession. The SCNC leadership actually set 1 October 1996 as the date to declare the independence of Southern Cameroons. However this turned out to be a bluff since nothing happened on that day except an 'Independence Day' address by the new SCNC chairman, Ambassador (retired) Henry Fossung, who called upon Southern Cameroonians to use their National Day as a 'day of prayer', asking God 'to save us from political bondage'. He reiterated that independence was 'irreversible and non-negotiable'.<sup>8</sup>

After embracing a secessionist stand, the SCNC adopted the following motto: 'The force of argument, and not the argument of force'. This demonstrated that it was pursuing independence for

Southern Cameroonians through peaceful negotiation and not through armed struggle. Given the Francophone-dominated state's unitary approach to the post-colonial nation-state project and its condemnation of any secessionist claims, the SCNC leadership developed two strategies for the peaceful establishment of an independent Southern Cameroon state: (i) to seek international recognition, and (ii) to sensitise and mobilise the Anglophone population.

### The SCNC leadership's pursuit of international recognition for its secessionist claims

The SCNC leadership has made strenuous efforts to gain formal international recognition of the Anglophone cause through diplomatic and legal channels. Only the most important undertakings are mentioned here (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003; Anyefru 2010).

One of the SCNC's most impressive activities was to send a nine-man delegation, including two of the main Anglophone architects of reunification, John Ngu Foncha and Solomon Tandeng Muna, to the UN in New York on 19 May 1995. This mission was to file a petition against 'the annexation of the Southern Cameroons by *La République du Cameroun* and to commit the international community to the Southern Cameroons' and search for a peaceful solution to head off the dangerous conflict that was brewing between *La République du Cameroun* and Southern Cameroons.<sup>9</sup> In its London Communiqué,<sup>10</sup> issued after this historic mission, the SCNC delegation stated that following the Republic of Cameroon's unilateral secession from the union in 1984, the Southern Cameroons question was no longer an internal problem of *La République du Cameroun* since there were now two distinct *de facto* entities that were no longer bound by any legal or constitutional ties, with Southern Cameroons having reverted to its pre-independence situation, i.e. as a UN Trust Territory. In these circumstances, Southern Cameroons demanded that the UN terminate its annexation to *La République du Cameroun* and grant full independence to its Trust Territory, in accordance with Article 76 of the UN Charter. It was only after gaining full independence that Southern

Cameroon would enter into negotiations with *La République du Cameroun* on future constitutional and bilateral links under the auspices of the UN.

The various missions by Anglophone leaders to the UN undoubtedly contributed to a growing awareness of the Anglophone problem in UN circles. There is sufficient evidence that UN leaders had become increasingly concerned about the possible outbreak of another violent ethno-regional conflict in West-Central Africa but they appear not to have supported SCNC secessionist claims. During his visit to Cameroon in May 2000, then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan pleaded for dialogue between Francophone and Anglophone leaders and at a press conference shortly before leaving Cameroon, he said:

I leave Cameroon with the impression that there is only one Cameroon, multilingual and multi-ethnic. I encourage a dialogue of these stakeholders. In every country there are problems of marginalisation. The way it has to be solved is by dialogue and not by walking away.<sup>11</sup>

Of late, the SCNC succeeded in approaching the UN through an intermediary channel. In 2004, it became a member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) in The Hague, an international organisation of 'nations, peoples and minorities striving for recognition and protection of their identity, culture, human rights and their environment'.<sup>12</sup> The organisation provides a legitimate and established international forum for members to present their grievances at an international level and through the UNPO, SCNC leaders have been able to address certain UN organs regarding the plight of Anglophones. For example, in 2005 Anglophone leaders made a first representation to the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) (Anyefru 2010: 94-99).

SCNC leaders also engaged in intensive lobbying to forestall the Republic of Cameroon's admission to the Commonwealth and to instead file an application for Commonwealth membership for Southern Cameroon. However the Biya government duly applied for Commonwealth membership in 1989 and, to the consternation

of Anglophone leaders, it was announced on 16 October 1995 that the Republic of Cameroon had been admitted into the Commonwealth. In reaction, the SCNC strongly condemned the Commonwealth for Cameroon's admission, accusing it of a blatant lack of sensitivity in a complex and explosive situation and of frustrating the political aspirations of Southern Cameroonian people. Britain in particular was blamed for its 'second treachery' towards the Southern Cameroons cause, the first having been in the pre-reunification period. The SCNC then pleaded for a Quebec-style referendum on independence for Southern Cameroons and for separate Commonwealth membership (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 96-99).

The decision by the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments to submit their dispute over the oil-rich peninsula of Bakassi to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for adjudication in 1994 offered Anglophone leaders the opportunity to access the legality of their defence of Southern Cameroons statehood (Jua & Konings 2004; Gumne 2006; Anyefru 2010). They claimed that Bakassi was a part neither of Cameroon nor of Nigeria but that it belonged to Southern Cameroons.

In 2001, a new Anglophone body was formed under the banner of the SCNC, the so-called Southern Cameroons People's Organisation (SCAPO) with the specific goal of pursuing legal avenues to address 'the claims of the peoples of Southern Cameroons to self-determination and independence from *La République du Cameroun*'. It soon filed a lawsuit against the Nigerian government in the Federal High Court in Abuja for its continuing disregard of the statehood and sovereignty of Southern Cameroons (Jua & Konings 2004: 624). SCAPO had several reasons for taking Nigeria to court in its battle for recognition of an independent Southern Cameroons state. First, the legal representation of the Southern Cameroons case could not be taken up in Cameroon itself. Second, like the Cameroonian government, the Nigerian government failed to recognise the statehood of Southern Cameroons and its ownership of the Bakassi peninsula. Third, the Trust Territory of Southern Cameroons had been administered by Britain as an integral part of Nigeria. SCAPO was thus inclined to regard Nigeria as a co-conspirator with Britain in the process that had led to the

annexation of Southern Cameroons by *La République du Cameroun*. And finally, Nigeria had ratified the AU's Banjul Charter of Human Rights that lays down in Article 20 the right of all colonised or oppressed people to free themselves from the bonds of domination by resorting to any means recognised by the international community.

In March 2002, SCAPO scored a landmark victory when the Nigerian Federal High Court ruled that 'the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be compelled to place before the ICJ and the UN General Assembly and ensure diligent persecution to the conclusion the claims of the people of Southern Cameroons to self-determination and their declaration of independence'. It also placed a permanent injunction restraining 'the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from treating the Southern Cameroons and all the people of the territory as an integral part of *La République du Cameroun*' (Jua & Konings 2004: 624-25).

This ruling was considered by the Anglophone leadership as a significant step towards international recognition of the Anglophone secessionist claims. However Nigeria had an interest in the court's ruling if one considers the ongoing hearings on the Bakassi case at the ICJ. This was clearly recognised by the Nigerian Federal High Court when it ordered the Nigerian government to ask the ICJ to rule on whether it was Southern Cameroons or the Republic of Cameroon that shared a maritime boundary with the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

This victory inspired the SCNC and SCAPO to start another legal action at AU level. They made a formal complaint against the Republic of Cameroon to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in Banjul in 2003 (Dicklitch 2010). In addition to the historic 'illegal annexation' of Southern Cameroons by Francophone Cameroon in 1961, they highlighted the political, economic, social and cultural marginalisation of Anglophone Cameroonians, claiming that Anglophones were a 'separate and distinct' people who deserved not only the right to development, but also to self-government.

In its 2009 ruling, the ACHPR affirmed Anglophone grievances against the Biya government and recognised Southern Cameroons as a distinct 'people', but it did not support Southern Cameroons

secessionist claims. It was evidently bound by Article 4(b) of the AU's Constitutive Act that calls for respect of existing borders at the time of independence. Consequently, it recommended 'comprehensive national dialogue' (Ebai 2009). The Biya government has not yet, however, shown any willingness to honour this recommendation.

The SCNC also failed to enlist the support of Cameroon's former colonial masters in its secessionist claims (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 99-101). Generally speaking, France has continued to support the Francophone-dominated regime in Cameroon during the current economic and political crisis. Besides the various agreements of cooperation between the two countries, there are other factors explaining French support too, such as the emergence of Anglophone opposition parties, in particular the SDF, during the political liberalisation process. The growing popularity of the Anglophone movements was regarded as an additional threat to France's superior interests in Cameroon: they fuelled existing anti-French sentiments, and their calls for federalism or secession formed a major challenge to French control over Cameroon and its stake in the oil industry in Anglophone Cameroon. With France's support, the Biya government is unlikely to concede any ground to the Anglophones.

While the British government has shown more sympathy than France for the Anglophone cause, it has constantly rejected the SCNC's secessionist claims.<sup>13</sup>

### The Anglophone leadership's sensitisation and mobilisation campaign

From the start, the Anglophone leadership made considerable efforts to transform Anglophone organisations from elitist movements into mass movements. It attempted to raise the consciousness of the Anglophone people regarding their region's subordinate position within the Francophone-dominated state and to mobilise them for action in its pursuit of federalism and secession. To this end, frequent meetings and rallies were organised throughout the Anglophone territory to make the population aware of the organisations' goals, programmes and strategies.



Of great importance to the sensitisation campaign were the regular strikes, demonstrations and boycotts organised by the leadership of the various Anglophone movements to protest against injustices committed by the Francophone-dominated state. Interestingly, some of these were directed at the myths and symbols of the unitary state. For example, Anglophone nationalists have refused to recognise the government's designation of 20 May, the date of the inauguration of the unitary state in 1972, as the country's National Day. Since the early 1990s, they have continued to boycott celebrations, declaring it a 'Day of Mourning' and a 'Day of Shame'. They have also indicted the regime for declaring 11 February, the day of the 1961 plebiscite, as Youth Day, seeing the continued failure of the government to highlight the historical significance of this day as a conscious attempt to reconfigure the nation's history. They have therefore called upon the Anglophone population to mark 11 February as the 'Day of the Plebiscite' and 1 October as the 'Day of Independence' as alternative days of national celebration. Anglophone activists have attempted to hoist federation, UN or independent Southern Cameroons flags on these days, but their attempts were often challenged by the security forces.

The Anglophone leadership's sensitisation campaign was quite successful between 1992 and 1995 and a sense of euphoria spread through Anglophone Cameroon when the SCNC delegation returned from its mission to the UN in 1995. At rallies attended by large crowds in various Anglophone towns, the delegation displayed a huge UN flag, claiming it had received it from the UN itself to show that Southern Cameroons was still a UN trust territory and that independence was only a matter of time (Jua & Konings 2004).

Since 1996, however, the Anglophone leadership's sensitisation campaign has come to a virtual standstill as a result of a general loss of momentum. Following the resignation of the founding fathers among the SCNC leadership, the new leadership, under the chairmanship of Ambassador (retired) Henry Fossung, has appeared incapable of devising a strategy to counteract the government's increasingly divisive and repressive tactics. Given this leadership problem and the government's persistent reluctance to enter into negotiations, a conflict developed within the Anglophone movements between the doves – those who continued to adhere to



a negotiated separation from *La République du Cameroun* – and the hawks – those who had concluded that the independence of Southern Cameroons could only be achieved through armed struggle. The Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) in particular opted for the latter strategy, as is manifest in its motto: ‘The argument of force’.

The SCYL emerged in the mid-1990s as one of the many Anglophone associations operating under the umbrella of the SCNC. Composed of ‘young people who do not see any future for themselves and would prefer to die fighting than continue to submit to the fate imposed on Southern Cameroons by *La République du Cameroun* (Konings 2005b: 176), the SCYL soon came to be seen by the Biya government as the most dangerous Anglophone movement. Little wonder therefore, that the government’s reaction to an ill-planned SCYL attack on military and civil establishments in North West Province between 27 and 31 March 1997 was out of all proportion when it ruthlessly killed, tortured, raped and arrested several local men and women, and forced others into exile. Some SCYL members died while in prison and others were not brought to trial until 1999 when they were not treated as political prisoners but were charged with criminal offences. Having become painfully aware that their organisation still lacked the necessary weapons and training to engage in regular guerrilla warfare against the large and well-equipped Cameroonian armed forces, SCYL leaders apparently decided after the dismal failure of the 1997 revolt to temporarily resort to less easily controlled forms of action, in particular the use of the Internet and the organisation of symbolic actions.

Following this revolt, the SCNC leadership appeared even less inclined to sensitise and mobilise the Anglophone population, leading to a general lethargy and internal divisions among the leadership. It was in these circumstances and with a sense of despair that Justice Frederick Alobwede Ebong, chairman of the SCNC’s High Command Council, took over the Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) station in Buea on 30 December 1999, proclaiming the restoration of the independence of the Federal Republic of Southern Cameroons (FRSC). He was subsequently detained in Yaoundé. At an SCNC meeting on 1 April 2000, Ebong was nominated as chairman of the SCNC and the first head of state of the FRSC.

With a view to endowing the FRSC with all the attributes of statehood as well as guaranteeing state continuity, the FRSC Constituent Assembly meeting in Bamenda in May 2000 adopted resolutions on the coat of arms, the flag and the national anthem. A flag was subsequently designed and the national anthem entitled 'Freedom Land' was released.<sup>14</sup> These developments gave new impetus to the Anglophone struggle as was evidenced by the fact that after years of vehement conflict about policies and strategies, four of the major Anglophone organisations, namely the SCNC, the SCYL, the Ambazonian Movement (AM), and the Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement (SCARM),<sup>15</sup> agreed to form an alliance to achieve the independence of the territory of the ex-British Southern Cameroons in 2001. At a summit in Washington in June 2001, representatives of the territory adopted the so-called Washington Proclamation of the Statehood of the ex-British Southern Cameroons, 'confirming the declaration of separate independence already made by Justice Ebong in Buea on 30 December 1999', and decided to set up the British Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration.<sup>16</sup>

And last but not least, one should not overlook the indispensable role Anglophone Cameroonians in the diaspora are playing in the SCNC sensitisation and mobilisation campaign. They have not only contributed immensely by supporting the Anglophone movements' activities financially, but have also underscored the importance of the Internet, especially at times when Anglophone voices critical of the government have been largely silenced in Cameroon (Jua & Konings 2004; Nyamnjoh 2005a; Anyefru 2008). They are maintaining a plethora of websites such as the homepages of the SCNC, the SCYL, the AM and the FRSC. Their online activities clearly demonstrate the considerable differences in their political agendas and ideologies and this has, unfortunately, resulted in minimal cooperation between the various cyber communities.

### Prospects for Anglophone secessionist claims

The Anglophone movements have booked several successes in their attempts to gain international recognition of their secessionist claims and in their regional sensitisation and mobilisation campaign.

Nevertheless, the prospects for their ultimate aim, i.e. the independence of Southern Cameroons, presently appear bleak. In addition to the fact that the principal international organisations, like the UN, the Commonwealth and the AU, are inclined to reject secessionist claims on the grounds of their respect for the sovereignty and integrity of member states, there are a number of other factors that are hampering Anglophone chances of success. These include the Cameroonian government's persistent refusal to negotiate with secessionist movements and its tactics to contain the Anglophone danger as well as the internal divisions among the Anglophone leadership and the elite.

The Biya government has proved to be increasingly capable of neutralising the Anglophone movements by employing long-standing tactics such as divide-and-rule, co-opting ethno-regional leaders into the regime, and severe repression. Its main strategy has been to divide the Anglophone elite by capitalising on existing rivalries between the South West and North West elites. Seeing themselves as having suffered in the distribution of state power, the South West elite have been inclined to see more political capital in the promotion of regional identity and organisation than in working to consolidate an Anglophone identity and organisation (Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998). The government has found it increasingly worthwhile to tempt the South West elite away from Anglophone solidarity with strategic appointments and the idea that the North West elite rather than the Francophone-dominated state is their primary enemy (Eyoh 1998a; Mbile 2000). Following the 1996 Constitution that provided state protection to autochthonous minorities, it became instrumental in cementing an alliance between the South West elite and the ethnically related Francophone coastal elite, the so-called Sawa movement, an alliance that transcends the Francophone-Anglophone divide (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). In addition to its divisive strategies, the government has enhanced its repressive tactics after the SCNC's adoption of a secessionist programme.

Significantly, the Anglophone secessionist stand is not only strongly opposed by the Biya regime but also faces a great deal of resistance in the Anglophone community itself. While most Anglophones tend to support the Anglophone movements'

grievances about Francophone domination, they are deeply divided over which path to take to resolve the problem. Besides the leadership of the Anglophone movements that advocate peaceful secession with an agreement about the sharing of assets belonging to each side, there are a considerable number in the Anglophone elite who favour federalism, albeit differing on the number of states. Since the 1996 Constitution, the Cameroonian government seems to be willing to concede to a certain degree of decentralisation. As a consequence, the pro-government Anglophone elite are strongly in favour of decentralisation based on the country's ten existing provinces.

There are clear differences within and between the various Anglophone movements. Since the resignation of the founding fathers (Sam Ekontang Elad, Simon Munzu and Carlson Anyangwe) from its leadership, the SCNC has been plagued by growing factionalisation. At times, the leaders appear to be more concerned with contesting each other's position of power than promoting the Anglophone cause. Currently, there are at least four factions in the SCNC, with each one claiming to be authentic (Owono 2010). The main faction is chaired by Chief Ayamba Ette Otun from the Manyu Division in South West Province, but because of his advancing age and relatively low level of education, the real holder of power in this faction is its North Western vice-president, Nfor Ngala Nfor. Curiously, the Biya government has created its own SCNC faction to counter the Southern Cameroons struggle. This pro-government faction is led by Chief Isaac Oben, another chief from the Manyu Division, and was rewarded by the regime for trying to challenge the SCAPO representation during the ACHPR sessions in Banjul.

There has also been a lot of in-fighting over the control of the SCNC's relatively scarce financial resources. Apart from the traditional financial contributions from the diaspora, the SCNC leadership has devised an ingenious source of income-generating activities. They offer Cameroonian migrants, regardless of whether they have actually participated in the Anglophone struggles, certificates claiming they are SCNC activists in order to make them eligible for political asylum in the host countries. Nfor Ngala Nfor and one of his lieutenants, Prince Mbinglo Hitler, have regularly been accused by other SCNC leaders of having appropriated part of the organisation's income for personal use (Owono 2010).

In addition, there are regular problems of disunity among the Anglophone organisations and a certain ambiguity in their objectives. Subsidiary organisations are developing objectives and strategies different from those of the SCNC, the umbrella organisation. Although most of them nowadays champion the independence of Southern Cameroons, some appear never to have altogether dropped the idea of the return to a federal state. This ambivalence is creating confusion among the Anglophone population. In June 2001, four of these organisations, namely the SCNC, the AM, SCARM and SCYL, agreed to form an alliance to gain independence for the former British Southern Cameroons. Strikingly, the AM immediately withdrew from the alliance when its leader, Fon Gorji Dinka, was not elected as head of the British Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration.

And finally, there is the problem of strategy. Although the government has persistently refused to enter into negotiations on either a return to a federal state or peaceful separation, the SCNC has never been prepared to drop its motto of 'The force of argument' and adopt a more confrontational strategy or even armed struggle as propagated by the SCYL. Such a strategy is unlikely to bring about a change in government position or international recognition and there is ample evidence that appeals and petitions of separatist movements to the UN, the Commonwealth, the AU and other international organisations are ineffective. The case of Eritrea is a clear example. The right to Eritrean self-determination was never recognised despite the fact that Eritrea had an excellent case for self-rule based on the abrogation of international agreements by successive governments in Addis Ababa and the fact that they had physical control over at least some of the land they claimed. Instead, Eritrea was only recognised as an independent state once a military victory had been won over the government in Addis Ababa. This is the traditional way in which international society recognises new states.

With their tendency to make the entire Francophone community responsible for the Anglophone predicament, the Anglophone movements have even managed to alienate the Francophones who had shown sympathy for their cause (All Anglophone Conference 1993). Obviously, this has been harmful to their plans and to the formation of alliances with Francophone groups that sympathise with the Anglophone cause.

Some desperate SCNC members were once heard to complain at a meeting: 'With no money, no foreign support, no arms, little grassroots support and most of the fighting and activism taking place on the Internet instead of on the ground, are we not wasting our time?' This may be somewhat exaggerated as the SCNC and other Anglophone organisations are far from dead, as their various actions show, but more unity and solidarity among Anglophones is needed, as is also a change of tactics.

## Conclusion

The Anglophone call for secession and the concomitant establishment of an independent state has a long history. It was the most popular option in Southern Cameroons in the period preceding reunification but the local population was never given the chance to vote for it in the 1961 plebiscite. The Anglophone call for secession reemerged in the mid-1980s when a prominent Anglophone chief and lawyer, Fon Gorji Dinka, demanded the immediate promulgation of an independent Anglophone state, which he called the Republic of Ambazonia.

Anglophone movements renewed this call during political liberalisation in the early 1990s but unlike the pre-reunification period, the renewed pursuit of an independent state was initially a minority option, with most Anglophone movements striving for the return to a federal state. It was not until the Biya government refused to discuss the federal option that the leadership of the Anglophone movements started championing the separation of Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon into two sovereign states along the lines of what happened in Czechoslovakia in 1992. It was envisaged that this kind of peaceful separation could be accompanied by an equitable sharing of assets and liabilities, and be supported by the establishment of other cross-border confidence-building institutions. Most of the leaders of the Anglophone movements now agree that this solution holds the best chance for peace in the long run because any attempts to engage belatedly in democratic and institutional reforms just to placate Anglophones and preserve international appearances will only postpone the day of reckoning and prolong

the misery. An increasing number of scholars (Ghai 1998; Sandbrook 2000) also regard secession as the best solution in cases where there are no prospects for peaceful co-existence of territorial units within dysfunctional and deeply divided nation-states. Eritrea's peaceful separation from Ethiopia in 1994 following a referendum in the previous year reassured those who feared that the secession of an African country would automatically open a Pandora's box of violence and fragmentation.

The question, however, remains as to whether there is sufficient support for the Anglophone secessionist call. In sharp contrast to their leadership's claim of widespread regional support, our own research has provided evidence that the majority of the Anglophone elite favour a form of federation. Even some SCNC leaders, like the late John Ngu Foncha and Solomon Tandeng Muna who were Anglophone architects of reunification, appear never to have abandoned their federalist ideal although they continued to support the SCNC line for strategic reasons.

It is unlikely that the Anglophone movements' call for an independent Southern Cameroons state will receive any support from the Francophone elite and the international community. The majority of the Francophone elite are clearly in favour of a decentralised unitary state and are determined to keep control of Anglophone Cameroon's rich natural resources in an area that has become the country's breadbasket and the source of considerable oil wealth.

The positive outcome of some of the Anglophone leadership's international representations of its cause has boosted Anglophone national sentiments. Nevertheless, the multiple initiatives for international recognition seem as yet to offer little prospect of success. International organisations continue to respect the territorial integrity of member states and disapprove moves towards any further Balkanisation. During his visit to Cameroon in 2000, the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan made the Anglophone movements understand in no uncertain terms that dialogue and reconciliation rather than separation would be instrumental to solving the Anglophone problem. A similar appeal was made in the 2009 ACHPR ruling.



Although the struggle for an independent Southern Cameroons state remains alive, especially as a result of the financial contributions and Internet activities of Anglophones in the diaspora, the prospects of success, if measured in terms of achieving a sovereign state, remain remote and Anglophone nationalists need to rethink their political objectives as well as their strategies. Given the Francophone-dominated state and the AU's steadfast refusal to consider Anglophone secessionist claims, more Anglophone nationalists are now proposing embracing armed struggle on the grounds that freedom is never freely given.

## Notes

1. For the history of Northern Cameroons, see Le Vine (1964) and Welch (1966). Northern Cameroons voted in the 1961 plebiscite for integration into the Federation of Nigeria.
2. The British had informed the United Nations that the Southern Cameroons would not be economically viable as an independent state. This was based on the Phillipson Report (1959) commissioned by the Foncha government in 1959 to investigate the financial, economic and administrative situation in Southern Cameroons. Its findings, however, could be disputed as an economic survey done in the same year by Dr K.E. Berrill (1960) came to a different conclusion. Hesitant about investing heavily in a region that was supposedly unattractive economically, the British were also opposed to extended trusteeship. The British Secretary of State for the Colonies once warned Southern Cameroons leaders that the golden key to the Bank of England would not be handed over to Southern Cameroons in the case of an extended trusteeship period.
3. For similar ideas, see Epie Ngome's excellent novel entitled *What God Has Put Asunder* (1992).
4. Reference to the incumbent regime as the government of *La République du Cameroun*, the name adopted by Francophone Cameroon at independence, has become a key signifier in the replotting of the nation's constitutional history as a progressive consolidation of the recolonisation of Anglophone Cameroon by the post-colonial Francophone-dominated state. See Eyoh (1998a: 264).
5. 'The New Social Order' by Fon Gorji Dinka, 20 March 1985, reproduced in Mukong (1990: 98-99).



6. The name is derived from Ambas Bay at the foot of Mount Cameroon, which was the area of permanent British settlement in the present-day Anglophone region. In 1858, the British Baptist missionary, Alfred Saker, purchased land from the King of Bimbia and became the *de facto* governor of the small colony of Victoria that was named after the British Queen. See Ardener (1968).
7. See SCNC press release reprinted in *Cameroon Post*, 16-23 August 1994, p. 3. See also Anyangwe (2008).
8. *Cameroon Post*, 8-14 October 1996; and *The Witness*, 12-18 November 1996.
9. See SCNC, Petition against the Annexation of the Southern Cameroons, Buea, May 1995 (mimeo).
10. SCNC, The London Communiqué, London, 22 June 1995 (mimeo).
11. See 'Annan Ends African Tour, Seeks Cameroon Dialogue' on scncforum website, 4 May 2000.
12. See <http://www.unpo.org>.
13. See *Star Headlines*, 19 March 2006, 'The British Government Condemns Anglophone Secession'.
14. *The Post*, 13 November 2000, p. 3.
15. SCARM was the successor of the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM), which was originally the most important Anglophone movement.
16. See British Southern Cameroons Summit, Resolutions, Washington, 17 June 2001 (mimeo); and Washington Proclamation of the Statehood of Ex-British Southern Cameroons, Washington, 17 June 2001 (mimeo).

## Good governance, privatisation and ethno-regional conflict in Cameroon

### Introduction

By proclaiming that a ‘crisis of governance’ underlies ‘the litany of Africa’s development problems’, the World Bank’s 1989 report *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* placed the concept of good governance at the heart of the donor agenda for Africa (World Bank 1989: 60). Painfully confronted at the time with the relative failure of its structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), the World Bank was inclined in this report to blame the weak, predatory and neopatrimonial African states for the poor performance of structural adjustment rather than to question its own neo-liberal reform package. It therefore stressed the need not only for less but also for better government in African states.

But what is good governance and how is it to be promoted? The term remains rather vague. The World Bank (1992: 1) defines it in managerial terms as ‘the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development’. Good governance was to flow from enhanced accountability within the public sector, transparency and openness in decision-making, the rule of law, and more efficient public management. World Bank officials also added the issue of capacity building to enable technocrats to initiate and implement market-based economic reforms as an essential element for good governance (Sandbrook 2000: 10-13).

Whereas the World Bank couched its interventions in the affairs of African countries in governance terms that enabled it to claim not to have preferences for particular types of regime, bilateral aid donors felt less inhibited in linking democracy to good governance. The latter sought to promote a liberal-democratic system through a

combination of political conditionalities and financial support for democratisation initiatives and capacity building, such as the introduction of international election observation and the empowerment of non-government organisations. Although bilateral donors continuously stressed that democratisation had its intrinsic merits, it is beyond any doubt that they saw it primarily as a vehicle for promoting the more efficient implementation of structural adjustment measures. Democratisation was said to empower the electorate by providing it with mechanisms of a parliamentary and extra-parliamentary nature to check upon the ruling regime's neopatrimonial practices and to participate in the decision-making process about necessary structural adjustment measures. This would contribute to the legitimisation of unpopular neoliberal reforms among the population.

Clearly, the good governance discourse, propagated by the donor community generally and the World Bank in particular, represents an instrumentalist, managerial and technocratic approach to development. It aims at promoting the emergence of a more conducive and, in their view, more legitimate political environment, backed by the requisite administrative capacity, for the successful implementation of orthodox structural adjustment (Olukoshi 1998a: 35). This approach entails an essentially depoliticised notion of governance. It narrates the proposed restructuring of African societies simply as a managerial and technical problem rather than as being contested and political. Disagreements and conflicts over the design and implementation of neo-liberal reforms are usually absent from any analysis, and development emerges as a neutral project guided by 'technical considerations of economy and efficiency, rather than ideological and political considerations' (Abrahamsen 2000: 143). When the World Bank and governance theorists do acknowledge conflict, they are usually in the habit of treating it solely, or primarily, as the result of 'selfish' and 'illegitimate' machinations of vested interests that are steeped in a variety of neopatrimonial relations. In the end, this approach tends to insulate governance from the actual political process: persistent struggles for power, control over resources, as well as access to the decision-making process about the contested neo-liberal reforms. It tends in particular to gloss over the weak and dependent position

of African states in the world capitalist system. The continent's strategic and economic marginalisation in the new world order and its dependence on foreign assistance have facilitated intervention and governance by international institutions and organisations to the extent that more and more decisions that determine the well-being of Africa's peoples are today being made outside the continent in the Washington offices of the Bretton Woods institutions. Power, in other words, is increasingly located outside the political community as conventionally defined by democratic theory, and beyond the reach of the democratic control of Africa's citizens (Abrahamsen 2000: 146-47).

While elected African governments have frequently tried to avoid, postpone, manipulate and dilute the imposed neo-liberal reforms, which tend to further undermine the patronage networks on which their power continues to rest and the limited legitimacy they still enjoy among the electorate, their dependence on continued financial assistance has generally led them to fall into line with the demands of their external constituency. Civil-society organisations that have either emerged or obtained a large measure of autonomy during political liberalisation are usually completely excluded from the decision-making process about neo-liberal reforms and have often displayed strong opposition to austere structural adjustment measures. Interestingly, in the absence of any powerful opposition parties in the African democratic transition, newly created ethno-regional associations have come to serve as the new intermediaries between the state and the electorate in a number of African states, including Cameroon (Kasfir 1998; Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998). Their leadership is determined to represent and defend ethno-regional interests during structural adjustment and often strives for a larger degree of ethno-regional autonomy and self-determination.

In this chapter I want to demonstrate these arguments with an extended case study of privatisation in Cameroon. Privatisation has become one of the cornerstones of the public-sector reforms imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions on Cameroon. In the first part of this chapter, I highlight the linkage between good governance and privatisation and its embeddedness in particular relations of power. In the second part, I focus on the vehement resistance of ethno-regional associations and other civil-society

associations, in particular the trade unions, to the government announcement on 15 July 1994 of the privatisation of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), a huge agro-industrial parastatal located in the coastal area of Anglophone Cameroon. These organisations perceived the announced privatisation of this important regional parastatal as a further step towards ethno-regional marginalisation and a severe threat to their workers' welfare.

### Governance and privatisation in Cameroon

Privatisation has become a key instrument in the structural adjustment programme and the good governance agenda imposed on Cameroon by the Bretton Woods institutions and bilateral donors. It is an essential part of the overall neoliberal reform package aimed at creating transparency and accountability in the management of national affairs as well as a favourable environment for opening up the Cameroonian economy to market forces and private-sector development.

As in most other African countries (Grosh & Makandala 1994; Tangri 1999), the parastatal sector in Cameroon has grown rapidly since independence (Tedga 1990; Van de Walle 1994; Walker 1998). From a handful of public enterprises inherited from the British and French Trust Authorities at independence and reunification in 1961, the Cameroonian parastatal sector grew to 219 enterprises in the mid-1980s, employing approximately 100,000 people. Growth in public-sector ownership was the result of a series of economic and political factors, in particular statist conceptions of development, economic nationalism, and the need for political patronage (see Chapter 4).

By virtually any measure of economic performance, the record of state-owned concerns has proved disappointing. Although by no means uniformly negative in their performance, public enterprises have been judged inefficient and unprofitable. The Cameroonian government itself has regularly recognised the operating ineffectiveness of its parastatals but little noticeable improvement in public enterprises has occurred (Konings 1993a: 27). Remarkably, the international financiers who made a major contribution to parastatal expansion failed to raise any serious alarm about the

dismal performance of Cameroonian public enterprises for a long time. This may be explained by the fact that they, like others, were impressed by the general performance of the Cameroonian economy which was viewed as one of the rare success stories in Africa, registering a phenomenal growth rate of 7 per cent between 1970 and 1986 (see Chapter 2). It was not until the crisis in the Cameroonian economy in 1987 that the World Bank began to express its disillusionment with the performance of state enterprises, attributing their poor performance to the following factors:

The causes of the bad results of the 60 enterprises, in which the state participates to a greater or less extent, are...the excessive size of the initial investments and the low earning capacity of the projects, over-employment, a too heavy administrative structure, the absence of clearly defined objectives and concomitant criteria of performance, and incentives for the management. These enterprises also suffer from the usual ills of public enterprises: the pursuit of social objectives without any direct financial compensation from the state, the politicisation of management and the interference of supervising ministries in the management, the slow reaction to developments in the market and the poor financial structure (World Bank 1987: 5).

Subsequently, in 1988/89, the Bretton Woods institutions forced the reluctant Biya government to adopt an SAP, and privatisation soon became an essential part of their 'good governance' and private-sector development programmes (see Chapter 4).

Public enterprise reform and private-sector development have been designed in the offices of the Bretton Woods institutions. Like other structural adjustment measures, they have been accepted by virtually all bilateral donors and presented to African governments as the only way to development and economic growth. Even since the Biya government was compelled in 1990 to introduce a certain measure of political liberalisation, including a multi-party system and a limited degree of freedom of press and association, there has been little local participation in the actual formulation of privatisation schemes. The degree of control exerted by donors and creditors, especially the Bretton Woods institutions, on these new

democracies poses a challenge to key features of liberal democracy as commonly conceived in political theory in that it threatens to erode the right to national self-determination and self-government. This is a form of democracy characterised by local political emasculation, where the fine-tuning of externally directed policies is the best that can be hoped for and where voices of dissent are persistently overruled by the government's accountability to its financial sponsors (Abrahamsen 2000: 145). The result is what Mkandawire (1999) has termed 'choiceless democracies', democracies in which pronouncements in favour of economic liberalisation are the only political route available.

Strikingly, the donor community has been keen to resist any accusation of undue influence over domestic policy choices, and has eagerly promoted the notion of national ownership of SAPs. 'Ownership' implies that the Bretton Woods institutions no longer impose policies on African countries but merely put their superior economic knowledge and planning skills at the disposal of governments, which then make an autonomous decision as to whether to adopt the suggested policy measures. Clearly, such a discourse denies the fact that public enterprise reforms and private-sector development programmes have been subjected to little local debate and have usually not required legislative debate. These programmes are normally simply imposed after secret consultations with a few top national technocrats representing the government.

There is obviously a serious contradiction between the donors' ardent quest for the insulation of technocracy and their calls for greater accountability and transparency in economic affairs. There appear to be two main reasons for their preference to deal with insulated technocrats. First, they rightly assume that Africa's 'old guard' neopatrimonial leaders are less inclined to faithfully implement structural adjustment because of its potential for undermining the clientelist networks on which their power rests. Technocrats, in contrast, are thought to be driven purely by considerations of competence and professionalism required for the effective design and implementation of economic reforms. Second, donors seem to feel that since adjustment requires unpopular sacrifices, in-camera negotiations with technocrats are preferable to a participatory decision-making process by which popular

demands can derail 'necessary' reforms. Most newly elected African governments also appear to eschew popular input into adjustment programmes. Not only do they have limited room for manoeuvre in negotiations with the IMF, the World Bank and other lenders but they are also expected to implement any agreements as negotiated. Knowing that they will therefore be unable to satisfy some demands, presidents and their lieutenants avoid consultations they cannot control and ignore or undermine articulations of dissent and protest, such as opposition by civil-society organisations and independent newspapers.

Remarkably, although the donors are able to design and impose structural adjustment measures upon African governments, they appear to have less control over their actual implementation. There is considerable research and empirical evidence to suggest that African governments may sign documents initiating a privatisation programme without intending to ever execute it (van de Walle 1994; Bennell 1997; Tangri 1999). For these government leaders, the need to continue financial assistance flows demands acquiescence to donor demands but the realities of the domestic political economy limit what is politically feasible.

Privatisation, in fact, represented a severe challenge to (i) the neopatrimonial logic of the Cameroonian regime which laid a solid foundation for co-opting the various ethno-regional elite factions into the 'hegemonic alliance' (Bayart 1979) and thus secured a considerable measure of political stability in the post-colonial state; (ii) the post-colonial state's welfare concerns manifest, among others, in the creation of employment and relatively good conditions of service in the public sector; and (iii) the existing national sentiments, looking upon the parastatal sector as part of the 'national patrimony' (Campbell 2001). Under these circumstances, a strategy of initial acceptance of a privatisation programme followed by delay, obstruction or, what van de Walle (2001) has called, partial reform may be the most effective.

While African governments have often tried to postpone or dilute the imposed privatisation programmes, civil-society organisations have frequently opposed their implementation as being harmful to their members' interests and have demanded a voice in the decision-making process (Olukoshi 1998; Konings 2002). One of the



privatisations in Cameroon that sparked off virulent opposition from ethno-regional associations and pressure groups was that of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC). The CDC was the most prominent of the 15 enterprises selected for privatisation in July 1994, being the largest agro-industrial parastatal in the country. Its estates are located in the coastal area of Anglophone Cameroon and its operation has been of great importance to regional development.

### Privatisation of the CDC and ethno-regional opposition

The CDC is the most important agro-industrial parastatal in the country with more than 100,000 hectares of land. 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 help of huge loans from several well-known financial institutions, including the World Bank, the International Development Association (IDA), the European Development Fund (EDF), the Commonwealth Development Corporation (COMDEV) and the French *Caisse Centrale de Coopération Économique* (CCCE), it expanded its area under cultivation from 20,000 to 42,000 hectares following the achievement of independence and reunification in 1961. It is the country's second largest employer, 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 (Konings 1993a).

The CDC is, furthermore, one of the country's oldest enterprises. Its history is closely linked with the political and economic history of Anglophone Cameroon. It was founded in 1946 but its roots can be traced back to the German colonial period (1884-1916) when many large-scale private plantations were created on the fertile, volcanic soils around Mount Cameroon in the present South West Province of Anglophone Cameroon. The establishment of a plantation economy in the region led to the expulsion of the original occupants of the land, notably the Bakweri, into prescribed native reserves (Matute 1990; Ardener 1996). With the British occupation in 1914/15, the property of German planters was confiscated and

turned over to the Custodian of Enemy Property. When the British took over the administration of the area shortly afterwards, the plantations were merged and a government department was formed to manage them. By 1922, however, the British Mandate Authority had already decided to get rid of them, as the administrative costs of maintaining them was said to be prohibitive. It then seriously considered returning the plantation lands to the original owners but dropped the idea in the end. Instead, it came to the conclusion that it would be in the best interests of the territory and its inhabitants to put the plantations back in the hands of foreign private enterprise. At an auction held in London in November 1924, almost all the estates were bought back by their former German owners.

At the start of the Second World War, the German estates were again expropriated by the Custodian of Enemy Property. After the war, a decision had to be reached, once again, on how to dispose of the properties. The Bakweri chiefs and educated elite, organised in the so-called Bakweri Land Committee (BLC), immediately began agitating for the return of its ancestral lands. It sent several petitions, first to the British Crown and subsequently to the United Nations, as Britain had assumed responsibility for the territory, the so-called Southern Cameroons, under United Nations Trusteeship after the war. However, after considerable deliberations, the British Trusteeship Authority declined once again to surrender the ex-German plantation lands to their original owners (Molua 1985; Konings 1993a). Instead, it announced in November 1946 that they would be leased to a newly established statutory corporation, the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC).

The corporation came into being with the passage of two ordinances in 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 the Second World War. Under the terms of this ordinance, the governor of Nigeria, who was responsible for the administration of the Southern Cameroons, was to declare them 'native lands' and hold them in trust for the common benefit of all the inhabitants of the territory. The second ordinance, the Cameroons Development Corporation Ordinance no. 39 (1946), provided for the setting up

of the corporation. All the lands acquired by the governor under the first ordinance were to be leased to this corporation for a period of sixty years. Significantly, the corporation was charged with a double responsibility: it was to develop and manage the approximately 104,000 hectares of estate lands in the interests of the people of the Trust Territory, and it was to provide for the spiritual, educational and social welfare of its employees. After fulfilling all its obligations, the corporation was to pay direct taxes to the government of Nigeria and all profits were to be used for the benefit of the people of the Trust Territory.

The CDC has been significant in the development of the Anglophone region. Students of plantation agriculture, such as Beckford (1972), have blamed the persistent poverty and underdevelopment of plantation 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 both 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, and has stimulated the supply of goods and services to itself and its workers. It played a key role in the commercialisation and modernisation of peasant production in the 1950s and in the establishment of regional smallholders' oil-palm and rubber schemes since the early 1960s (Ardener 1958; Konings 1993b). 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.

The government announcement on 15 July 1994 of the privatisation of this important agro-industrial enterprise was all the more shocking to the Anglophone population since the CDC (i) had been one of the very few public enterprises in Cameroon to perform relatively well until the economic crisis; (ii) 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 reducing costs and increasing productivity; and (iii) was on the

way to economic recovery following the 50 per cent devaluation of the CFA franc in early 1994 that made CDC products more competitive on the world market (Konings 1995b).

The announced privatisation of the CDC prompted vehement protest actions in Anglophone Cameroon from various ethno-regional associations and pressure groups that had been either created or granted a large measure of autonomy in the wake of political liberalisation in December 1990. The following ethno-regional organisations have been the most active.

First, there are the various Anglophone associations that since 1993 have been operating under an umbrella organisation, the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) (see Chapter 5). The government announcement of the CDC privatisation was seen by these Anglophone associations as a further step in the dismantling of the Anglophone colonial legacy by the Francophone-dominated state. As a consequence, they called upon Anglophones to forget about any internal differences and form a united front against attempts to sell the CDC to Francophone or French interests.

Besides the Anglophone associations, there were also the associations of the elite and chiefs in the South West Province of Anglophone Cameroon where most of the CDC estates are located. The most prominent South West associations were the South West Elite Association (SWELA) and the South West Chiefs' Conference (SWECC). There is some overlap between these organisations, with some important South West chiefs also being members of SWELA (Konings 1997; Nyamnjoh & Rowlands 1998; Eyoh 1998b). Both associations claim to be non-political pressure groups, with their main aims being to promote the South West Province's socio-economic and cultural revival. Although both organisations supported most of the Anglophone grievances about Francophone domination, they equally claimed that the South West had been more disadvantaged than the North West in the post-colonial state in terms of distribution of strategic posts in the federation and the unitary state (see Chapter 3). The South West elite and chiefs particularly feared that the newly created Anglophone movements' pursuit of either a return to a two-state federation or outright secession would lead to renewed South West domination by the entrepreneurial North West majority. They were therefore inclined

to champion a ten-state federal system based on the existing ten provinces in Cameroon, which would retain the present separation between the South West and the North West Provinces, thus safeguarding the former's autonomy.

Despite such internal rivalries and conflicts within the Anglophone community, the South West elite and chiefs favoured a (temporary) alliance with the leadership of the Anglophone movements when the privatisation of the CDC was announced. This alliance was justified on the grounds of the corporation's immense contribution to the welfare and development of the Anglophone community as a whole.

And finally there was the Bakweri Land Committee (BLC), the organisation of the Bakweri chiefs and elite in Fako Division of the South West Province, whose main goal has continued to be the retrieval of their ancestral lands that were expropriated under German colonial rule for the purpose of plantation production and later, in 1946, leased by the British Trusteeship Authority to the CDC. The BLC felt particularly aggrieved by the announced privatisation of the CDC. It felt betrayed at not having been previously consulted about the corporation's privatisation and it warned the government that the CDC lands were Bakweri lands and thus could not be sold to non-natives without Bakweri consent and compensation. The BLC is being supported in its current struggles by both the South West and Anglophone associations.

In addition to the ethno-regional associations, there were other civil-society organisations in the region that resisted the privatisation of the CDC. The most important was the Fako Agricultural Workers' Union (FAWU) that is responsible for the representation and defence of the CDC workers' interests (Konings 1993a, 1995a). Its president, Mr C.P.N. Vewessee, is one of the most prominent trade-union leaders in Cameroon, having played a significant role in the achievement of a large measure of trade-union autonomy in 1992. He insisted that the CDC could not be privatised without the FAWU being consulted, arguing that the workers had made personal sacrifices during the economic crisis to assist the corporation's recovery by accepting drastic cuts in salaries and fringe benefits and contributing to a compulsory savings scheme. Moreover, the union, he said, would resist any mass lay-offs and/or deterioration

in the workers' conditions of service as a result of privatisation (Konings 1995b).

And, finally, the Anglophone press has strongly condemned the announced privatisation. It has continued to defend the Anglophone cause and to inform the Anglophone population of the issues at stake.

### Ethno-regional protest actions against CDC privatisation

During the economic crisis, starting in 1986-87, there were frequent rumours in Anglophone Cameroon that the Biya government was hoping to privatise the CDC and sell it to Francophone or French interests. The government strongly denied such rumours but Anglophones remained on the alert, ready to act if their regional patrimony was threatened.

In June 1992, for instance, it was rumoured that the French were interested in taking over the corporation after the Biya government, highly dependent on French support and aid, had managed to obtain a FCFA 7 billion low-interest loan for the ailing company from the French CCCE. Although this loan provided much-needed capital for investment purposes, the increased control over the corporation by France was highly resented by CDC workers and managers, as well as by the general public in Anglophone Cameroon. It was then reported in Anglophone newspapers that the CCCE wanted to take over the CDC oil-palm estates, which again resulted in widespread protests in Anglophone Cameroon. In July 1992, SWELA began to collect signatures for a petition against this alleged takeover.<sup>1</sup>

This outcry against expanded French control over the corporation contrasted sharply with Anglophone sentiments regarding previous and later transfers of the management of two major CDC crops to Anglo-American companies. Few protests were voiced in Anglophone Cameroon when the corporation entrusted the management of the banana sector to the American multinational Del Monte in 1987. And Anglophone newspapers even lauded the agreement between the CDC and (the British) COMDEV in late 1992 which stipulated that management of the corporation's three tea estates be transferred to COMDEV for a period of ten years.

Anglophones argued that these two Anglo-American companies had wide experience in plantation management. Comdev had even had experience in Anglophone Cameroon, having satisfactorily managed the CDC from 1960 to 1974 (Konings 1993a: 41-45). Above all, Anglophones strongly believed that Anglo-American companies would be less inclined than French ones to dominate and exploit an Anglophone region and that their business culture fitted in well in Anglophone Cameroon.

When the government finally did announce the privatisation of the CDC on 15 July 1994, Anglophones were deeply incensed. All existing ethno-regional associations and opposition parties formed a united front to resist the government's decision. One Anglophone columnist, Mr Jing Thomas, captured the essence of Anglophone sentiments:

The CDC is unlike any other corporation. It means native lands, especially those of the Bakweri. It means jobs for Cameroonians, especially the Anglophones. It is a symbol of Anglophone survival against all odds.... If the CDC falls....the last act of internal colonisation would have been completed.<sup>2</sup>

Anglophones once again alleged that privatisation of the CDC was 'an ill-disguised plot to hand over the corporation to the French and the Francophones' or 'a plan by Biya to compensate his "tribesmen" and allies with a slice of the parastatal cake'.<sup>3</sup> There were protest marches in Anglophone towns organised by SWELA and the Anglophone associations. Protesters carried banners with slogans such as 'France: Hands off Anglophones' and 'Hands off or we will burn the plantations'. The National Executive of the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM), the most important Anglophone association, met on 30-31 July 1994 and condemned the CDC privatisation as a declaration of war against the people of Southern Cameroons and called upon Anglophones to observe 16 August as a day of protest and solidarity with the CDC.<sup>4</sup> SWELA thereupon declared 12 August as another day of solidarity with the CDC. Despite a ban on demonstrations on its solidarity day and a heavy police presence, a determined group of SWELA members led by Secretary-General Martin Nkemngu marched successfully to



the governor's office where they presented a protest memorandum for the attention of the head of state.<sup>5</sup> At a press conference in Limbe (Victoria) on 20 August, the FAWU president, Mr C.P.N. Vewessee, declared that the union and the workers were totally against the dubious privatisation of the CDC. Since the workers had a joint financial stake in the corporation amounting to FCFA 5.5 billion, the privatisation could only be enforced on terms acceptable to the majority of the workers.<sup>6</sup> In August, the Biya government sent a delegation of high-ranking Anglophone allies to the capitals of the two Anglophone provinces to try to calm the population. They were jeered and asked whether they would 'benefit from the spoils'.

Unsurprisingly, the most vehement opposition in Anglophone Cameroon came from landowners. As soon as the privatisation of the CDC was announced, the 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 any consideration having been given to the Bakweri land problem. Soon thereafter the BLC was renamed the Bakweri Land Claims 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's decision. They agreed to voice strong opposition to the announced privatisation on the grounds that the CDC lands were Bakweri lands and thus could 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.<sup>7</sup>

Over 500 Bakweri chiefs, notables and elite gathered at the Buea Youth Cultural and Animation Center on 4 August 1994 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'. They insisted that any privatisation plan 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'.<sup>8</sup> 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 and secretary of the *ad hoc* committee, Professor Ndiva Kofele-Kale, was designated counsel for the Bakweri people with instructions to present their case before the United Nations and other international fora.

The Bakweri case was strongly supported by the 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 and also stressed that the Bakweri were not inclined to renew the 60-year CDC lease, thus reclaiming the CDC lands after its expiry in 2007.

Concerned about 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, the Deputy Secretary-General at the Presidency, and the 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, who had always been a staunch supporter of the regime until the Bakweri land issue arose,<sup>9</sup> then took the floor. Amid thunderous applause he declared that he as the custodian of the ancestral lands and the Bakweri population as a whole were against the privatisation of the CDC. He requested that Chief Inoni 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.<sup>10</sup>

After the government delegation returned to Yaoundé, no further government action took place concerning CDC privatisation but this apparent victory for Anglophone resistance turned out to be short-lived. In 1997 rumours of an imminent privatisation of the CDC became more and more persistent. In conformity with the agreement concluded with the IMF and the World Bank within the framework of the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Programme (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 seen 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 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.<sup>11</sup>

The CDC 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.<sup>12</sup>

The CDC was finally put up for sale in January 1999. Few protests were heard from the now almost dormant Anglophone movements (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000). 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 South Western members of parliament and government, they denounced the privatisation of the CDC saying that the latter's acceptance of the CDC sale 'was tantamount to a betrayal of their people'.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

Since no reply was forthcoming from the presidency, the BLCC, strongly supported by South West associations, like SWELA and SWECC, 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, an interim bureau of the BLCC was set up in the United States in May 2000 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 Internet.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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 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). 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'.<sup>17</sup> Soon afterwards, on 21 August 2000, the BLCC counsel, Professor Ndiva Kofele-Kale, was invited by the United Nations to make a representation on the Bakweri lands issue to the United Nations 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 as follows:

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.<sup>18</sup>

It became increasingly evident that the BLCC was finding it hard to defend Bakweri interests at the national level after 'their own son', Peter Mafany Musonge, was appointed prime minister in 1996. 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 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 any eventual sale of the CDC. Their expectations appeared to have a solid foundation because, in his former capacity as CDC general manager, Musonge had publicly declared during a 1994 radio interview that any privatisation of the

CDC should be 'not only economically effective but also socially equitable'. For that reason, indigenous landowners, workers and investors would be directly involved in this endeavour.<sup>19</sup> 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 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, he is reported to have resorted to intimidation, using the Buea sub-prefect and the Fako prefect to that end.

In March 2000, the Buea sub-prefect, Mr Aboubakar Njikam, banned a BLCC general assembly meeting for which he had earlier given his approval. The prime minister appears quickly to have ordered a halt to the meeting when he learnt that compensation was high on the agenda but he failed to intimidate the committee, which 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 cease 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.<sup>20</sup>

With the high profile publicity given to the BLCC 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.<sup>21</sup>

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 a lack 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, namely:

- 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.<sup>22</sup>

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, brought strong pressure to bear upon the Cameroonian government to settle the privatisation imbroglio. In the wake of the reluctance of foreign companies to invest in the CDC, primarily because of 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. Without having ever consulted the BLCC, the government announced in October 2002 that the CDC tea sector had been sold to a South African consortium, Brobon Finex PTY Limited (Konings 2011).



## Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show that privatisation has become a cornerstone in the good governance-structural adjustment linkage formulated by the western donors and creditors and imposed upon African states. It is, in essence, an attempt to free state enterprises from 'politics', in particular from the government's neo-patrimonial logic which is seen as the basic cause of their malfunctioning, to introduce transparency, accountability and the rule of law in policy-making and implementation needed for the efficient operation of market forces, and to redirect the state away from being an entrepreneur to being a promoter of private enterprise. Privatisation is also said to have a potentially liberating effect on civil society: it will empower the people by creating opportunities for private initiative and entrepreneurship.

My case study of the privatisation of the CDC in Anglophone Cameroon has provided sufficient evidence to substantiate our main thesis that the good governance-structural adjustment linkage, though largely framed in managerial and technical terms, is actually highly political, being embedded in particular relations of power, and ironically it often contradicts the liberal-democratic principles prescribed by the bilateral donors. In this respect, it has clearly demonstrated that:

- Privatisation schemes imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions tend to erode national sovereignty over basic economic policy decision-making despite the fact that these institutions usually try to depoliticise their interventions in African states by referring to their superior economic knowledge and technocratic skills. Moreover, the installation of a technocracy to implement 'correct' policies is an encouragement of authoritarian forms of governance: accounting to external agencies takes the place of accountability to legislatures and the electorate, democratic decision-making processes are circumvented, and a resulting 'cult of secrecy' discourages political debate and dialogue (Mkandawire 1999).
- Government leaders have constantly attempted to postpone and manipulate the implementation of privatisation schemes, which challenge the patronage



system that forms a stabilising and uniting factor in the weak nation-state, undermine their limited popular legitimacy, and create ethno-regional opposition. Nevertheless, they have been eventually forced to comply so as not to forfeit any needed financial assistance.

- The government announcement of the privatisation of the CDC in Anglophone Cameroon has been particularly contested by various ethno-regional associations that have emerged during political liberalisation. Having been excluded from the decision-making process, they have strongly protested against their loss of control over ancestral lands and regional parastatals, which they considered as a renewed onslaught by the Francophone-dominated post-colonial state on the Anglophone cultural and economic heritage.

## Notes

1. *The Oracle*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1992, p. 2.
2. *Fako International*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January), 1995, p. 18.
3. *New African*, no. 326 (January), 1995, p. 25; and *Africa International*, nos 279/280 (January-February), 1995, p. 39.
4. CAM, 'Communiqué of the Enlarged Ex-Bureau Meeting, 30-31 July 1994 (mimeo); and CAM, 'CAM Resolution on the Privatisation of the CDC', 30-31 July 1994 (mimeo).
5. *The Herald*, 18-21 August 1994, p. 7.
6. *Cameroon Post*, 6-19 September 1994, p. 9.
7. *Fako International*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1995), pp. 14-16.
8. Memorandum of the Bakweri People on the Presidential Decree to Privatisise or Sell the Cameroon Development Corporation, Buea, 27 July 1994.
9. 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 CPDM, in Fako Division and chairman of the CDC before being appointed Paramount Chief of Buea in 1992. For his career, see Gwellem, J.F. (1985) *Cameroon Year Book 1985/86*, Limbe: Gwellem Publications, 113-14.

10. Cited in *Fako International*, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1995), p. 16.
11. *The Post*, 5 December 1997, pp. 1-2.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Isaha'a Boh Cameroon, Bulletin no. 405.
14. See Letter from the Bakweri around the World to President Paul Biya of Cameroon, dated 1 October 1999.
15. See <http://www.bakwerilands.org>. Most of the documents quoted in this chapter can be found on this website.
16. Letter from Dr Lyombe Eko, Executive Director of BLCC-USA, to Mr Horst Köhler, Managing Director of the IMF, dated 16 June 2000.
17. Press Release no. blc/us/05/08/00, The BLCC to seek consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
18. BLCC, Open Letter to All Prospective Buyers of CDC Plantations, Buea, 12 October 2000.
19. See *Cameroon Post*, 26 July-2 August 1994, pp. 12-13.
20. BLCC, The BLCC refuses to stand down in the face of threats from Fako administrative authorities, Buea, 15 June 2000.
21. Through such manoeuvres, Musonge succeeded, albeit temporarily, in dividing 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.
22. See Report of the Meeting of Prime Minister Mafany Musonge with BLCC Delegation, Yaoundé, 4 October 2000.



## Good governance and border conflicts in Africa: The Bakassi dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria

### Introduction

Africanists have developed a renewed interest in the study of colonially negotiated borders of late due to an increase in boundary disputes between and within African states (cf. Nugent & Asiwaju 1996; Bach 1999; Mbembe 1999; Herbst 2000; Nugent 2002; Bennafla 2002). After independence, border skirmishes and wars between African states were relatively rare, with governments more or less adhering to the sacrosanct nature of boundaries inherited from colonial times (the principle of *uti possidetis jus*), as laid down in the 1963 Charter of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). At present, however, African states are involved in numerous disputes, such as those between Ethiopia and its neighbours in the Horn of Africa (Abbink 1998, 2003), between Nigeria and its neighbours, and between the Democratic Republic of Congo and its neighbours. According to Mbembe (1999: 9), most of these disputes have their origins 'not in the desire to make an ethno-cultural space coincide with the space of the state, but rather in the struggle to control resources considered to be vital'. Moreover, the recent political liberalisation process has created more space for separatist and irredentist movements within African states, as is evidenced in Senegal (Casamance), Cameroon (the Anglophone region), Angola (the Cabinda enclave) and Namibia (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003; Forrest 2004; Englebort & Hummel 2005; Keller 2007).

This chapter seeks to analyse one of these protracted border disputes in Africa that could have escalated into a major interstate war had it not been settled in a unique showcase of conflict

prevention. This dispute, which gained international attention in the 1990s, is the conflict between Cameroon and Nigeria over the sovereignty of the Bakassi Peninsula, an area rich in oil reserves and other natural resources. Following a series of military confrontations between Nigerian and Cameroonian troops, the Cameroonian government filed a case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1994 and eight years later, in October 2002, the court ruled in its favour.

The eventual agreement reached by the heads of state in 2006, the so-called Greentree Agreement, on the modalities of the Nigerian withdrawal from the Bakassi Peninsula in accordance with the 2002 ICJ verdict seems to substantiate Gerti Hesselning's thesis (2006) that respect for the rule of law, which she considered to be vital in settling the numerous intrastate and interstate conflicts in Africa and in building up sustainable peace, has improved in some African states during the current process of political liberalisation. The international community, too, hailed the agreement between the two heads of state as proof that African states are increasingly inclined to rely on international law rather than on armed struggle to resolve potentially explosive interstate boundary disputes (Udogu 2008).

This study supports Hesselning's thesis to a large extent but also offers some critical comments. It attempts to show that Hesselning may not have paid sufficient attention to the complex nature of border conflicts in Africa. She therefore fails to recognise the following observations made in this present study:

- First, the implementation of the rule of law in border disputes is likely to meet serious obstacles in Africa. The Bakassi dispute clearly demonstrates that an ICJ verdict may not be enough to bring about a sustainable agreement between two parties. Other factors may also play a decisive role in settling border conflicts peacefully including: (i) the strategic role of an impartial mediator – in this case, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan – in providing an environment of trust through their 'good office' role; (ii) the importance of strong leadership and a determination to overcome domestic reluctance; (iii) the valuable role of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed

Commission (CNMC) – a commission of Cameroonian and Nigerian representatives chaired by the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for West Africa – in monitoring the implementation of the 2002 ICJ verdict and the 2006 Greentree Agreement; and (iv) the importance of sustained international commitment to preventive diplomacy and the rule of law in compliance with the 2002 ICJ verdict (International Peace Institute 2008).

- Second, respect for the rule of law does not automatically lead to the achievement of sustainable peace in border disputes in Africa. This study attempts to demonstrate that the international community’s view that the 2006 Greentree Agreement was going to settle the Bakassi dispute once and for all was too optimistic as it completely overlooked the stakes for other parties in the conflict. Two stakeholders, namely the predominantly Nigerian population on the Bakassi Peninsula and the Anglophone Cameroonian secessionist movements, have continued to contest the 2002 ICJ verdict and the 2006 Greentree Agreement in the strongest terms. The Nigerian inhabitants allege that the implementation of the rule of law fails to take into account their overwhelming desire to remain Nigerian citizens in the Nigerian political entity, and they vehemently resist the idea of incorporation into the Republic of Cameroon. Anglophone Cameroonian secessionist movements argue that the Bakassi Peninsula should never have been a point of issue between Nigeria and Cameroon at all because the territory forms part of the Southern Cameroons, which used to be the name of the Anglophone territory prior to independence and the country’s reunification in 1961. The various modes of resistance of both groups against the 2002 ICJ verdict and the 2006 Greentree Agreement raise serious doubts about the international community’s acclamations of a peaceful settlement to the Bakassi dispute.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first describes the development of the Bakassi dispute. The second discusses the implications of the 2002 ICJ verdict and the 2006 Greentree

Agreement, while the third documents the fierce resistance of the Nigerian inhabitants on the peninsula and Anglophone Cameroonian secessionist movements to the ICJ verdict and the Greentree Agreement.

### The development of the Bakassi dispute

The Cameroon-Nigeria border has been a source of regular conflict between the post-colonial Cameroonian and Nigerian states (Anene 1961; Weladji 1974-75; Nwokedi 1984-85; Owolabi 1991; Ngoh 2001). Similar to other colonially negotiated boundaries, the border, and especially the maritime border, has been neither unambiguously defined nor satisfactorily demarcated (Asiwaju 1998). Sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula has been a major bone of contention in the long history of Cameroon-Nigeria border disputes.

The Bakassi Peninsula is an area measuring approximately 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> that is made up of mangrove swamps and half-submerged islands protruding into the Bight of Bonny (formerly known as the Bight of Biafra). It is part of the Ndian Division of the South West Province of Anglophone Cameroon, with a population estimated at between 250,000 and 300,000. The vast majority are Efik-speaking Nigerians who eke out an existence as fishermen. The peninsula lacks basic infrastructural provisions: there is no electricity, no potable water (this has to be fetched from the mainland), no roads and few educational or health facilities. At first sight, it seems surprising that such a neglected and unpromising area should have excited such attention from the governments of Cameroon and Nigeria over the past thirty years, to the point where full-scale war has at times appeared imminent (Anene 1970; Cornwell 2006).

Before the scramble for Africa, Bakassi seems to have been part of the ancient Kingdom of Calabar. During the scramble, the Obong or King of Old Calabar signed a Treaty of Protection with the Queen of England on 10 September 1884. Despite the Obong's protest, however, the British eventually ceded the Bakassi Peninsula to the German Kamerun Protectorate in 1913 through a series of bilateral treaties and other legal instruments.

Following the First World War, the erstwhile German Kamerun Protectorate (1884-1916) was partitioned between the British and French victors, first as 'mandates' under the League of Nations

and later as ‘trusts’ under the United Nations. The British territory was much smaller than the French, comprising about a fifth of the total area and population of the former German colony. It consisted of two narrow non-contiguous regions bordering Nigeria and stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to Lake Chad. The southern part was christened Southern Cameroons, and the northern part became known as Northern Cameroons. Bakassi became part of the Southern Cameroons (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003).

A complicating factor for future territorial claims on Bakassi was that the Southern and Northern Cameroons were administered as integral parts of Nigeria. As a result, there was no real border between the British Cameroons and Nigeria and this promoted a free flow of goods and labour between the two territories. During this period, a large number of Nigerians, notably of Igbo and Ibibio origin, migrated to the Southern Cameroons where they came to dominate the local economy, a development that was strongly resented by the Southern Cameroonian population and exploited by regional politicians during the nationalist struggles after the Second World War (Konings 2005c). This shared colonial history encouraged the Nigerian post-colonial state to lay claim to the Bakassi Peninsula.

In the run-up to independence in the late 1950s, the United Nations asked Britain to organise a plebiscite in the British Cameroons to ascertain the wishes of the local population as to which country it would like to be part of following independence. While the Northern Cameroons decided to join the independent Federation of Nigeria, the Southern Cameroons decided on 11 February 1961 to join the already-independent Republic of Cameroon (the former French trust territory), which was to become the Federal Republic of Cameroon on 1 October 1961 (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). It is worth noting here that there were 21 polling stations on the Bakassi Peninsula during the UN-organised plebiscite in the Southern Cameroons. Evidently, the international community at that time was in no doubt about the fact that Bakassi was part of the Southern Cameroons and that, following reunification, it would become part of the newly established Federal Republic of Cameroon.

Significantly, sovereignty over Bakassi itself was not an issue between Cameroon and Nigeria for some time after independence (International Court of Justice 2002). Several Nigerian authorities



and scholars publicly confirmed Cameroonian sovereignty over Bakassi, and Nigerian maps had the peninsula marked as part of Cameroonian territory right up until the 1990s (Essombo 1995; Mbome 1996; Mgbale 2001; Olagunju 2009). It was only after the discovery of large amounts of oil in the Bakassi area, albeit a decade after independence, that Nigeria started publicly claiming ownership of the peninsula.

Initially, the post-colonial Nigerian and Cameroonian states were more concerned with demarcating the colonially negotiated borders than with sovereignty over Bakassi. One of the major issues was the maritime border between the two countries, which had only been vaguely defined in the Anglo-German agreements of 1913.

From the mid-1960s onwards, a newly created Joint Cameroon-Nigeria Commission tried to resolve the boundary dispute, but very little was achieved. The agreements concluded by the two governments were either contested or denounced outright. One of the principal factors that hampered any peaceful solution was the mutual mistrust shown by the leaders, something that dated back to pre-reunification days. The territorial losses suffered during the UN-organised plebiscites in the British Cameroons had created deep and long-lasting bitterness. Against the expectations of the Francophone Cameroonian and Nigerian leaders, Southern Cameroons then voted for reunification with Francophone Cameroon, and Northern Cameroons for integration with Nigeria.

The Cameroonian President Ahmadou Ahidjo was particularly aggrieved by the loss of the British Northern Cameroons, which was of the same ethnic and religious extraction as his home region, namely the northern part of Francophone Cameroon. Instead of strengthening his position, the plebiscite results appeared to weaken it. He strongly suspected that the Southern Cameroons vote for reunification would cement an alliance between the Southern Cameroons elite and the ethnically related opposition in the southwestern part of Francophone Cameroon (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). He accused the British-Nigerian colonial administration of having manipulated the elections in the British Northern Cameroons to its own advantage and took the matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague and to the United Nations, but lost his case. For several years, he declared the

anniversary of that verdict as a day of mourning, to the displeasure of Nigeria's leaders. Ahidjo was also reluctant to improve relations with his neighbour because he was inclined to perceive the close cultural and historical connections between Nigeria and Anglophone Cameroon as a potential threat to reunification and to a strong central state and national unity. He was particularly worried that the connection might encourage secession among the Anglophone population, all the more so because there was a growing dissatisfaction among the Anglophone minority with Francophone hegemonic tendencies following reunification (Konings 2005c).

Nevertheless, Ahidjo's support of the Gowon regime during the Biafran civil war did bring about a temporary improvement in bilateral relations. This led to an intensification of border talks, which eventually resulted in the 1975 Maroua Declaration that delimited the maritime boundary and recognised Cameroonian sovereignty over Bakassi (Owolabi 1991; Mbome 1996). The overthrow of the Gowon regime in a military coup five weeks after concluding this accord was clearly connected with the terms of the agreement. The new Nigerian leader, Mohammed Murtala, falsely accused Gowon of having handed over Bakassi, which he claimed to be Nigerian property, to Cameroon as a gift in gratitude for the role played by Ahidjo in the Nigerian civil war, and he refused to ratify the agreement. He reportedly threatened that 'rather than accept the outrageous 1975 award, Nigeria would go to war if the Cameroonians refused to negotiate' (Nwokedi 1984-85: 51). Although Murtala died in an unsuccessful coup just a year later, his successor, General Olusegun Obasanjo, held the same opinion. This new Nigerian stance infuriated Ahidjo, who accused Nigeria of acting in bad faith, and he subsequently declined to enter into any further negotiations with the Nigerian authorities as long as he remained head of state. Bilateral relations hardly improved under Ahidjo's successor, Paul Biya, mainly because of continuing border problems.

Following these events, sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula became more of an issue between the Cameroonian and Nigerian post-colonial states; and tensions built up on both sides before finally culminating in armed conflict. Bakassi has become of enormous economic and geo-strategic importance due to not only its rich hydrocarbon and fish resources but also its pivotal interest in

controlling access to the port of Calabar, which is currently being developed as Nigeria's Export-Processing Zone and the Eastern Command Headquarters of the Nigerian navy (Asiwaju 1998: 254; Ngang 2010).

The first serious skirmishes between Nigerian and Cameroonian forces occurred on 16 May 1981 and brought the two states to the brink of war. Three Nigerian patrol boats came under fire in the Bakassi area and five Nigerian soldiers were killed. Nigeria's demands for an apology and compensation were initially refused, and relations between the two countries took an ominous turn for the worse. In July 1981, however, Cameroon undertook to pay compensation and tensions eased, with plaudits going to Nigeria's President Shagari for his restraint and for containing his hawkish military. The incident led to the resurrection of the joint commission and discussions on the border dispute were officially reopened (Cornwell 2006: 51-52).

These discussions had little effect, however, as the Nigerian inhabitants of Bakassi continued to protest to the Nigerian authorities in Cross River State about the actions of the Cameroonian gendarmes who were demanding excessive payments for fishing licences. Later raids by the gendarmes were evidently more violent, involving looting, rape and the destruction of fishing equipment. And then in May 1991, the gendarmes entered nine fishing villages, hoisted their national flag and announced that they were renaming the settlements. They also promised that health and educational facilities would be provided, though they demanded the payment of taxes. The new Nigerian military leader, General Sani Abacha, then claimed that the Nigerian state had to protect the Nigerian population on Bakassi and ordered Nigerian troops to occupy part of the peninsula on 21 December 1993. In response, Cameroonian troops attacked the Nigerian occupying force, which resulted in several deaths and large-scale destruction of property. The fighting continued intermittently and both sides increased the quantity and quality of their weapons in the disputed zone. Ngniman (1996) gives a detailed report of all the military events that took place between 1993 and 1996 and, in February 1996, the Nigerian forces clashed again with Cameroonian troops.

A number of initiatives were taken to prevent the dispute from escalating and to bring the two parties to the negotiating table. These included pressure from France which was motivated by its determination to safeguard its interests in both states (Mgbale 2001: 175), mediation by the Togolese President Eyadéma, and the adoption of resolutions by the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity, apparently with little success. On 29 March 1994, the Cameroonian government filed an application with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague to institute proceedings against Nigeria for using violence to contest Cameroon's sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula. On 5 September 2002, just a month before the court's verdict was due, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the two heads of state, Olusegun Obasanjo and Paul Biya, met in Paris in the presence of the French President Jacques Chirac and the two African leaders pledged to comply with the court's verdict, irrespective of its ruling.

#### The implications of the 2002 ICJ ruling and the 2006 Greentree Agreement

On 10 October 2002 and after eight years of deliberations, the ICJ ruled in favour of Cameroon (International Court of Justice 2002). It justified its verdict as follows. The land boundaries between Nigeria and Cameroon had been established by treaties signed by Britain and Germany, notably the Anglo-German Agreement of 11 March 1913, and the court accepted the authenticity of these treaties. It also stated that Cameroonian claims had been given added weight by the 1975 Maroua Declaration signed by President Ahidjo and General Gowon. This declaration, though never ratified by Nigeria, clearly recognised Cameroonian sovereignty over Bakassi. According to the court, there was also ample evidence that there was a certain measure of Nigerian acceptance of Cameroonian claims in the period preceding the outbreak of the conflict in the 1990s.

The court dismissed Nigeria's claims, which had been largely based on the legal principle of historical consolidation and the exercise of sovereignty after independence, with the acquiescence of Cameroon. During the court sessions, Nigeria's legal experts declared that the subjects of the chiefs of Old Calabar had occupied

the peninsula since pre-colonial times and claimed that, following independence, these chiefs had transferred their title to the peninsula to the Nigerian state, which had exercised sovereignty over Bakassi ever since without any protest from Cameroon. As proof of Nigeria's post-colonial sovereignty, they referred to a number of practices on the peninsula, including Nigeria's maintenance of public law and order, its collection of taxes, its introduction of local governance, the widespread use of the Nigerian currency, the holding of Nigerian passports by Bakassi residents, and the presence of schools and health centres subsidised by the Nigerian state.

The court ordered Nigeria to withdraw its administration and its armed forces and police from the peninsula expeditiously and without condition. However, it reminded the Cameroonian government of its pledge at the hearings to continue to afford protection to Nigerians living on the peninsula. It also rejected Cameroon's request that Nigeria be held responsible for the damage caused by its occupation of Bakassi.

While Cameroon was obviously satisfied with the verdict, it caused consternation in Nigeria, arousing vitriolic comments from Nigerian officialdom and the Nigerian media alike, which went as far as identifying a Western conspiracy against the country. For example, Chief Richard Akinjide, a former Nigerian Attorney-General and Minister of Justice who had been a leading member of Nigeria's legal team, described the verdict as being '50% international law and 50% international politics' and 'blatantly biased and unfair'. He made particular reference to the fact that the president of the court, Gilbert Guillaume, was a Frenchman who was likely to support the claims of the Francophone-dominated regime in Cameroon (Baye 2010). The outcome of the controversy was a *de facto* Nigerian refusal to withdraw militarily from Bakassi and to transfer sovereignty. The Nigerian government did not, however, openly reject the judgment but instead called for an agreement that would provide 'peace with honour, with the interest and welfare of our people' (Olagunju 2009: 14).

At this critical point, Kofi Annan appealed to the two countries to respect and implement the court's judgment and reaffirmed the readiness of the United Nations to assist both countries.<sup>1</sup> In his relentless efforts to achieve lasting peace, he once again invited the

two presidents to a seminal meeting in Geneva on 15 November 2002, where they agreed to his request to set up a Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC) made up of representatives from both countries and UN experts and chaired by a special representative of the Secretary-General. The CNMC was to work out ways of implementing the ruling of the court and to move the process forward. Its mandate covered the demarcation of the land and maritime boundaries between the two countries; the withdrawal of the Nigerian administration and armed forces from the peninsula and the transfer of authority to Cameroon; an eventual demilitarisation of the territory; protection of the rights of the affected population; and the promotion of joint economic ventures and cross-border cooperation. Kofi Annan's proposal that his Special Representative for West Africa, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah from Mauritania, chair the CNMC was accepted by both sides.

The commission began meeting every two months in the capitals of the two states. After a difficult start, some progress was made, such as Nigeria's offer to construct a cross-border road connecting Ikom and Mamfe, and the implementation of the demarcation of the boundary. One of the issues that impeded a major breakthrough was Nigeria's refusal to withdraw troops from Bakassi until the protection of the legitimate rights of the Nigerian population on the peninsula was assured. Cameroon proved unwilling, however, to accord Nigerian residents in the area special privileges or status.

Under a working plan drawn up in 2003 and approved by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the heads of state of both countries during a third tripartite meeting in Geneva on 31 January 2004, Nigeria was to withdraw its forces from Bakassi by the end of May. But at the 11 February 2004 session of the CNMC, Nigerian members requested a revision of the ambitious timetable and a new deadline of 15 September 2004 for the transfer of sovereignty to Cameroon was agreed. Nonetheless, Nigeria failed to respect the new deadline, citing technical problems. The Nigerian authorities referred particularly to the vehement resistance by the majority population on Bakassi to Cameroonian rule and on 13 September 2004, the Nigerian House of Representatives called for a UN-organised plebiscite on Bakassi as a more democratic way of deciding on an eventual transfer of sovereignty to Cameroon.

Although both presidents pledged their commitment to a peaceful solution to the problem at the meeting on 28 July 2004, Cameroon and the United Nations began to express their impatience with Nigeria's foot-dragging over its withdrawal from the disputed area during the October session of the CNMC in Abuja. Nigeria's failure to respect the 15 September 2004 deadline for the withdrawal of its administration and troops led to a complete standstill in bilateral negotiations within the CNMC. It took the intervention of the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to bring the presidents of both countries together on 11 May 2005 in Geneva, where they reaffirmed their willingness to resolve the dispute by peaceful means and requested the commission resume negotiations as soon as possible.

However, renewed acts of aggression by the Nigerian army on the Bakassi Peninsula on 5, 17, 18 and 21 June 2005, which left one Cameroonian corporal dead, threatened the resumption of talks, and the Cameroonian government announced on 23 June 2005 that it would lodge a complaint with the UN Security Council. It was only after successful mediation by Ahmadou Ould-Abdallah, the UN chairman of the CNMC, that bilateral negotiations were resumed. Relations between Cameroon and Nigeria improved following the meeting of the commission in Abuja on 13-14 October 2005, which produced a draft agreement and a new timetable for the withdrawal of Nigeria's troops and administration.

These developments laid the foundations for a landmark agreement between the heads of state on the modalities of the Nigerian withdrawal from the Bakassi Peninsula in accordance with the October 2002 ICJ judgment and with due respect for the well-being of the Nigerian inhabitants there. The agreement was concluded on 12 June 2006 at a summit meeting on the Greentree Estate in Manhasset, New York under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General and in the presence of representatives of four witness states (the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany).

The Greentree Agreement, which was widely commended as a shining example of peaceful conflict resolution in Africa, contained the following provisions. First, Nigeria would withdraw its estimated 3,000 troops from the territory within 60 days and formally cede the territory to Cameroon. Second, the islands of Atabong and



Akwabana, which were inhabited almost exclusively by Nigerians, would be administered by Nigeria for two years. Third, the Nigerian inhabitants of Bakassi would have two years to decide whether to remain on the peninsula as Nigerian citizens, take Cameroonian nationality or relocate to Nigeria. Fourth, a special transitional provision granting Nigerians free access to the Bakassi region would be in force for five years. Fifth, a follow-up commission of ten representatives – two each from Cameroon, Nigeria and the United Nations plus one from each of the four witness states – would be set up to implement the agreement (International Peace Institute 2008; Olinga 2009).

As a result of the agreement, Nigeria began its military withdrawal on 1 August 2006 and a ceremony on 14 August 2006 marked the formal handing over of the northern part of the peninsula. Credit must be given to both presidents for recognising that the border dispute had to be seen in the greater context of the overall relationship between both states. One can only speculate as to whether President Obasanjo's administration would have been quite so accommodating had he been preparing for a third term of office, as many of his supporters had wished. Certainly, the concessions he made were not popular domestically and were seen as an affront to the nation's considerable pride. Nevertheless, the settlement of the dispute did a great deal to reinforce his reputation as a statesman whose skills seem to be in growing demand on the African continent. His apparent concern for a peaceful solution of the Bakassi dispute and other violent conflicts in Africa has undoubtedly contributed to strengthening Nigeria's candidature for the desired African seat on the UN Security Council.

Relations between Cameroon and Nigeria improved even further when, on 11 May 2007, the CNMC reached an agreement on the maritime boundary between the two countries. However, the Bakassi issue threatened to strain relations again on 12 November 2007 when unidentified assailants attacked a Cameroonian military post on the peninsula, killing 21 Cameroonian soldiers and wounding many others. The Cameroonian authorities immediately held the Nigerian army responsible for this attack, but the Nigerian government denied involvement in the incident. Both countries promptly agreed to work together to identify the attackers. An



initiative by the Nigerian senate a few days after the attack soured relations between the two neighbours and on 21 November 2007, it passed a motion requiring the Yar'Adua government to stop the transfer of the Bakassi territory to Cameroon. Even more importantly, it called for a review of the Greentree Agreement on the handover of the disputed area, alleging that former President Obasanjo had failed to put the agreement before the National Assembly for ratification, as required by the Nigerian constitution. The chairman of the Nigerian delegation in the CNMC, Prince Bola Ajibola, reacted by assuring the Cameroonian authorities on 29 November 2007 that Nigeria had no intention of revoking the transfer of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon.

Despite a court order ruling that Nigeria should delay the handover to Cameroon of the remaining parts of the Bakassi Peninsula until accommodation for the resettled Nigerian citizens had been provided, the Yar'Adua administration decided to withdraw from the area completely on 14 August 2008, in accordance with the Greentree Agreement, and to bring the long-standing dispute to an end.

### Regional resistance to the 2002 ICJ verdict and the 2006 Greentree Agreement

With the Nigerian withdrawal of its administration and troops from the Bakassi Peninsula and recognition of Cameroonian sovereignty in the wake of the 2002 ICJ verdict and the 2006 Greentree Agreement, the international community widely believed that the Bakassi dispute had been resolved once and for all. This soon proved to be wishful thinking since it had overlooked the interests of stakeholders other than the Cameroonian and Nigerian states in the dispute. These stakeholders were the predominantly Nigerian population on the peninsula and the Anglophone Cameroonian secessionist movements which, from the start, had vehemently resisted the 2002 ICJ verdict and the 2006 Greentree Agreement.

*The Nigerian inhabitants of the Bakassi Peninsula*

According to Professor Boniface Egboka who hails from the area, the 2002 ICJ verdict was a tragedy of unimaginable magnitude for the Nigerian population on the peninsula. He considered the ICJ judgment to be ill-fated, godless and unjust as well as humiliating and demoralising for the Nigerian inhabitants (Sama & Johnson-Ross 2005-2006: 115). His views were shared by the Nigerian inhabitants on the peninsula.

Their political leaders and traditional rulers repeatedly called on the Nigerian government to maintain control over Bakassi and they even threatened to secede from Nigeria and create an independent Bakassi state if the Nigerian government failed to protect their interests. For example, in November 2003, Joe Atene, the Bakassi representative in the Cross River State House of Assembly, publicly declared that the Nigerian residents of Bakassi would regard a unilateral handing over of the peninsula by the Nigerian government to Cameroon as a serious betrayal:

We have always been Nigerians, and if Nigeria now decides to turn its back to us, we may not have any other option than to pursue self-determination. We will not be part of Cameroon.<sup>2</sup>

There appear to be several reasons for the Nigerian population's fierce resistance to Nigeria's handing over of Bakassi to Cameroon. One is actually a continuation of the historical consolidation argument put forward by the Nigerian state during the ICJ sessions: that Bakassi had been part of Nigeria since pre-colonial times. Another was their fear of becoming strangers on their own lands after Nigeria's recognition of Cameroon's sovereignty over the peninsula. The Nigerian inhabitants have often stressed that they were not prepared 'to subject themselves to Cameroonian rule and the bondage of Cameroonian gendarmes'.<sup>3</sup> Another reason was their belief that such a transfer would imply 'complete neglect and abandonment' of the peninsula and that Nigeria, rather than Cameroon, had been making a contribution to territorial development.<sup>4</sup>

Significantly, many Bakassi leaders considered President Obasanjo's widely praised respect for the rule of law to be in conflict with their people's right to self-determination:

We are in support of the declaration of an independent state. The United Nations should realise that we have the right to decide where we want to be and the right to self-determination. We are Nigerians and live on our ancestral land. You can see some of the graves here dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. How can you force a strange culture and government on us? We appreciate what Nigerian government is doing but let it be on record that they have betrayed us and we will fight for our survival and self-determination.<sup>5</sup>

For a long time, there had been no clear connection between the rebel movements in the nearby Niger Delta and the Bakassi resistance movements but, from early 2006 onwards, there was growing evidence that militant activities in the Niger Delta had spilt over into the Bakassi region. Organisations like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Defence and Security Council (NDDSC) joined forces with a shadowy Bakassi militia, the so-called Bakassi Freedom Fighters (BFF). While these movements claimed to represent the interests of the people living in the oil-rich Niger Delta and the Bakassi region, they were also engaged in various, often criminal, activities to obtain a share in the region's oil revenues. They claimed responsibility for raids on Cameroonian military posts on the Bakassi Peninsula that resulted in the death of several Cameroonian soldiers and a civilian, and their sporadic attacks in the area have continued to the present day, leaving the Cameroonian military embarrassed, official diplomacy humiliated, the inhabitants feeling insecure and the prospects for long-term peace in jeopardy.

Under the terms of the 12 June 2006 Greentree Agreement, Nigerian inhabitants of Bakassi were given three options: keeping Nigerian nationality and remaining as foreign residents on Cameroonian territory; taking out Cameroonian nationality; or being resettled elsewhere in Nigeria. Soon after the Nigerian state's handing over of the largest part of Bakassi to Cameroon on 14 August 2006, a growing number of the Nigerian residents who were

determined to remain Nigerian citizens and feared Cameroonian repercussions, especially from the Cameroonian gendarmes, fled to Nigeria. During the 15<sup>th</sup> session of the CNMC, Nigerian representatives alleged that Nigerian citizens living on Bakassi and in other parts of Cameroon were returning to Nigeria with stories of maltreatment by Cameroonian gendarmes. Between 22 and 30 August 2006, more than 6,000 Nigerians were shipped from Douala and Limbe to Nigeria. The commission then resolved to send an observer mission of 15 UN representatives and five delegates each from Nigeria and Cameroon to the peninsula.

In the months leading up to the Nigerian handover of the remaining parts of the peninsula to Cameroon on 14 August 2008, the number of Bakassi refugees in Nigeria increased dramatically. Some reports estimated their number at about 100,000. Having abandoned their homes and businesses in Bakassi, they initially moved to overcrowded transit camps in Nigeria and, in an attempt to appease them, the Nigerian government began constructing a 'New Bakassi', which is contiguous with Cameroon's Bakassi territory. This project has been largely unsuccessful and has even resulted in the displacement of the original inhabitants' homes and property to make space for migrants from Bakassi. Given the history of hostilities between the Nigerian residents of Bakassi and the Cameroonian gendarmes and the violent clashes that have taken place in the area in recent times, it is safe to assume that practically all Nigerians will eventually leave the area.

#### *Anglophone secessionist movements*

The 2002 ICJ verdict and the 2006 Greentree Agreement have also been constantly contested by the various Anglophone movements that emerged during the political liberalisation process in Cameroon in the early 1990s (see Chapter 5). Since the violent confrontations between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi Peninsula, the umbrella organisation of all the Anglophone movements, the SCNC, has constantly emphasised that Bakassi is neither a part of the Republic of Cameroon nor of Nigeria but instead belongs to the Southern Cameroons.

The decision of the Cameroonian and Nigerian governments to submit their dispute over the Bakassi Peninsula to the ICJ for adjudication in 1994 offered Anglophone nationalists an opportunity to access legal space (Jua & Konings 2004). In 2001, the newly founded Ex-British Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration created a new body, the Southern Cameroons People's Organisation (SCAPO), with the specific goal of pursuing legal avenues to achieve international recognition of the Anglophone secessionist claims. In its legal struggle for the recognition of an independent Southern Cameroons state, SCAPO filed a lawsuit against the Nigerian government in the Nigerian Federal High Court in Abuja, accusing it of continuing disregard of the Southern Cameroons' statehood and sovereignty during the Bakassi dispute (see Chapter 5).

In the end, SCAPO scored a landmark victory in March 2002 when the Nigerian Federal High Court ordered the Nigerian government to ask the ICJ to rule on whether it was Southern Cameroons or the Republic of Cameroon that shared a maritime boundary with the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Konings 2005c: 295-96). Clearly, the implication is that the ICJ cannot adjudicate in the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula without first clarifying the international status of Southern Cameroons. It is only after such a clarification that a decision can be made about sovereignty over Bakassi. Regrettably, despite numerous requests by Anglophone secessionist movements, this clarification was never made. The Nigerian government was not prepared to execute the Federal High Court's judgment nor was the ICJ ready to suspend proceedings on the Bakassi case pending determination of the international status of Southern Cameroons.

It is interesting to note that the Anglophone leadership, which always strongly condemned Nigerian domination of Southern Cameroons in the pre-reunification era, was inclined to support Nigerian opposition to the 2002 ICJ verdict. Following press reports that the UN Secretary-General was about to discuss the ICJ decision with the heads of state of Cameroon and Nigeria in Geneva on 15 November 2002, the then chairman of the Ex-British Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration wrote to him on 12 November 2002 as follows:<sup>6</sup>

While we share your anxiety for good neighbourliness between Nigeria and *La République du Cameroun*, the people of the Southern Cameroons, under the banner of the SCNC, wish to make their stand on the disputed territory abundantly clear.... Our problem is undoubtedly that of preference for the Federal Republic of Nigeria to continue to retain the Bakassi peninsula until the State of the Southern Cameroons shall be restored. Then we shall ourselves negotiate the retrieval of Bakassi from the hands of Nigeria, in a process we believe shall be very friendly and easy as not to require arbitration. We share a common Anglo-Saxon political culture with Nigeria by virtue of having been governed by Great Britain together as a single entity for half a century.... On the other hand, the people of the Southern Cameroons do not want *La République du Cameroun* to lay hands on our Bakassi inheritance.

In 2006, the chairman of SCAPO, Dr Kevin Gumne, asserted that there would not be peace on the Bakassi Peninsula without an independent Southern Cameroons:

No permanent settlement can ever take place on the Bakassi peninsula unless the Southern Cameroons is accepted as a distinct and separate party to the settlement agreement. Furthermore, we believe that a long-standing settlement must take due cognizance of the concern of various parties which have legitimate interest in the peninsula (Orisakwe 2006).

He therefore called for the Southern Cameroons to be accepted as a third party to any talks regarding the demarcation of the boundary between Nigeria and Cameroon. Like the leaders of other Anglophone secessionist movements, he stressed that the Southern Cameroons would not respect any agreement between Nigeria and Cameroon on the maritime border if it ignored the self-proclaimed state of Southern Cameroons and its people.

The various Anglophone secessionist movements have also constantly expressed support for the Bakassi people, claiming them to be part of the Southern Cameroons. They strongly condemn the Cameroonian state for its lack of concern for the Southern Cameroons in general, and Bakassi in particular:

Cameroon has one single concern on the Bakassi peninsula and that is oil. They do not care about the Southern Cameroons or the indigenous Bakassians. They just want the oil at any cost. In order to achieve this goal, they want to use the verdict of the ICJ to accomplish the annexation of the Southern Cameroons (Orisakwe 2006).

## Conclusion

A message from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon that was read at the official handing-over ceremony of the remaining parts of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon on 14 August 2008 said: 'This is a day of triumph for the rule of law, which lies at the very core of the values of the United Nations'. And the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for West Africa, Said Djinnit, said that 'the handover should serve as a model for the resolution of other border disputes in Africa'.<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly, the respect shown by the heads of state of Nigeria and Cameroon for the 2002 ICJ verdict that confirmed Cameroon's sovereignty over Bakassi was a great achievement, especially when taking into account the huge importance of the peninsula for both countries. Analysing the explosive nature of the Bakassi dispute in the 1990s, the African magazine *Jeune Afrique* claimed that all the factors necessary for a major military conflict were present and went on to stress the area's economic and strategic importance to both countries as being a pivotal factor in the possible escalation of the conflict.<sup>8</sup>

This apparent success story in the peaceful settlement of African border disputes provides some proof for Gerti Hesselning's thesis (2006) that respect for the rule of law has improved in a number of African states following political liberalisation. The relative advance of democracy in Cameroon and Nigeria has contributed to a climate of confidence. Both states have wanted to be included in the international community and to be seen to respect the rule of law.

What Hesselning seems to have underestimated is that a verdict based on international law may face implementation difficulties in a complex border dispute. The Bakassi dispute underscores the importance of the UN's continued engagement in the implementation process, strong leadership and regular interactions and consultations among the disputant states. Time and patience

also played a role in the outcome of these negotiations. The former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, was instrumental in establishing an atmosphere of trust, which attests to the importance of good offices in resolving disputes. The leaders of Cameroon and Nigeria recognised the long-term benefits of peaceful relationships between their nations, whose geography, history and culture have been intertwined for centuries. The CNMC, which formed an original and innovative approach for the execution of international law, also played a positive role as an instrument for monitoring and implementing the ICJ's ruling and the Greentree Agreement. The Bakassi resolutions took a long time to reach but the degree of disaffection over the terms could have been higher if the process had not been tempered with patience and sensitive timing.

Above all, this chapter has shown that despite the Cameroonian and Nigerian governments' respect for the rule of law, their attempts to implement the 2002 ICJ verdict have not yet managed to resolve the Bakassi dispute. Both the predominantly Nigerian population on the peninsula and the Anglophone Cameroonian secessionist movements continue to fiercely resist the ICJ verdict, claiming ownership of the peninsula and declining Republic of Cameroon citizenship. The Bakassi inhabitants remain strongly attached to their Nigerian citizenship and the Anglophone secessionist movements are pursuing citizenship of an independent Southern Cameroons state. Both parties assert that there can never be peace in the area without Nigeria and Cameroon first recognising their claims.

## Notes

1. The following sections are largely based on my Cameroon contributions to several *African Yearbooks*. See A. Mehler, H. Melber & K. van Walraven (eds), *African Yearbook: Politics, Economy and Society South of the Sahara*, Vols. 1-4, Leiden: Brill.
2. *The Post*, 17 November 2003, p. 3.
3. *Ibid.*, 1 November 2002, p. 1.
4. *The Guardian Post*, 14 November 2002, p. 2.
5. *The Guardian*, 18 August 2006.



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6. Letter from Dr Martin Luma, National Chairman of the SCNC, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Buea, 12 November 2002.
7. AFP, 'Nigeria cedes Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon', 14 August 2008.
8. *Jeune Afrique*, 'Cameroun/Nigeria: La guerre secrète', no. 1871, 13-19 November 1996, p. 13.

## China and Africa in the era of neoliberal globalisation with Cameroon as a case study

### Introduction

The People's Republic of China's renewed interest in Africa in the era of neoliberal globalisation is one of the most significant developments on the African continent. While there was little evidence of China's presence in Africa two decades ago, hundreds of major Chinese businesses are now active there, bolstered by tens of thousands of Chinese labourers, retailers and tourists. The growing importance the Chinese leaders are attaching to the African continent was manifested when they dubbed 2006 to be the 'Year of Africa' to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and African nations. At the beginning of 2006, the Chinese government promulgated a White Paper outlining 'China's African Policy' (Government of China 2006), which was followed by official visits by the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Li Zhaoxing, President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to several African countries. The third gathering of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was held in Beijing at the end of 2006 and was attended by numerous African heads of state and ministers. The Forum expressed its wish 'to deepen and broaden mutual beneficial cooperation in political relations, economic cooperation, international affairs and social development'.<sup>1</sup>

Remarkably, China's increasing engagement with Africa went largely unnoticed in African Studies for some time. Most of the existing literature on Sino-African relations deals with the Cold War era (cf. Larkin 1971; Ogunsanwo 1974; Snow 1981) and some Africanists have aptly distinguished two phases in this period (Taylor 1998; Bräutigam 1998). The first was the Maoist era when China's Africa policy was primarily marked by ideological and strategic considerations as the country attempted to export its revolutionary

model to Africa, undermine western and Soviet influence there, and counter the diplomatic inroads being made by Taiwan. The second phase started with Deng Xiaoping's economic modernisation policies when, for pragmatic reasons, China decided to focus on economic cooperation with the West. As a result, its interest in Africa was starkly reduced, all the more so because of Africa's growing economic stagnation (Konings 2007b).

It is only recently that Africanists have acknowledged that China's profile has dramatically changed since the end of the Cold War and that it has become a key external actor on the continent in today's era of neoliberal globalisation (Alden 2005, 2007; Tull 2006; Kaplinski *et al.* 2006; Holslag 2006; Broadman 2007). For some scholars (Jaffe & Lewis 2002; Hurst 2006), the drive to secure energy resources for the country's rapid economic expansion is behind China's growing engagement with Africa. This certainly captures an important dimension of its interests in Africa but it would be a mistake to ascribe a single motive to this relationship.

This chapter argues that China sees Africa as a partner in the fulfilment of its strategic goals, namely resource security, new markets and investment opportunities, and political support for its expanding global interests. While China's growing presence in Africa is most visible on the economic front, which is a natural consequence of its own domestic economic growth, one should not overlook its political objectives. China is aiming at forging an alliance with African states to combat perceived western hegemony, especially in the United Nations and other multilateral organisations, and to restrict Taiwan's diplomatic space in Africa. FOCAC, which was set up by China in October 2000, has provided the institutional expression of a strategic China-Africa partnership in economic and political affairs (Konings 2007b).

This chapter attempts to show that the African response to China's growing engagement with the continent has been ambivalent. On the one hand, governments and business elites in Africa are seeing new opportunities in China for trade and investment, and ways to bolster regime stability and strategically important partnerships (Alden 2005). What is particularly appealing to many African rulers is that China seems to provide an alternative to the 'painful' neoliberal economic and political reforms espoused

by the West and typified by the ‘Washington Consensus’ of the IMF and the World Bank. They were quick to embrace the various tenets of the development paradigm propagated by China, which was defined by Joshua Cooper Ramo (2004) as the ‘Beijing Consensus’: non-interference in state sovereignty; freedom from western hegemony; and an absence of any conditions on aid-giving (with the exception of the One-China principle). China appears to be offering Africa something new, namely a straightforward business relationship between equals based on mutual interest and non-interference in the other’s internal affairs (Sautman 2006).

There are, on the other hand, rising concerns in the African business sector, labour unions and other civil-society groups about the impact China is having on Africa. One reason for concern is that low-cost Chinese consumer goods, which are enabling Africans to purchase basic items formerly beyond their reach, are threatening local manufacturing capacity and employment. Other reasons for concern include the employment of predominantly Chinese labour on the booming Chinese construction projects in Africa and the poor labour and environmental standards practised by Chinese businesses. The damage that China’s ‘no political conditions’ policy is having on the promotion of human rights, good governance and transparency is also a cause for alarm in some civil-society circles.

This chapter, however, intends to go further than most of the available scholarly works on Sino-African relations that tend to treat Africa as a homogeneous unit and gloss over national and local peculiarities. Some of the few exceptions to this trend include Dobler (2007, 2008) on China-Namibia relations, Lee (2007) on China-Uganda relations, Large (2008) on China-Sudan relations, Grion (2007) on China-Angola relations, and Ogen (2008) on China-Nigeria relations. These studies help us to understand the huge variations in China-Africa relations. Following a general assessment of the impact of renewed Chinese interest in Africa and Africa’s response to China’s new engagement with the continent, I will discuss the still largely unexplored field of China-Cameroon relations and the responses of Cameroonian stakeholders to these relations.

## The impact of renewed Chinese interest in Africa

China's interest in Africa today seems to be mainly driven by its constant search for resource security, new markets and investment opportunities, and political support. It is necessary to examine here the effects of 'new' Chinese economic and political imperatives in Africa. This is all the more important because China's leaders are continuously claiming that a strategic partnership between Africa and China would be of mutual advantage and inevitably result in a 'win-win' situation (Taylor 2005a; Alden 2005; Goldstein *et al.* 2006; Tull 2006).

### *Resource security*

China's dynamic economic growth is fuelling an ever-increasing demand for oil, minerals, timber and other natural resources. Guaranteed long-term access to Africa's relatively underexploited natural resources clearly tops China's agenda (Alden 2005; Council on Foreign Relations 2006).

China is now the world's second largest importer of oil after the US and accounts for 31% of the growth in the global demand for oil. China's recognition of the dangers facing its current sources due to political instability in the Middle East has resulted in Africa assuming even greater prominence in its unrelenting pursuit of secure oil supplies. China has consequently taken a number of steps to expand and diversify its oil supplies in Africa (Tull 2006). At present, just under 30% of the country's oil requirements come from Africa, mostly from Sudan, Algeria and, increasingly, the Gulf of Guinea. Beijing has signed more than 40 different oil agreements with African countries (Pham 2006: 243).

Most Chinese oil companies are state-owned and, as such, enjoy a number of competitive advantages over their western rivals when it comes to securing African supplies. Unlike their increasingly publicity-sensitive western counterparts, the Chinese have no qualms about making deals with Africa's most corrupt and repressive regimes. The Chinese government imposes no political conditions on African governments before signing contracts for exploration or production (Lafargue 2005; Hurst 2006) and strategic objectives

often override commercial concerns in Chinese companies' investments in the African oil sector. Individual investments do not have to be profitable if they serve China's national goals, such as establishing a position of influence and the staking-out of future opportunities. The Chinese government is providing a favourable investment climate in Africa for its oil companies through a well-considered combination of regular high-profile visits by Chinese government officials to Africa and the provision of economic incentives for African governments and diplomatic backing in international organisations. One particular instrument for currying favour with governments in oil-producing African states is China's willingness to offer what is referred to as a 'total package': soft loans and credit lines, gifts and bribes, development assistance, arms deliveries, the use of its seat on the UN Security Council for the protection of African interests and other measures to bolster a competitive advantage for Chinese companies.

Sudan is a good example of how Chinese oil companies have taken advantage of a situation where western sanctions against human-rights violations and corporate-image liabilities have prevented multinationals from committing themselves (Council on Foreign Relations 2006; Tull 2006). Over the years, China has invested an estimated US\$ 5 billion to acquire exploration and drilling licences and in constructing pipelines, refineries and other infrastructure. Sudan now supplies about 7% of China's total oil imports. Given its constant emphasis on state sovereignty and its substantial investment in Sudan's oil sector, it should not come as a surprise that China has repeatedly frustrated attempts by the UN Security Council to take action against Sudan after the full extent of Khartoum's genocide campaign in Darfur was revealed in 2004.

More recently, China has become a significant player in the oil sector on the west coast of Africa, which is the continent's largest oil-producing area. Nigeria and Angola are the main producers and China has increased its activities in both these countries. In 2004, Angola became China's largest supplier of crude oil in Africa. And in the same year, the Chinese state-owned Export-Import Bank (Eximbank) provided it with a soft loan of US\$ 2 billion as part of a longer-term aid package in exchange for 10,000 barrels of oil a day. The deal would appear to be of mutual interest: it enabled the

Angolan regime to circumvent pressure by western donors for increased fiscal transparency and it strengthened China's foothold in the Angolan oil economy.

In addition to oil, the Chinese economy needs a range of commodities that are available in mineral-rich African countries. Its demand for minerals is driving up world commodity prices for copper, zinc, aluminium and nickel, reversing a long-term decline in prices and giving African exporters of these materials a much-needed boost (Lafargue 2005).

Logging and timber have become a major focus of Chinese involvement in Africa too. China is the largest global importer of wood products, with imports having more than tripled since 1993. It is now importing considerable amounts of wood from the forests of Cameroon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Liberia. Many of its imports from Africa are from unlicensed loggers or companies with environmentally suspect logging practices, which are condoned by the Chinese. Illegal timber exports to China from Gabon have been estimated to be as high as 70% of Gabon's total timber exports (Butler 2005).

China is the world's leading exporter of textiles and clothing but has to import cotton – mainly from the US – to provide for its domestic and international production. However, the share of the African countries that export cotton, namely Burkina Faso, Benin, Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Togo and the Central African Republic, has been increasing since the mid-1990s (Pham 2006).

Finally, food security is a growing concern. With its projected increase in population, the loss of vital agricultural land to industry and mounting consumption amongst its urbanising population, China will have to rely more on imports of grain and other foodstuffs in the future. Chinese investors, both public and private, have already leased vast tracts of agricultural land in several African countries such as Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and joint fish-processing ventures have been set up in Gabon and Namibia to process catches by Chinese industrial trawlers operating in the Gulf of Guinea, one of the world's richest fishing grounds (Alden 2005; Pham 2006).

*New markets and investment opportunities*

While China's principal interest in Africa is access to natural resources, the continent is also providing it with new markets and investment opportunities. Imports from China, ranging from shoes and textiles to high-tech goods, are flooding local markets there (Kaplinsky *et al.* 2006). African consumers, whose purchasing power has sharply declined with the economic crisis and economic liberalisation, appreciate these relatively cheap goods in spite of regular complaints about their quality compared to western products. Zimbabweans, for example, have even coined a term for what they consider 'substandard' Chinese goods, namely 'zhing-zhong'. African traders and manufacturers of all sizes have all been hit hard by the flood of cheap Chinese imports, particularly those linked to the new Chinese wholesale and retail shops that use established networks to access goods (Haugen & Carling 2005). Traditional products and retailers have been edged out by Chinese businesses across the continent and a new feature of virtually all African cities is the emergence of a 'Chinatown'.

Besides being a dumping ground for cheap consumer goods, Beijing increasingly sees Africa as a market for its expanding arms industry. Today, Chinese firms rank among the top suppliers of conventional arms to Africa (Committee on International Relations 2005; Taylor 2005b; Pham 2006).

China's trade with Africa has increased sharply since the setting up of FOCAC in 2000. Two-way trade, which stood at about US\$ 10 billion in 2000, surged to nearly US\$ 40 billion in 2005, while China's share of Africa's trade jumped from 2.6% to over 6% in the same period, making it the continent's third largest trading partner after the US and France. In its recent Africa Policy Paper, the Chinese government expressed its intention to give preferential treatment to trade from the least-developed Sub-Saharan African countries and has established a China-Africa Business Council with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to promote trade with and foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa (Jenkins & Edwards 2006: 31). Significantly, Sino-African trade is no longer vastly in China's favour as growing oil imports from Africa have led to a Chinese trade deficit since 2000.



Direct Chinese investment in Africa rose substantially following the government's 'Go-out' or 'Go-global' strategy, which was initiated in 2001 and focuses on active state support and encouragement for domestic firms to pursue investment abroad (Kaplinsky *et al.* 2006; Jenkins & Edwards 2006). While most projects in Africa are being undertaken by Chinese state-owned enterprises, private companies are increasingly investing there too. The Chinese government is frequently exhorting businesses to engage in joint ventures with African counterparts. In its 2006 Africa Policy Paper, it pledged to support and facilitate corporate investment in Africa with preferential loans and buyer's credit, and stated that some 750 Chinese enterprises were currently active in Africa, with investments totalling US\$ 1 billion.

Most African governments are welcoming direct Chinese investment and are eager to provide the required licences for Chinese entrepreneurs. There has been a steady deterioration in FDI in Africa since the end of the Cold War, especially compared to Asia. Moreover, with the imposition of conditionalities by western donors designed to punish any regime that violates standards and practices of good (economic and political) governance, African regimes need to find an alternative source of foreign support. China is willing to invest not only in the highly competitive scramble for national resources but also in sectors that western private investors and aid agencies have either neglected or abandoned as being less profitable, namely physical infrastructure, industry and agriculture (Committee on International Relations 2005; Council on Foreign Relations 2006).

Large Chinese firms are aiming to acquire a dominant position in key sectors of the economy: construction, petrochemicals, transportation, communications, electricity, water management, industrial technology and so on. They already appear to have achieved this objective in construction. Chinese construction firms, which are supported by the state apparatus and employ low-cost but highly efficient Chinese labour, have been able to outbid contractors from other parts of the world and are winning an increasing slice of the contracts to pave highways, build hydroelectric dams, upgrade ports, lay railway lines and build pipelines. These projects will all stand to help Chinese companies transport African

resources more effectively in the future. The state-owned China Road and Bridge Corporation alone had some 500 projects in progress in Africa in 2005 (Pham 2006).

Not all the public works projects undertaken by Chinese enterprises have been for financial gain. Recognising far more astutely than most western nations the importance of large prestigious projects to regime legitimacy, Chinese support has also been lent to a range of less remunerative building contracts, like the Foreign Ministry buildings in Djibouti and Uganda, the Houses of Parliament in Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, and Mozambique, and soccer stadiums in Tanzania, the Central African Republic and Mali. Chinese telecommunication companies are also making rapid inroads into the African market. Huawei Technologies has expanded its communication business into 39 Sub-Saharan African countries, and has an US\$ 800 million contract to build the infrastructure for Nigeria's lucrative cell-phone market.

### *Creating a political alliance with Africa*

China's renewed interest in Africa is not only economically motivated but also stems from its political concerns with western, and especially US, hegemony in the world since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the persistent presence and influence of Taiwan in Africa.

Feeling increasingly vulnerable with the emergence of a unipolar world and determined to reinforce its position *vis-à-vis* the West, China has tried to project itself as the leader of the Third World, stressing the need for South-South solidarity and cooperation in the pursuit of a new, just and equitable political and economic world order (Taylor 1998; Alden 2005). Africa has played a prominent role in China's search for a political alliance among developing countries since it formed the largest single voting bloc in multilateral organisations. By positioning itself at the helm of a coalition of African states, China is hoping to use its leverage in its position on the UN Security Council and improve its bargaining powers in other international institutions. Constant references to the need to create a new, equitable political and economic order reflect the country's competitive instincts towards the US in the international arena.

In FOCAC's Beijing Declaration in 2000, China and Africa agreed to cooperate more closely in international affairs in the future, which they claimed would result in concrete gains for both sides (Government of China 2000a). During the second FOCAC meeting in Addis Ababa in December 2003, China declared that it was ready to coordinate its position with African countries in the process of formulating international economic and political rules and in multilateral trade negotiations (Government of China 2003).

On the one hand, African votes have been crucial to Beijing's multilateral diplomacy, both in blocking resolutions at the UN Commission on Human Rights concerning alleged human-rights abuses in China and in garnering sufficient support to win their bid to host the Olympic Games in 2008. Beijing believes that its strategic alliance with Africa will enable it to secure its long-term interests in the WTO and other multilateral organisations at relatively low cost.

African states have, on the other hand, equally benefited from the new superpower's readiness to preserve their interests in multilateral settings. China has been willing to use its seat on the UN Security Council to protect some of Africa's most egregious regimes from international sanctions, particularly Sudan and Zimbabwe. It offers an alternative source of support, even for some of the West's closest allies, when they chafe under demands for economic and political reform from the West. China has strongly defended issues in multilateral organisations that are of pivotal interest to Africa, including the lifting of trade barriers and farm subsidies, increased aid and debt relief, and African representation on the UN Security Council.

Another major reason for China to establish a political alliance with African states is to circumvent Taiwan's diplomatic space on the continent. Recognition of the One-China principle has remained a basic element in Beijing's foreign policy. In fact, it is the only political condition to China's cooperation with individual African states and organisations. It has been quite successful in attracting African support for its principle (Jiang 2003) and at present, there are only five African countries that maintain official diplomatic relations with Taiwan: Gambia, Burkina Faso, Malawi, Swaziland, and São Tomé & Príncipe.

## Africa's response to China's new engagement with their continent

The African response to China's fast-growing involvement on the continent used to be overwhelmingly positive, especially among the political elite. Underlying this positive attitude by African governments was the recognition that China was (i) providing new sources of FDI and development assistance; (ii) actively supporting existing regimes irrespective of their political orientation; and (iii) serving as an important strategic partner that could counter western hegemony on the international stage.

Of late, growing concern can be observed in the African media and certain sections of civil society regarding China's impact on Africa. One major issue of concern is the flooding of African markets with cheap Chinese products. African manufacturers and retailers are complaining bitterly that they cannot compete with their Chinese counterparts since they are unable to undercut Chinese production costs and prices. Trade-union leaders are becoming alarmed at the forced closure of local industries and the resulting catastrophic job losses.

The so-called 'textiles tsunami' clearly illustrates the adverse impact of the massive Chinese export machine on local African industries (Committee on International Relations 2005; Alden 2005; Tull 2006). Chinese textile exports are increasingly undermining the national and international markets of African textile manufacturers. Until January 2005, the latter operated under special arrangements permitted by the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA), including the US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which allowed the US to place quotas on clothing and textile imports from China and provided African producers with duty-free access to the US market. These arrangements promoted a rapid growth of African textile exports, particularly in countries like South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Ghana, Uganda and Kenya. Unexpectedly, some Chinese textile companies were also able to benefit from the MFA and AGOA arrangements by setting themselves up in Africa in order to be entitled to duty-free access to the US market. Once the MFA expired in January 2005, however, Africa's textile boom witnessed a meltdown. American demands for African textiles plummeted in

favour of even cheaper garments made in China, and African-based Chinese companies moved production back to China. In the process, thousands of African workers lost their jobs or risk doing so in the near future. Understandably, African trade unions have strongly protested this development. In South Africa, where about 67,000 jobs have been lost in the textile industry, the unions have successfully petitioned the government to lobby in Beijing for voluntary restraints on textile imports.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of growing numbers of Chinese retailers in Africa has brought new goods to the local population and, concurrently, threatened to undermine established retailers. Haugen & Carling (2005) argue that the influx of Chinese trading shops (*baihuo*) have been met with a mix of enthusiasm and concern, reflecting their ambivalent impact on the local economy. Retailers from Cape Verde to Namibia are complaining about the Chinese invasion. The Chinese trading community in Lusaka has, for example, grown tenfold to about 30,000 over the past decade, and this has sparked huge resentment among the local population.

Given the high rate of unemployment in Africa, it is not surprising that Africans resent the Chinese practice of employing their own nationals rather than taking on local workers in Chinese-sponsored projects. The use of Chinese contract labour is particularly visible in the recent flurry of Chinese infrastructure projects. Official figures show that there were about 82,000 Chinese labourers working in Africa in 2005, although unofficial estimates are much higher (Sautman 2006: 29). The use of Chinese contract labour is even being promoted by current Chinese development assistance policies and it is increasingly evident that Chinese loans no longer come without any strings attached. A loan from the Eximbank, for example, often requires the debtor to select Chinese enterprises as contractors, who then import Chinese workers to do the work and source at least 50% of the equipment, materials, technology and services needed from China.

As the Chinese presence in Africa increases, the nature of its closed society and relative wealth may breed conflict, as has been the case in parts of South East Asia. Cultural misunderstandings and even racism of the kind expressed by some African students at Chinese universities could fuel these difficulties. Anti-Chinese

sentiments, however misguided, have already spilled over into protests and sporadic violence in Zambia and Lesotho, as well as in other parts of the continent.

The hazardous labour and safety standards in Chinese enterprises in Africa are another point of concern. The privatised Chambishi copper mine in Zambia is a notorious example (Lungu & Mulinga 2005). Following its takeover by the Chinese state-owned Non-Ferrous Metal Industries Corporation (NFC) in 1998, the new management hired almost all its Zambian workers on one-year contracts: only 72 out of the approximately 2100 local workers were given permanent contracts. And, even more importantly, these workers were earning the lowest salaries in the Zambian mining industry, with the lowest-paid receiving as little as US\$ 14 a month. Moreover, safety standards in the mine were lax, which resulted in a growing number of accidents, and the predominantly casual labour force lacked the experience to carry out the dangerous mining operations required. In April 2005, a blast at the NFC explosives factory in Chambishi killed more than fifty workers. It was only after persistent union pressure that management was eventually prepared to raise wages to US\$ 68 a month – roughly the minimum wage in Zambia – in July 2006. The Chambishi miners nevertheless stressed that their colleagues in other copper mines continued to be better rewarded for similar work. On 25 July, just a few weeks after the agreement on the new pay scales was signed between management and the union, hundreds of miners rioted following rumours that management was renegeing on the pay increases. They proceeded to storm the residences of the Chinese managers, destroying property and smashing cars. One of the managers shot at the rioters, injuring four of them and the riot police also injured two other rioters before the crowd was dispersed.

NGOs are also expressing concerns about the growing Chinese presence in Africa. Some are protesting about China's generally dismissive approach to good environmental practice, others are voicing fears about its apparent support for African regimes that ignore human rights and good governance demands, and its continuous delivery of arms to the continent (Shin 2006). Significantly, the latter concerns are, at least in theory, increasingly being supported by a number of reform-minded Africa-wide

organisations, such as the African Union (AU) and the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), that are contesting the long-standing Chinese principle of non-interference in state sovereignty. The AU's constitution allows it to intervene in a member state should it consider that there are, for example, gross violations of human rights there. And NEPAD's peer review mechanism is structured around an independent review process of an African country's adherence to good governance criteria.

### China-Cameroon relations

After independence in January 1960, the Cameroonian government opted to establish diplomatic ties with Taiwan rather than with China. Taiwan was offering African states generous aid irrespective of their political inclinations, while China was then only supporting 'socialist' regimes and radical or revolutionary movements in so-called reactionary African states (Konings 2007b: 344-45). Cameroon's President Ahmadou Ahidjo regularly criticised China's support of the radical nationalist party, the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC), in his country (Joseph 1977), condemning Chinese conduct in July 1965 as follows:

China is one of the states supporting terrorism in Cameroon. We have proof, for Cameroonian terrorists are in Communist China. As long as that situation exists, we shall vote against China's admission to the United Nations (Ogunsanwo 1974: 173).

From the mid-1960s onwards, however, an important shift in China's Africa policies can be observed. It ceased its ideological offensive and began to appeal to all legitimate African governments, promising them aid on even more favourable terms than Taiwan, but on condition that they recognise its One-China principle. One important reason for this striking change in policy was that China had come to the painful conclusion that most African states lacked socialist revolutionary fervour. But even more importantly, China needed support from as many African countries as possible in order to be awarded the seat it so desired on the UN Security Council.



This investment in Africa paid up handsomely in 1971 when 26 of the 50 African states at the UN, including Cameroon, voted for an Albanian resolution to offer Communist China a seat in the United Nations (Hutchinson 1975; Weinstein 1975; Konings 2007b). Cameroon severed its relationship with Taiwan on 26 March 1971 and since then has maintained diplomatic ties with the People's Republic of China.

Relations between Cameroon and China have been characterised by numerous official visits involving top government officials and these have served as a forum to reinforce ties through the signing of cooperation agreements. Unsurprisingly given China's increasing engagement with Africa in the era of neoliberal globalisation, there have been determined efforts by the Cameroonian and Chinese governments to strengthen both diplomatic and economic ties.

China's Prime Minister was in Cameroon in August 2003 and this was followed by the visit by Cameroon's President Paul Biya to China in September 2003. The vice-president of China's Eximbank paid an official visit to Cameroon in March 2006, and President Paul Biya again visited China in November 2006 to participate in the third FOCAC meeting. Cooperation between Cameroon and China was crowned by the first ever visit to Cameroon by a Chinese president in January 2007.

The intensification of diplomatic ties has been followed by a rapid increase in economic interaction and a wave of Chinese migration to Cameroon. While there were only a few Chinese in Cameroon between 1971 and 1995, a growing number of small- and large-scale entrepreneurs, workers and even prostitutes (Ndjio 2009) have subsequently settled there. The Chinese Embassy in Yaoundé recently claimed that there were about 1,500 Chinese in Douala and between 2,000 and 3,000 in Yaoundé, mainly from Fujian and Zhejiang provinces (Jansson 2009: 4). However this would seem to be an underestimate. Although reliable statistics on Chinese migration are missing, some observers estimate the number of Chinese living in Cameroon to be as high as 200,000, although a more realistic figure might be between 20,000 and 50,000. Whatever the exact number, Cameroon, like some other African countries (Dobler 2008), seems to have reacted to the rapid increase in Chinese migrants in recent years with consternation and even suspicion.



Ngome (2010) found that many urban inhabitants in Cameroon were alarmed by the apparently uncontrolled Chinese ‘invasion’. Fearing Chinese competition, they have tended to respond with discourses of xenophobia.

Economic relations between Cameroon and China are evolving rapidly in today’s era of neoliberal globalisation. It is important to assess the benefits and risks of Cameroon’s relationship with China rather than take for granted the rhetoric from the Chinese leadership about a new strategic relationship based on friendship, reciprocal benefits and win-win economic cooperation.<sup>3</sup> To gain an insight in this field, it is useful to examine traditional channels of economic interaction, such as investment, trade and aid flows.<sup>4</sup>

### Chinese investment in Cameroon

The Cameroonian government has been openly wooing the Chinese to invest in Cameroon. In a speech to visiting Chinese President Hu Jintao in January 2007, President Biya invited Chinese enterprises ‘to come in their numbers and invest in Cameroon in all the sectors, especially hydrocarbons, mineral exploitation and wood extraction’.<sup>5</sup> He had already made a similar appeal while visiting China in November 2006. Given a lack of data on the exact value of Chinese investment in Cameroon, I simply describe here some of the investment activities of the Chinese in various sectors of the economy and discuss their possible impact on Cameroonian society.

#### *Oil and mining*

Two Chinese firms, including the China National Petroleum Company, are actively involved in oil exploration in the Gulf of Guinea. In April 2009, another Chinese oil company, Yan Chang from Shanxi Province, signed an agreement with the Cameroonian national oil company, the *Société Nationale des Hydrocarbures* (SNH), for a four-year exploration programme in two previously untouched onshore blocks – Zina and Makare – in northern Cameroon at a cost of US\$ 18 million. This is Cameroon’s first onshore oil-drilling project. In Cameroon’s mining sector, the only registered Chinese

company is Sinosteel's subsidiary Sinosteelcam, which is looking for iron in the Lobe concession close to Kribi. Chinese investments in mining in Cameroon are expected to increase following the 2007 appeal from the President of Cameroon (see above).

### *Forestry*

There are 23 logging concessions that are being exploited by nine companies in Cameroon. Only one of these has Chinese involvement: the Hong Kong-based Sino-French joint venture, Vicwood, has a total of 532,537 hectares of concessions. In addition, a number of independent Chinese timber traders are active in Douala. Chinese involvement in the forest sector is expected to rise as exports of wood to China increase (see below).

### *Agriculture and fishing*

In 2006, the Cameroonian government sold 10,000 hectares of land to Shanxi State Farms, a big Chinese company that specialises in the production, transformation and trade of agricultural products. These lands are located in Centre Province (2,000 ha in Nanga-Eboko and 4,000 ha in Ndjoré) and in the West Province (4,000 ha in Santchou). The cost of the project is US\$ 62 million, which will be financed by FOCAC loans from the Eximbank. The firm, which employs mainly Chinese workers, has already begun activities, with 200 ha of rice under cultivation in Nanga-Eboko. From the very start, the local population and various civil-society organisations have protested the Cameroonian state's large-scale sale of ancestral lands to China and the poor conditions of service offered to the irregularly employed local contract workers in this newly established Chinese company. Besides agriculture, a number of smaller Chinese enterprises are involved in fishing, using trawlers and more sophisticated fishing equipment than the local fishermen who regularly accuse them of destructive fishing practices.<sup>6</sup>

### *Infrastructure*

One of the earliest infrastructural projects undertaken by a Chinese company was the construction of the Lagdo Hydroelectric Dam in northern Cameroon, which was built between 1977 and 1982 by China International Water and Electric Corporation. Recently, Chinese firms have started bidding for more construction contracts and increasing numbers of Chinese companies active in Cameroon's infrastructure sector are tendering for projects funded by the Cameroonian government, the African Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank. It was unprecedented when the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) won a bid to construct some 13 km of road in Cameroon's economic capital, Douala, in 2004. The CRBC's price was US\$ 18 million, way below that demanded by rival bidders who requested upwards of US\$ 30 million. The construction was successfully completed a month ahead of schedule, which was greatly appreciated by both the Douala municipal authorities and the World Bank that was also involved in the project. Subsequently, several other Chinese companies have won contracts. For example, Zhejiang Geophysical Prospecting, which specialises in well-digging, is currently conducting a project on behalf of the World Bank and the Cameroonian government.

### *Retailing*

The activity attracting the majority of the Chinese to Cameroon today is, however, the retailing of cheap goods from China, including electronic appliances, textiles, travel goods, footwear and clothing. Family-owned Chinese shops and small-scale enterprises are to be found in almost every urban settlement across the country, sometimes concentrated in so-called Chinatowns. Local retailers are facing stiff competition from the Chinese, even though they also import from China.

### *Health*

Cameroon has been witnessing an explosion in Chinese traditional medicine and many Cameroonians are turning away from western drugs and local traditional herbs. The phenomenal growth in the

number of Chinese healers, clinics, shops and even mobile drug vendors is unprecedented. Almost every town in Cameroon now has at least one traditional Chinese clinic and patients using Chinese medication assert that the drugs are effective and comparatively cheap and that these healers are more accessible than western-trained doctors. However, western-trained doctors operating in Cameroon have not taken the popularity of Chinese healers lying down. They regard most Chinese healers and their associates as quacks and Cameroon's Medical Council, which is made up of western-trained and traditional doctors, has repeatedly called on the public-health authorities to strictly regulate the health sector and expose fake practitioners, namely Chinese healers (Ngome 2010).

Of late, the Chinese government has started promoting joint ventures between Chinese firms and private-sector partners in Cameroon. Eximbank has been called upon to play an important role in this direction as it accorded the Cameroonian government a loan worth US\$ 14 million in 1997 for two joint-venture projects between Chinese and Cameroonian businessmen. These projects involved the production of tractors and the recycling of tyres but both ended in failure with the factories closing and an associated metalwork project subsequently being suspended. The Cameroonian authorities blamed the Chinese for carrying out the feasibility studies by themselves, while the Chinese accused their Cameroonian partners of mismanagement. It is, however, beyond any doubt that Chinese investment has generally brought benefits to Cameroonians and the country's economy. It has provided Cameroon with alternative and relatively cheaper sources of finance and has helped to diversify its partners.

Local labour is benefiting from employment opportunities created by Chinese enterprises, especially as assistants in Chinese shops, restaurants and clinics, but also as workers in Chinese-owned construction firms. However, these jobs require no specific skills and are not only poorly remunerated but usually also short-term. For example, assistants may be laid off as soon as their Chinese owners and staff have learnt to communicate in the local language. It is also common for Cameroonian workers not to have an employment contract with their Chinese employer. Local labour may also be subject to lay-offs or a cut in wages if the local enterprise

has to restructure or even collapses due to the stiff competition from Chinese entrepreneurs who usually possess superior technical know-how and better managerial skills. Worse still, Chinese enterprises are tending to import most of their own labour, even unskilled manual workers.

The Cameroonian population as a whole is benefiting from Chinese investment as the Chinese are contributing to the supply of a larger variety of relatively cheap goods and services in the country. However, it might stand to lose in the long run as the quality of goods and services supplied by Chinese entrepreneurs is often of dubious quality compared to those supplied by western and even Cameroonian entrepreneurs.

### Trade relations between Cameroon and China

In the wake of the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1971, bilateral trade between the two countries grew rapidly, rising from US\$ 2.84 million in 1971 to US\$ 813.54 million in 2009. This section describes Cameroon's import and export links with China, its increasingly unfavourable trade balance with China, and the likely impact of these trade relations on stakeholders.

#### *Exports to China*

Cameroon's exports to China used to be relatively limited but rose by more than 170% at the start of the new millennium to stand at more than US\$ 123 million, which represents nearly 7% of Cameroon's total exports. Unfortunately, Cameroon's exports to China took a downward trend in the same period and, by 2005, exports to China had declined to US\$ 69 million, which is only 2.5% of the country's total exports.

Close examination of the structure of Cameroon's exports to China reveals that they are limited to a few raw materials, which used to include crude oil, cotton and wood. However, the export of crude oil, which accounted for more than 50% of Cameroon's export income from China, stopped in 2003 due to declining oil production in Cameroon, which made the quantity available for China too small to be transported economically. Raw cotton then

became the principal export commodity, representing almost 75% of all exports to China. China bought about 39% of Cameroon's total cotton exports in 2005 and exports of rough timber and wood-related products increased from 9% to about 24% of Cameroon's exports to China. This represented almost 4% of Cameroon's total timber exports.

Such an export performance is disappointing and demonstrates that Cameroon is not yet earning much from China's huge demand for raw materials. President Biya's invitation to China in 2007 to invest in mineral exploitation may be a positive move and lead to some improvement in this area.

### *Imports from China*

Imports from China have been steadily increasing, rising from US\$ 39 million in 1999 to US\$ 144 million in 2005. China has now become Cameroon's third source of imports after France and Nigeria, accounting for 5% of the country's total imports.

While exports to China are essentially limited to two commodities, imports from China cover a wide range of products. Before 2003 cereals (and especially rice) were the main import commodities, accounting for almost 50% of all imports. Following a dramatic decline in imports of cereals, imports from China are now largely made up of manufactured goods (53%) and machinery, transport and other equipment (31%).

Cameroonians, especially in the middle- and lower-income groups, are undeniably benefitting from the cheap consumer goods arriving from China. One clear example is the takeover of the motorbike market by the Chinese, which has led to a 50% reduction in prices. The availability of cheap motorbikes has stimulated the expansion of motorbike taxis, the so-called *bendskein*, in Cameroon's urban centres (see Konings 2006c). There are complaints about the quality of Chinese goods but this has not deterred people from purchasing goods made in China.

The manufacturing sector is also benefiting from cheap capital and intermediary inputs from China, especially those small- and medium-sized enterprises involved in manufacturing activities that require most of their capital goods from China. On the other hand,

these firms may face stiff competition on the domestic market due to the cheaper products from China, especially if they produce products that are being imported from China. On balance, the survival of Cameroonian firms depends on their ability to innovate and remain financially competitive.

### *Trade balance between Cameroon and China*

Cameroon used to enjoy a favourable trade balance with China when the value of its exports of raw materials to China was greater than its imports. Since 2001, Cameroon's trade surplus with China has been declining and it showed negative figures in 2004. President Biya raised the issue of the worsening trade balance in an appeal to visiting President Hu Jintao in January 2007, saying: 'We wish to benefit from export quotas for some of our products like coffee, cotton, cocoa, banana, just to name a few, so as to re-equilibrate as much as possible the trade balance between our two countries'.<sup>7</sup>

There is a serious risk in the current pattern of trade between Cameroon and China. Cheap imports from China are destroying the industrial sector while the primary sector is expanding thanks to rising demands from China. If this pattern is not checked, the Cameroonian economy will be locked into the production of primary products.

### *Chinese aid to Cameroon*

China's aid to Cameroon has been geared towards major infrastructural projects in the fields of culture, sport, energy and telecommunications. Some landmark projects include the construction of the Yaoundé Conference Centre, the Lagdo Hydroelectric Dam, Yaoundé's sports stadium and the modernisation of the telecom network, a project undertaken by Huawei in close cooperation with Camtel. Clearly, few traditional donors would agree to finance prestige projects like the Yaoundé Conference Centre and sporting infrastructural projects as China has been doing in Cameroon.

Chinese aid has also focused on the health and educational sectors. Some of the major projects in the health sector include the construction of a 200-bed gynaecological, obstetric and paediatric

hospital in Yaoundé, the Ngouso Clinic in Yaoundé, hospitals in Mbalmayo and Guider, and the renovation and extension of the hospital in Buea. Since 1975, China has regularly sent medical teams to Cameroon and a total of 45 medical personnel were stationed in Cameroon in June 2009. China is also providing growing educational support to Cameroon (Nordtveit 2010), with laboratory equipment being donated to the University of Yaoundé and annual scholarships (40 in 2008 and 32 in 2009) awarded to allow Cameroonian students to study in China. In 1997, a Mandarin language-teaching centre was set up in Yaoundé that was managed jointly by Zhejiang University and the International Relations Institute of Cameroon. The centre was given the status of Confucius Institute in 2007 and currently teaches Mandarin as well as Chinese language classes and culture. It has branches in Douala, Maroua and Buea. The Chinese have also recently started constructing some primary schools.

There was a surge in Chinese aid in 2007 following President Hu Jintao's visit to Cameroon when agreements committing aid worth US\$ 130 million were signed.<sup>8</sup> Compared to traditional donors, Chinese aid remains limited as net western development aid to Cameroon in 2003 stood at US\$ 899 million. China is, however, providing a new and rapidly increasing source of funding for Cameroon that seems to be unconditional and not tied to any political and economic reforms. But there is sufficient proof that Chinese aid does require the purchase of Chinese goods and services and that almost all Chinese aid projects are being executed by Chinese firms with imported Chinese labour, a fact that is resented in Cameroon.

Chinese aid to Cameroon is either in the form of grants or interest-free and concessional loans. It is therefore comparatively less expensive than some bilateral aid from western donors that includes non-concessional lending, and some multilateral aid that rarely includes grants. It is also worth noting that Chinese aid is exclusively project-based and China does not give Cameroon any assistance in the form of programme or budget support, as prescribed in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (Khan & Baye 2008: 27).

China has cancelled substantial amounts of debt owed by Cameroon. The first amounted to US\$ 34 million and followed the FOCAC meeting in 2000. The second sum to be cancelled, worth



US\$ 32 million, was agreed upon during President Hu Jintao's visit to Cameroon in January 2007. The third was worth US\$ 30 million and was cancelled in August 2010. Though clearly less significant than the debt relief offered by western bilateral donors (US\$ 1,200 million by the Paris Club) and multilateral institutions (US\$ 1,306 million), it is significant in relation to the total debt owed to China. These cancellations equally demonstrate China's unwillingness to condition debt relief, as is the case with the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

The fact that Chinese assistance does not come with strings attached regarding policy reform is seen by some Cameroonian intellectuals and civil-society organisations as detrimental for the local population as it undermines efforts to strengthen transparency and good governance and improve social and environmental standards.

## Conclusion

With its emergence as a significant world player in the era of neoliberal globalisation, China has returned to Africa on a larger scale than ever before, and with the ideological and financial resources to compete for political and economic influence. Some of the reasons behind China's renewed interest in Africa are similar to those that prevailed during the Cold War era when it presented itself as a Third World leader in its efforts to forge alliances with African states that would enable it to better contest the perceived western hegemony in multilateral organisations. China also needed African political support then in its attempt to minimise, or preferably eliminate, Taiwan's presence on the continent. Nevertheless, renewed Chinese interest in Africa has been primarily economically motivated. With the rapid expansion of its domestic economy, China has been looking for natural resources, new markets and investment opportunities, and its trade with Africa has risen sharply. At the core of China's inclusion in African markets is its deliberate promotion of a foreign policy with 'no political strings attached' that, coupled with Beijing's willingness to provide direct aid and concessionary loans, has proven to be very attractive to many African leaders.

Strikingly, while most members of the African political elite continue to appreciate the establishment of strategic partnerships between Africa and China in economic and political matters, coming as they have on the heels of years of global neglect of the continent, various African intellectuals and civil-society organisations have become critical of China's new profile in Africa. A South African intellectual, Moeletsi Mbeki, for instance, displayed a rather ambivalent attitude towards China's new engagement with Africa when he declared that China 'is both a tantalising opportunity and a terrifying threat to South Africa'. On the one hand, he said that China was 'just the tonic' that the mineral-rich but economically ailing South Africa needed but added that exports from China and Hong Kong to his country are double those from Africa, and almost double what South Africa exports to China. He feared trade relations between South Africa and China would be a 'replay of the old story of South Africa's trade with Europe' as evidenced by the fact that 'we sell them raw materials and they sell us manufactured goods with a predictable result – an unfavourable trade balance against South Africa'. He went on to accuse Chinese companies of flooding the South African market with cheap products, undercutting local firms and not hiring African labour (Shelton 2001).

Trade unions have emerged as the most vocal opponents of Chinese business activities in Africa among African civil-society organisations, seeing these as a serious threat to local employment and as promoting poor labour standards. They are bringing considerable pressure to bear on African governments to take protective measures and to force Chinese entrepreneurs to adhere to national labour laws.

Some civil-society organisations fear that China's unscrupulous support of pariah regimes, like those in Sudan and Zimbabwe, could undermine internal and external demands for the introduction of good governance and democracy. In their persistent efforts to contest the long-standing Chinese principle of non-interference in state sovereignty, they can count on support from organisations such as the AU and NEPAD.

As Africans begin to voice concerns about some of the less positive effects of China's presence in Africa, Beijing will have to find new ways to engage the continent. They will need approaches

that are not predicated on securing the compliance of the African political elite alone. Otherwise, they will run the risk of being portrayed as an ally of oppressive and corrupt regimes for self-interested reasons.

Although official data is limited on the extent of China-Cameroon relations, this chapter has provided some evidence that China is slowly but surely gaining ground in Cameroon. As elsewhere in Africa, the country's growing engagement with Cameroon seems to involve not only opportunities but also some risks and challenges. This chapter has assessed the benefits and risks of China's increased cooperation for various stakeholders in Cameroonian society, rather than taking for granted the official Chinese discourse of 'win-win' cooperation.

Given that the impact of China-Cameroon relations appears to be as ambivalent as elsewhere on the continent, Cameroon needs to examine its relationship with China to minimise any risks involved and exploit the advantages. Ways should be sought to increase exports to China, especially for commodities that are currently not being exported such as bananas, coffee and cocoa. Strategic sectors at risk of extinction from Chinese competition should be protected and negotiations should be started with China for some form of voluntary restraint. Joint ventures with genuine partners need to be encouraged as there is the potential here for transferring both technical and management skills to the local business community.

There has to be more transparency in Cameroon-China aid relations, not only to facilitate harmonisation with other donor programmes but also too allow for public scrutiny. Local and international civil-society organisations are called upon to play the important role of watchdog and to formulate strategies to assess and monitor the effects of China's cooperation with Cameroon and other African countries. Trade, investment and aid from China may be good for Cameroon's development but good policies and better management are also important and should not be neglected in China's cooperation with Cameroon.

## Notes

1. See 'Highlights of the Action Plan of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation', *People's Daily Online*, 6 November 2006.
2. See 'Restrict Cheap Chinese Clothes – SA Unions', *Business in Africa Online*, 7 September 2006.
3. See President Hu Jintao's speech during his visit to Cameroon in January 2007, in *Cameroon Tribune*, 31 January 2007.
4. In this endeavour, I am particularly indebted to Khan & Baye (2008).
5. *Cameroon Tribune*, 2 February 2007, p. 3.
6. See *The Post*, 22 October 2007.
7. *Cameroon Tribune*, 2 February 2007, p. 3.
8. *Cameroon Tribune*, 2 February 2007, p. 3.



## Political liberalisation and the violent university students' revolt in Cameroon

### Introduction

The struggle for political liberalisation, starting at the end of the 1980s, unleashed an unprecedented wave of student rebellion on university campuses in West and Central Africa (Kpatinde 1991). University students were often in the forefront of these struggles, sometimes with the support of secondary school students, their teachers and other socio-professional groups (Bratton & van de Walle 1992).

Although there is a striking lack of studies on the role of students in the 'democratic transition' (Buijtenhuijs & Thiriot 1995), the reasons for their widespread revolt seem to be similar. Political liberalisation allowed space for students to voice their long-standing grievances about the deteriorating living and study conditions at most African universities. The lack of basic infrastructure needed to cope with the massive growth in the student population since independence resulted in rapidly falling academic standards (Mbembe 1985; Tedga 1988; Lebeau 1997). The severe economic crisis and subsequent Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) aggravated the situation with an increasing withdrawal of state support for universities, university students and university graduates (Albert 1995; Federici 2000). Governments were compelled to make further cuts in university budgets, to request that students pay tuition fees and additional levies, and to virtually stop recruiting new graduates into already oversized state bureaucracies. As a result of such state withdrawal, African universities no longer appeared to be serving as centres of elite formation. This process of 'institutional liberalisation' has been highly resented by the students in their pursuit of upward mobility.<sup>1</sup> Comparing themselves with preceding generations who could count on getting government jobs because of their degrees, students nowadays see themselves as an

‘abandoned’ or ‘lost’ generation (Cruise O’Brien 1996). Little wonder that they have been inclined to see corrupt and authoritarian regimes as responsible for their predicament and to perceive a ‘democratic transition’ as a necessary precondition for change in society in general and in universities in particular. In Mali, students made a significant contribution to the overthrow of the regime and the introduction of a multi-party system (Smith 1997), but in most other African countries student rebellions have been brutally suppressed by the forces of law and order.

In this chapter, I focus on the student revolt at the University of Yaoundé – the only university institution in Cameroon until the 1993 university reforms. While Cameroonian university students share most of the grievances expressed by their counterparts in other West-Central African states, they appear to have played a somewhat different, and to a certain extent exceptional, role in the political liberalisation process. Although political liberalisation offered them the opportunity to organise to defend their interests, it also tended to divide them along ethno-regional lines. This led to an intensification of the simmering tensions between two groups of students: the ‘autochthonous’ Beti students who tended to support the ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) on the one hand, and the Anglophone and Bamileke ‘stranger’ students who were more inclined to support the major opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), on the other. Given the fact that the University of Yaoundé was located in ‘their’ territory, the Beti students claimed control of student politics in ‘their’ university and were determined to combat any organisation of ‘stranger’ students that caused trouble on campus and strove for the overthrow of the regime. The growing polarisation between these two groups of students, fuelled by the regime, ethnic entrepreneurs and the press, gave rise to an explosion of violence and the emergence on campus of a Beti militia engaged in various forms of ethnic exclusion. Unlike student rebellions in other parts of West and Central Africa, unrest and violence on the University of Yaoundé campus lasted almost uninterrupted for six years, from 1990 to 1996.

In the first section of this chapter I explore the development of student organisation along ethno-regional lines during political liberalisation, while the second section presents a detailed report of the 1990-96 student revolt.<sup>2</sup>

## Political liberalisation and student organisation along ethno-regional lines

After its creation in 1961, the University of Yaoundé experienced relatively few student protests until the beginning of the 1990s. Some were politically motivated, but most were prompted by the students' frequent worries about *bourse et bouffe* [grants and food], especially the quality and quantity of food and the number, amount, and timely payment of scholarships.

The relative absence of any serious student unrest during the first three decades of the university's existence is understandable. Students undoubtedly belonged among the most privileged of the political system and were constantly told that they would be the future leaders soon to be co-opted into the regime. A university degree gave almost automatic access to one of the many potentially lucrative posts in the expanding civil service or public sector. Even when the supply of graduates became much larger than the demand for them in the 1970s, President Ahmadou Ahidjo (1961-82) and his successor, Paul Biya, continued to create job openings for them in the administration. For example, to alleviate pressures on the labour market, the Biya government recruited 1,500 new graduates in the already oversized state bureaucracy in 1983 and another 1,700 in 1985. Moreover, in an attempt to preserve student loyalty following Biya's ascendancy to power in 1982, the government increased both the amount and the number of scholarships in 1984 (Mehler 1993: 296). And, if the 'carrot' did not keep the students quiet, the authoritarian post-colonial regimes did not hesitate to use the 'stick',

Several factors explain why the students' behaviour changed so dramatically at the beginning of the 1990s, as manifested in their frequent and protracted strike actions. First and foremost, there was growing dissatisfaction with the deepening crisis within the university and the lack of employment prospects for university graduates. Mockingly, students referred to their university as 'the bachelors' cemetery'. The number of students increased from 35 in 1961 to 10,000 in 1982 and 41,000 in 1992 (Mehler 1998: 59; Mbu 1993: 82) but the university infrastructure was able to provide for at most 7,000 students (Anonymous 1991). Lecture rooms, libraries,



laboratories and office space for lecturers were inadequate and lacked necessary equipment. The university hostel could offer accommodation to a limited number of students, often on the basis of patronage or ethnic criteria, and the vast majority of students were compelled to look for accommodation themselves, often in the so-called 'mini-cities' around the university, constructed mostly by entrepreneurs closely connected with the university authorities or the regime. Rooms were rented at exorbitant prices, FCFA 10,000 or more per month, very expensive for students on an average scholarship of FCFA 30,000. Lecturers had a heavy teaching load but poor conditions of service (Ouendji 1996). In addition to badly stocked libraries, this was one of the reasons for frequent sales to students, at vast prices, of stereotyped lecture notes dubbed *polycops*.

Given the inadequate infrastructure, it is not surprising that the quality of degrees offered by the university continued to fall. Failure rates were extremely high, reaching 80 percent in the Faculty of Law and Economic Science (Anonymous 1991). Poor educational standards further lowered graduates' employment chances. Besides this structural crisis, there was also a moral crisis: large-scale fraud during examinations, and sexual harassment.

Above all, there appears to have been no clear separation between politics and academics. All appointments at the university, from that of the chancellor on down to messengers and cleaners, were political appointments. Loyalty to the regime appears to have been more important than intellectual merit for a university career (Nyamnjoh 1999). A number of professors close to the regime, for example Mono Ndjana, Fame Ndong, Bipoum Woum, and Eno Belinga, were regularly absent from the university, having been recruited by the regime and the CPDM for information campaigns throughout the country. The administration of the university appeared to be geared predominantly toward political control. National security agents could be found disguised as students constantly spying on students and lecturers. As one student put it, 'the so-called scholarship is really a bribe in exchange for freedom of thought and expression' (Gobata 1993: 98-99).

The university was administered in an authoritarian manner with little dialogue between the university authorities and the academic staff and students. Unlike some other West and Central African

countries such as Senegal (Diop 1992; Bathily *et al.* 1995), Ghana (Amoa 1977; Oquaye 1996) and Nigeria (Ojo 1995; Lebeau 1997), no student union in Cameroon was allowed to represent and defend student interests. The so-called delegates or student representatives - those responsible for imposing the decisions of the university authorities upon the students while taking note of those who complain (Dibussi 1991: 16; Mbu 1993: 107) - were not elected by the students after 1986 but were appointed by the administration. Worse still, they tended to become informants who pointed out subversives to the regime in times of crisis. Lack of participation in university affairs created the impression among students that revolt was the only avenue to change in the university.

While the deepening crisis in the university was a constant source of frustration among students, the changing economic and political environment in Cameroon had a radicalising effect on them. The economic crisis that hit Cameroon – once one of the most prosperous countries in Africa – in the mid-1980s and the subsequent implementation of an SAP in 1988-89 aggravated the students' predicament (Konings 1996a). There were no longer any funds available for improving the university infrastructure. There were regular delays in the payment of scholarships, causing many hardships among students, and there was an almost total stop in new recruitment into the state bureaucracy. Like other social strata, students tended to attribute the economic ills and the concomitant process of institutional liberalisation to the corrupt and authoritarian Biya regime.

The political liberalisation process that started in 1990 was a decisive factor in the student rebellion.<sup>3</sup> It actually appears to have had an ambivalent impact on the students. On the one hand, it created space for students to organise in defence of their interests but on the other hand, it tended to divide them. The introduction of a multi-party system and the regionalisation of political competition (Eyoh 1998a) split students along party and ethno-regional lines. Political liberalisation even encouraged an obsession with autochthony among students, leading to violent forms of exclusion of 'strangers', fuelled by the Biya regime in its struggle for survival in multi-party elections (Geschiera & Nyamnjoh 2000; Konings 2001). The major line of division among students became

the following: the autochthonous Beti students who tended to support the ruling party, the CPDM, led by President Paul Biya who was himself a Beti versus the Anglophone and Bamileke ‘strangers’ lumped together as ‘Anglo-Bami’ who generally supported the main opposition party, the SDF, led by Anglophone John Fru Ndi.<sup>4</sup>

To fully understand this cleavage and the violence that accompanied the struggle between the two groups of students during political liberalisation, it is necessary to point out that animosities between the Beti and Anglo-Bami have a long historical background, not only at the University of Yaoundé but also in Yaoundé and Beti territory as a whole.

There was, first of all, the large-scale migration, set in motion during French colonial rule, from the Grassfields – the region of the Francophone Bamileke (the present West Province) and Anglophone ethnic-related peoples (the present North West Province of Anglophone Cameroon) – to Yaoundé and other Beti towns. The Bamileke, renowned in Cameroon for their ‘entrepreneurial ethos’ (Warnier 1993), migrated in large numbers to Yaoundé, acquiring more and more land to build their own houses and coming to dominate the city’s commercial sector to a large extent. Especially after independence (1960), the local population began to express their fears of becoming overwhelmed by the Bamileke in their own area, evoking tensions between the two groups and, sometimes, violent clashes.

Tensions between the two groups increased when Ahmadou Ahidjo transferred power to Paul Biya in November 1982. The Beti elite saw the coming to power of one of their ethnic members as simply an opportunity to seize power from the Fulbe and Bamileke, who had enjoyed a privileged position regarding capital accumulation during the Ahidjo regime (see Chapters 2 and 4), and advance their own economic and political interests. Initially encountering great difficulties in consolidating his power (Takougang & Krieger 1998), Biya started to give in to these ethnic pressures. In protest against the increasing Beti monopoly on economic and political power, Bamileke businessmen then withdrew their savings from banks and transferred them to informal savings circuits called ‘tontines’. This contributed to the banks’ growing liquidity problems and to the economic crisis (see Chapter 2).

The growing tensions between the Beti and the Bamileke were also manifest in the ethnic discourse and repeated ethnic clashes at the University of Yaoundé. Following publication of the book *L'Idée sociale chez Paul Biya* in 1985, there was a fierce debate between its author, Mono Ndjana, a professor of philosophy and one of the most faithful ideologues of the regime, and Maurice Kamto, an eminent professor of law. This intellectual debate between a Beti (Mono Ndjana) and a Bamileke (Maurice Kamto) rapidly developed into an ethnic confrontation. In the course of another debate at the university on 11 March 1987 about the political literature in Cameroon, Mono Ndjana accused some Bamileke colleagues of 'ethno-fascism' in the sense that they were exhorting their own ethnic group to end their current marginalisation and win political power (Collectif 'Changer le Cameroun' 1992: 19-25). In reaction, one of the accused, the philosopher Sindjoun Pokam, developed his theory of 'mono-fascism'. This term refers not only to the name of his adversary, Mono Ndjana, but also to attempts by one single ethnic group, the Beti, to monopolise power in Cameroon (Pokam 1987). Obviously, such debates resulted in an intensification of the existing tensions between the two groups in the university.

Like the Bamileke, the Anglophones were seen as another threat to Beti power. I have argued in this volume that the Anglophone minority deeply regrets its vote for reunification with the Francophone majority in 1961, feeling marginalised, exploited and assimilated by the Francophone-dominated state and Francophones as a whole (see Chapter 5). In the wake of Biya's accession to power in 1982, they began to protest openly against their allegedly second-class citizenship in Cameroon and to call for a return to the federal state or outright secession. The Anglophone students at the University of Yaoundé were the first to express Anglophone disenchantment with the Biya regime. Their initiative can be explained by the many hardships they experienced at the university. Though officially a bilingual institute, the University of Yaoundé has clearly remained a Francophone institute. The Anglophone students protested when, in September 1983, the Beti Minister of National Education promulgated an order modifying the Anglophone General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination by making it similar to the Francophone baccalaureate. Apparently the order was

intended to facilitate the entry of Anglophone students into the country's professional and technical institutes, which were exclusively based on the French system. The Anglophone students, however, interpreted the proposed reform as a subtle attempt by the Francophone-dominated state to assimilate the Anglophone educational system. They maintained that the problem of Anglophone exclusion from the professional and technical institutes in the country could not be solved by assimilation but rather by the creation of institutes based on the English system. Their ensuing demonstrations and boycott of classes met with extreme police brutality (Nyamnjoh 1996a). The students used this protest action to voice other grievances including the recent dismissal of Gerald Bisong, an Anglophone lecturer in the Faculty of Law and Economics, allegedly for offering one of the few courses in English in the officially bilingual university.<sup>5</sup> The situation did not calm down until eleven days later when President Biya issued a statement calling on students to return to classes and announcing the setting-up of a commission composed of highly qualified and experienced Anglophones and Francophones to look into the students' grievances.

The greatest shock to the Beti and the regime came in May 1990 when the first opposition party in the country, the SDF, was launched in Bamenda, the capital of the North West Province of Anglophone Cameroon (see Chapter 3). The fact that the SDF rapidly spread its influence among the Anglophones and ethnic-related Bamileke heightened the panic in government circles and hardened Beti attitudes towards the Anglo-Bami, perceiving the latter's alliance as the greatest challenge to their position of power.

In Yaoundé and other Beti towns the autochthonous population found it unacceptable that Anglo-Bami 'strangers' or 'settlers' would try to help the SDF to gain power. As 'strangers' they should not try to rule in the home region of their landlords but instead should vote CPDM or else go home and vote for their own party. Newly founded Beti vigilante groups, such as Commando Delta, Direct Action, and the National Front for Beti Liberation, signed highly incendiary tracts, referring to the Anglo-Bami as 'exploitative, domineering, unscrupulous, and ungrateful invaders' and calling on them to leave or face the consequences (Collectif 'Changer le Cameroun' 1992). On several occasions, Beti mobs and vigilante

groups attacked Anglo-Bami property in Yaoundé while the security forces stood by indifferently (Nkwi & Socpa 1997). One such occasion was in 1991 when the so-called National Coordination of Opposition Parties and Associations (NCOPA), in which the SDF played a leading role, organised a protracted 'ghost town' campaign to force the Biya regime to agree to a sovereign national conference (see Chapters 2 and 3). Another occasion was during the 1992 presidential elections when the chairman of the SDF, John Fru Ndi, made significant inroads into Yaoundé, thanks to the large Anglo-Bami diaspora: 39 per cent of the votes cast against 52 per cent for Paul Biya. Following these fraudulent elections, John Fru Ndi accused Biya of stealing his victory. Yet another occasion was the 1996 municipal elections, which took place a few days after the promulgation of a new constitution promising state protection for minorities and the autochthonous population (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000; Konings 2001).

The autochthony discourse and ethnic exclusion became part and parcel of university life when students started organising in 1990. On the one hand, there emerged what was initially called the National Coordination of Cameroon Students but later changed its name to the Students' Parliament or simply Parliament. It was by far the largest student union on campus. While the Anglo-Bami students formed the core of its membership and leadership, students from other ethnic groups outside the Beti area also formed part of its membership. Many Parliament members lived in one of the mini-cities around the university called Bonamoussadi and, particularly during the heyday of student rebellion, they tended to assemble almost daily at their meeting-place at Bassora in Bonamoussadi. Parliament soon came under the influence of the opposition parties, notably the SDF. Parliament members agreed with the opposition that an overthrow of the regime was required to bring about real change in society at large and in the university in particular. The Anglophone members equally championed the establishment of an Anglophone university. Parliament leaders often presented themselves as revolutionaries who were prepared to use all means at their disposal, including demonstrations, strikes, and acts of vandalism, should the regime and the university authorities fail to listen to or to give in to their demands.

On the other hand, a Committee for Self-Defence was called into being by the regime to counteract the actions of Parliament. Its leadership and membership was mainly Beti but some members of other ethnic groups were also part of the Self-Defence group. For example, one of its principal leaders, 'General' Ngoufack, was a Bamileke. He hailed from the same village as Augustin Kontchou Kouomegni, who used to be a professor of political science at the university before being appointed minister of information and culture and a government spokesman. He and other non-Beti members were recruited by the regime to give the public the impression that the Self-Defence group was not an exclusively Beti affair but an organisation of responsible students. Ngoufack was well rewarded for his services and was given a lucrative job in the National Ports Authority after his graduation despite the freeze in public-sector employment.

Most of the Beti members of the Self-Defence group believed that Parliament was out to destroy 'their' university and to remove 'their' government from power. Others perceived Parliament as a group of vandals set to disturb the academic year and to destroy university property while claiming that they were defending the rights of the responsible students. Others had just joined the group because they were given cash and, in some cases, free lodgings by the regime in return for their combat with Parliament. Since the Committee for Self-Defence was made up of only a small minority of the students, they were allowed to carry weapons, including clubs, knives and pistols, to attack members and sympathisers of Parliament. They were even alleged to be involved in crimes, such as murders, to incriminate Parliament members.

The Committee for Self-Defence worked closely with the Beti vigilante groups on campus, particularly the self-styled Direct Action group that openly declared that the University of Yaoundé was on Beti land and thus should fall under Beti control. It often declared that the Anglo-Bami students should either recognise Beti control or go home'. Sometimes, however, the Self-Defence group composed of Beti and non-Beti students appeared to distance itself from this ethnic militia:



The Committee for Self-Defence is different from the other vigilante groups because these other groups have objectives, which are unknown. Meanwhile, everyone knows the objectives of our committee and it works in the interest of the majority of students who are regularly admitted into the university (Quoted in Lisinge [n.d.]).

Becoming increasingly aware that it constituted only a minority among the student population, the Self-Defence group was prepared to enter into negotiations with their colleagues from Parliament. For instance, in a circular issued on 6 May 1992, it declared:

Together let's save the University of Yaoundé.

Conscious of the fact that violence cannot solve any problem,

Conscious of the fact that discord among the students is disadvantageous to the representation of their interests, and

Conscious equally of the fact that we have got the same academic problem,

The Committee for Self-Defence demands a dialogue, a debate, with our friends of Parliament (Quoted in Lisinge ([n.d.])).

Following the formation of the Committee for Self-Defence and the Beti vigilante groups, which received logistical support from the forces of law and order, Parliament created its own commandos to fight these hostile groups and to protect its members.

### Political liberalisation and student revolt, 1990-96

From 1990 to 1996 the University of Yaoundé barely functioned, with university life being repeatedly paralysed by student protest and revolt. During this period there were regular violent confrontations between Parliament on the one hand and the Committee for Self-Defence, the Beti vigilante groups, and the forces of law and order on the other. In this section, I focus on three such



confrontations. The first occurred in 1991 following Parliament's call for a sovereign national conference. The second took place in 1993 after Parliament's protest against the introduction of university tuition fees. The third occurred in 1996 following Parliament's resistance of the university authorities' imposition of special levies on students in addition to tuition fees.

*Parliament and the holding of a sovereign national conference, 1991*

Relations between the students and the state and university authorities started to deteriorate from 1990 onwards. On 26 March 1990, a number of mostly Anglophone students marched in support of launching the SDF in Bamenda and the introduction of a multi-party system in the country. The government press falsely accused them of having sung the Nigerian national anthem (Ngniman 1993; Kamto 1993).<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the gendarmes, usually called *ninjas* by the students and other sections of the population, harassed and brutalised the students, looted their property and arrested about three hundred of them.<sup>7</sup> Apparently the students' so-called delegates, appointed by the university authorities, were involved in this oppression and pointed out to the gendarmes the rooms of the Anglophone students and even joined them in torturing their fellow students (Dibussi 1991). Little wonder that this behaviour by 'their' delegates contributed to the students' pursuit of an autonomous organisation. This march by Anglophone students incited disaffection and resentment among the autochthonous Beti population on and off campus, with some Beti landlords threatening to remove Anglophone students from their houses. To forestall any further student protest actions, the regime stationed the *ninjas* permanently on campus.

Tensions remained high on campus for the rest of the year. In July 1990 students lodged a complaint with the chancellor, Joel Moulen, that a number of them had been paid FCFA 10,000 less than the amount stipulated in the text regulating their scholarships. Since no further payments were forthcoming, they marched on the Ministry of Higher Education. When the Minister failed to settle the issue, they started mounting roadblocks on campus. Fearing that the matter would escalate, the university authorities then decided

to pay the students.<sup>8</sup> In September of the same year some second- and third-year students in the Faculty of Law and Economics protested against mass failures in the examinations<sup>9</sup> and by the end of November, Anglophone students had started boycotting classes to press home their demands. Undergraduates in the Department of English Language and Literature complained about overcrowding in lecture rooms. English private law students protested about discrimination, bitterly lamenting that some of their courses were in French while French private law students had no courses at all in English.<sup>10</sup>

It was in this context of growing tension on campus and the gradual opening of space for organisation during the political liberalisation process that the National Coordination of Cameroon Students (the group that was soon to be called Parliament and became allied with the SDF opposition party) was formed under the leadership of Benjamin Senfo Tonkam, a Bamileke student. Its first public activity was on 15 August 1990, when it addressed an open letter to the Head of State, stressing that higher education in Cameroon was 'sick and without repairs', and characterised by 'inadequate infrastructures, anachronism and arbitrariness'.<sup>11</sup> It further stated that university students in Cameroon were among the most wretched in Africa, being faced with poor nutritional standards, housing conditions, and transport facilities, low scholarships, language barriers, and exploitation by their professors. It requested that the president look into the matter of growing unemployment rates among university graduates and the militarisation of the university campus after the 26 May 1990 Bamenda incident. It also appealed to him to reform the university so that it would become a school of tolerance and dialogue and regain its lost credibility.

The emergence and increasing politicisation of Parliament disturbed the university authorities and the regime. Their worries appeared to be justified when, after some earlier skirmishes (Mehler 1993:297; Mbu 1993), an initially peaceful demonstration by Parliament on 2 April 1991, formed the prelude to a two-month explosion of violence on campus. On that day, Parliament members marched in support of the opposition parties' call for the holding of a sovereign national conference and an unconditional general

amnesty for political prisoners and exiles. The government strongly condemned their actions, attributing them to student manipulation by the opposition parties. The president warned the students to remain aloof from politics, insisting that the university was a temple of learning and not a haven of politics: 'La politique aux politiciens, l'école aux écoliers'. In reaction, Parliament leaders maintained that if the authorities were sincere about purging the university of politics, they should start dissolving all the CPDM branches and youth movements on campus and bar the university population from participating in CPDM rallies and other CPDM propaganda activities (Dibussi 1991). Moreover, they claimed that a sovereign national conference could make a significant contribution to solving the problems at the university and in society as a whole. As one Parliament leader put it:

A sovereign national conference is a forum for collective self-confession, a platform to point out past mistakes and to elaborate new codes of conduct – a process that will inevitably lead to a positive restructuring of our unadapted educational system and its mediocre university and that will eventually lay the foundation for the resolution of post-university problems such as unemployment.<sup>12</sup>

The student demonstrations on 2 April were dispersed by the gendarmes, but the following day Parliament members marched again, burning vehicles, including that of the chancellor, and smashing the windows of the Chancellery. The chancellor then requested that the security forces protect university property and students who refused to take part in the demonstrations. Subsequently, the gendarmes guarding the campus were reinforced by new troops. This combined force immediately moved into action, spraying tear gas over students, looting their rooms, raping some of the girls, and torturing anyone arrested. The authorities were indifferent to such brutalities. Parliament commandos challenged the security forces daily, throwing stones in intifada style and then withdrawing as well as chanting liberation songs like 'Today may be the last day, we don't know'. They also tried to protect students in the residential areas against attacks by the Self-Defence group. They developed a system of whistle signals for meeting each other,

attacking, withdrawing and so on. Besides Senfo Tonkam, three other Bamileke leaders of Parliament became well known to the Cameroonian public during this period thanks to the media, namely Corentin Talla, nicknamed 'Schwartzkopf', Robert Wanto, nicknamed 'Colin Powell', and Blaise Yimga Yotchou nicknamed 'Abou Nidal'.

Assuming that the situation was more or less under control, troops withdrew from the campus on 19 April without notifying the chancellor. Parliament members used this opportunity to assault those lecturers and students who were hostile to Parliament, leading to renewed occupation of the campus by the security forces. Parliament leaders then decided to halt all activities on campus until further notice and to advise their fellow students to leave. Curiously, on 21 April, the leader of Parliament, Senfo Tonkam, who had been hiding in the U.S. embassy, was escorted to the campus by U.S. marine bodyguards to announce the so-called Operation Ghost Campus (Boulaga 1997: 92-93).

On 4 May, Parliament held a meeting approved by the chancellor at the university sports complex. An estimated crowd of 25,000 students attended this meeting chanting the popular freedom song of the famous Cameroonian singer Anne-Marie Ndze. Parliament leaders reiterated their demands for the organisation of a sovereign national conference, summed up all the students' grievances, and called for solidarity among students (Lisinge n.d.). After the meeting, some Parliament members were attacked and wounded by Direct Action, the Beti militia linked to the Committee for Self-Defence. On Monday morning, 6 May, Parliament members marched to see the chancellor, providing him with a report of their meeting and requesting protection against any further attacks by the Beti vigilante groups. In his reply, the chancellor avoided addressing any of the points raised by the students. The latter then decided to leave and to assemble in the afternoon at their usual meeting place at Bassora to devise future strategies.

One of the unexpected guests at the afternoon meeting was 'General' Ngoufack, the principal leader of the Self-Defence group. He told Parliament members that he was attending their meeting without the knowledge of his own group. He then declared his willingness to enter into negotiations with the leaders of Parliament.

Although he then left the meeting, rumours were already spreading on campus that he had been ‘hijacked’ by Parliament, which understandably led to commotion in Self-Defence group circles, and among the university authorities and the government. The Self-Defence group reacted swiftly by capturing three members of Parliament with a view to holding them hostage until Ngoufack was freed. In the meantime, the chancellor had notified the government authorities of the dangerous situation and the government then ordered an end to Parliament’s meeting.

The security forces arrived when the students were about to leave the meeting and, without any notice, charged brutally. The Self-Defence group, the Beti militia and the Beti inhabitants of the nearby quarters also attacked fleeing students. Soldiers again invaded students’ residences in Bonamoussadi, looting property, raping girls and arresting any student caught up in the violence. Reportedly, 218 students were arrested, but there were contradictory reports about the number of deaths, disappearances, and injuries. While the private press spoke of several deaths, the government was less than precise in its reports. The minister of information and culture and government spokesman, Augustin Kontchou Kouomegni, began a swift rise to prominence in the regime and notoriety in the opposition by claiming ‘zéro mort’ [no deaths]. Realising that the population was shocked by such an unprecedented degree of violence on campus, the Biya government on 15 May appointed a nine-man committee headed by Chief Justice (retired) Sam Endeley, an Anglophone with close ties to the regime, to investigate the matter. In its final report, the committee was critical of the role of the university authorities and the forces of law and order but it came to the conclusion that there were ‘no deaths, no rapes, no disappearances’. While the opposition strongly contested the committee’s conclusions, the government was clearly pleased with the report. Soon after its publication, Endeley was appointed Bakweri Paramount Chief – a position that had been vacant for a considerable period of time (Geschiere 1993).

On 7 May 1991, the day after what came to be known in student circles as the ‘Bassora Massacre’, Parliament leaders protested against these events by declaring a boycott of classes for the remainder of the year. On the same day, many members of Parliament left their rooms in Bonamoussadi and other mini-cities around the university.

Renewed brutal charges by the security forces on student residences followed after a student, Ndam Souley who was believed to have been a government informant, was killed by a Molotov cocktail on 15 May. Government and Parliament accused each other of having committed this crime. Charged with murder and wanted by the police, Parliament leaders such as Schwartzkopf, Colin Powell and Abu Nidal, sought refuge in the building of the EEC representation in Yaoundé where they were later refused political asylum. Senfo Tonkam was arrested on 23 May and was subsequently sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

The government was eventually prepared to make some concessions to Parliament to induce them to end Operation Ghost Campus. It first announced that two new universities would be created, one of which would be an Anglophone university as demanded by the Anglophone students. It then dismissed the chancellor, Joel Moulen, and replaced him with Peter Agbor Tabi, the first Anglophone to occupy this position. When this strategy failed to yield the desired results, the government resorted to intimidation. It threatened students by announcing that anyone not attending lectures would be considered dismissed or having withdrawn from the university. From the end of May onwards students began to return to the university. The university authorities forced the ill-prepared students to sit the end-of-the-year examinations so as not to lose the academic year and their own credibility. Examinations were finally held under tight security.

#### *Parliament and the introduction of tuition fees, 1993*

Like his predecessor, the new chancellor, Peter Agbor Tabi, appeared not to be interested in any form of regular consultation with Parliament. He became almost obsessed with strengthening control over the students. In a time of deepening crisis when the government claimed that there was no money to improve the university infrastructure and to pay salaries and scholarships regularly, he erected the so-called Berlin Wall to facilitate control over the students by the security forces, the Committee for Self-Defence, and the Beti militia.

It soon turned out that his efforts to maintain control were unsuccessful. By 12 December 1991, Parliament had staged another prolonged strike against the delay in the payment of scholarships. A new round of violence and confrontation between Parliament and its opponents occurred on campus after Parliament's leaders had declared a renewed Operation Ghost Campus. Violence reached a climax in 'The Night of the Long Knives' on 20 January 1992, when the *ninjas* stormed Bonamoussadi, again brutalising and raping students, looting their property, and arresting over 35 of them.

A few months later, Parliament announced that 6 May would be a day of Ghost Campus in honour of the martyrs of the 6 May 1991 Bassora Massacre. In the days preceding 6 May the Beti militia distributed tracts around campus, threatening the Anglo-Bami students and admonishing them to go home. In a circular, the Committee for Self-Defence announced that it was going to celebrate its historic victory over Parliament on 6 May 1991.<sup>13</sup> During the night of 5 May, a Bamileke female student, Guiadem Ange Tekam, the director of the students' newspaper the *Voice of the Student*, was molested by the security forces, forced to march naked through Bonamoussadi, and then detained. She was accused of having distributed tracts calling on students to march on 6 May. On Martyrs' Day itself, some 15 Parliament members were subjected after their arrest to dehumanising and savage treatment by the security forces. They were severely beaten, bathed in mud, their hair shaved with broken bottles and their faces painted with a black substance, and then were transferred to some of the newly established torture cells. On 8 May, some 500 third-year female students from the Faculty of Law and Economics staged a peaceful protest march to the Chancellery. Their ultimatum to boycott classes until the unconditional release of their colleague, Guiadem Ange Tekam, was simply ignored by the chancellor.

The new chancellor was to face an even greater student challenge at the beginning of 1993. On 19 January, Titus Edzoa, the minister of higher education, announced on CRTV the long-expected university reforms, including the establishment of six, more manageable, university institutions in the country; the introduction of a system of credits for two semesters of fourteen weeks each



(students needed at least a 70 per cent pass rate to be promoted to the next class); and tuition fees of FCFA 50,000 a year per student, to be paid in two instalments.

The levying of tuition fees was particularly shocking to the students since both the prime minister, Simon Achidi Achu, and the minister of higher education had declared during the 1992 presidential elections that university tuition fees would not be introduced. While still engaged in the struggle for the regular payment of their scholarships, the students were suddenly told they had to pay for their own university education and forget about their unpaid scholarships. In addition, the students argued that they could not be compelled to pay fees at a time when their parents' incomes had been dramatically curtailed due to drastic cuts in salaries and agricultural-commodity prices and when the living and study conditions on campus were so poor.<sup>14</sup>

Immediately after the announcement of the university reforms, the members of Parliament assembled at Bassora where they decided to stage a peaceful demonstration in town and to boycott classes. They then marched into town, chanting anti-Biya songs and setting a huge effigy of Biya ablaze. When they started mounting barricades, the gendarmes attacked them. Some students sustained injuries, others were arrested. Forced to withdraw, they staged another demonstration in town the following day where the gendarmes again confronted them with water canons, tear gas, beatings, and arrests. Back on campus, they set fire to a Faculty of Science building housing a geology laboratory and the offices of some fifty lecturers.

In a circular issued by Parliament, it was alleged that the Chancellor Peter Agbor Tabi then instructed his militia on campus to increase raids on students both on campus and in residential areas. These raids, the circular said, 'were intended to brutalise students and destroy their goods so that, intimidated, fewer and fewer students would have the courage to join the boycott of tuition fees'. Agbor Tabi was quoted as saying 'blood should flow, if necessary, so that the students either pay their fees or go back to their home provinces to do farm work'.<sup>15</sup> Apparently, the security forces, the Self-Defence group, and the Beti militia, which started terrorising Parliament members and destroying or looting their property, carried out Agbor Tabi's instructions religiously.



Violence reigned on campus for months. During the night of 24-25 April, a second-year Bamileke student, Collins Djongoué Kamga, was set on fire in his room. He was said to have paid part of his tuition fees against Parliament's instructions. The regime was therefore quick to make Parliament responsible for this murder. Even the confession by a Beti member of the Committee for Self-Defence on Radio Africa No. 1 on 30 April that his group was responsible for the crime did not deter the regime from punishing Parliament members. Without further investigation, the minister of higher education summarily dismissed thirty-five members of Parliament from the university. An additional list of seventeen names was circulating and persons on this list felt in danger (Boulaga 1997: 143). In an interview after this incident, the chancellor declared that the Committee for Self-Defence had every right to protect the interests of the responsible students in view of the unstable situation on campus.

One of the consequences of the mysterious assassination was that students started paying their fees for fear of being executed should they fail to do so. The authorities, who were considered to have ended this protracted strike successfully, were rewarded for their services a few weeks later. Following a cabinet reshuffle, the minister of higher education, Titus Edzoa, was promoted to Secretary-General at the Presidency, one of the most powerful positions in Cameroon, while the Chancellor Peter Agbor Tabi moved up into Edzoa's former post.

*Parliament and the imposition of special levies on students, 1996*

Parliament members had vehemently resisted the introduction of the FCFA 50,000 university tuition fee in 1993. They became even more restive when the university authorities began to impose additional levies upon students, including FCFA 5,000 for pre-registration, FCFA 5,000 for medical costs (supposed to cover the costs of X-rays that were never carried out), FCFA 1,000 for transcripts of examination results, and FCFA 1,500 for the use of laboratory facilities in the Faculty of Science. In addition, the cost of participation in the catch-up summer session in September was FCFA 25,000 despite the fact that students could follow no more

than four courses during this session. The imposition of some new levies, such as the payment of FCFA 100 for each visit to the library at night, FCFA 50 for studying in one of the lecture rooms on weekends, and FCFA 25 for the use of toilet facilities, was seen by the students as provocation.

It was not until 1996 that Parliament leaders laid their hands on the 1993 university reform decrees. They then discovered that the imposition of special levies was not covered by the decrees' text of application. Attempts to meet the new chancellor, Dominique Obounou Akong, to discuss the issue failed.

Two incidents fuelled student unrest and sparked renewed strike action. The first incident occurred on 16 April when the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, Joseph-Marie Essomba, issued a circular cancelling the first semester results of some third-year students who had not yet sat all their first-year examinations. It also announced that only students who had paid their tuition fees of FCFA 50,000 would have their results published. The students opposed these directives as a violation of the text and spirit of the 1993 university reform decrees. They emphasised that these reforms stipulated that a 70 per cent pass mark sufficed for promotion to the next class and that tuition fees were payable in two instalments. Publication of the first-semester results could therefore not be made dependent on payment of the second semester fees. The second incident took place on 2 May when the students were provoked by the arrogant behaviour of the Dean of the Faculty of Science, Amougou Akwa. During a meeting with some of his students in front of the Chancellery he tried to conclude the discussion by asking whether there was still another 'sponger' (*fainéant*) who wanted to pose a question. The students saw this as further proof that the university authorities never took them seriously.

The next day, 3 May, members of Parliament started demonstrating on campus. They marched to the offices of both deans, chased students and lecturers out of the lecture rooms, mounted roadblocks, shattered windscreens, and finally launched an attack on the registrar's office while chanting anti-chancellor songs in Pidgin English like 'papa di suffer, Obounou di chop moni'. This signified the start of another protracted student strike. A new

batch of Parliament leaders emerged (with nicknames like Chairman Savimbi, Etienne Lautier, Fidel Castro and Thatcher) who declared a renewed Operation Ghost Campus. In subsequent days there were frequent confrontations between Parliament commandos and the security forces. Any students who were seen carrying books to or from campus were seized by members of Parliament, 'baptised' with dirty water and urine, had their faces smeared with mud, and ordered to return to their rooms.

Describing the new levies as 'extortion', some 3,000 members of Parliament marched on 6 May to the office of the Chancellor Dominique Obounou Akong. During a meeting with some of their representatives, the chancellor reportedly accused Parliament leaders of wickedness and questioned why they had never gone on strike when his predecessor, Peter Agbor Tabi, their Anglophone brother, imposed the new levies. He was nevertheless prepared to make some minor concessions, including a reduction of the toilet fee from FCFA 25 to FCFA 10 and the library fee from FCFA 100 to FCFA 50. He finally threatened to kill any student caught destroying university property. The students were obviously not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting and held the chancellor hostage in his office until late in the evening when gendarmes used tear gas and water canons to chase them back to their residential areas.<sup>16</sup>

Following his failure to resolve the dispute, the chancellor invited the minister of higher education, Peter Agbor Tabi, to visit the campus and calm down the students. The following day, 7 May, the minister went to the campus accompanied by over 200 gendarmes but his provocative speech aggravated rather than resolved the crisis. He warned the students to resume classes and avoid the consequences of strike action, which he insinuated would be dealt with ruthlessly:

You people already know me and the sanctions I can take against any of you caught striking. If you want to march, go on marching, but I advise you to run rather than to march. If you want violence, I will teach you what it means to love it.<sup>17</sup>

He provoked the already irate students even further with a remark suggesting that higher education was not for the poor. The September catch-up session was for those who could pay since it was not compulsory, and those who could not afford to pay university dues could 'go back to their home provinces to do farm work'.<sup>18</sup> After all, university enrolment figures were still quite high. As soon as he had left the campus, the security forces started dispersing the students. Using tear gas, water canons, and batons they descended on the students, beating, injuring and arresting several of them.

On 8 May, Parliament members marched in protest, chanting liberation songs and resorting to violence 'to teach Agbor Tabi a lesson in humility'.<sup>19</sup> They burnt down a section of one of the halls used for tutorials and attempted to set one of the lecture rooms ablaze but were chased away by the security forces that fired tear gas at them. They then blocked the free flow of traffic in neighbouring areas by setting tyres on fire, but were again tear gassed into hiding.

Changing their strategy, they decided to present their grievances to the Anglophone prime minister, Simon Achidi Achu, the following day. A team of three advisors in the prime minister's office received a delegation of six Parliament leaders. The prime minister had instructed the team to resolve the immediate demands of the students and tell them that he could receive them only after they had resumed classes. The team assured the students that all the arrested students would be released and that the forces of law and order would be withdrawn from campus the day after they resumed classes. It also promised the student delegation that the university authorities would victimise none of the strike leaders. Before the delegation left, the prime minister sent in a note that said 'After the resolution of your immediate demands, I will personally look into the other matters when you resume classes. The rule says obedience before complaint'. Parliament members, however, demanded concrete guarantees for what had been discussed. When these were not forthcoming, they continued to boycott classes. The prime minister, in turn, washed his hands of the matter, describing the students as 'stubborn kids' who needed to be called to order by the university authorities and the government.<sup>20</sup>

Soon after the failure of this conciliation attempt, the Self-Defence group and Beti vigilante groups were reactivated on campus. In a communiqué, the Self-Defence group described the grievances of Parliament as legitimate, but it stressed that the authorities had made concessions that should be reciprocated by the students. It regretted that Parliament preferred to resort to acts of vandalism rather than to enter into negotiations with the administration, accusing its opponent of being manipulated by the radical opposition parties. It denounced arson on campus as an Anglo-Bami war against the Beti. In the face of what it described as a 'premeditated conspiracy against the Beti and their patrimony', it warned the Anglo-Bami students that 'the period of relaxation was over'. It exhorted the latter to abandon what it referred to as their 'Machiavellian Dance' and to go back and destroy property in their own region. It also resolved 'that for every Beti student killed, one hundred Anglo-Bami students would be killed in reprisal'. It finally called on lecturers who sympathised with the strike to stop their manoeuvres, 'for your lives will be in danger and your wives will be raped'.<sup>21</sup>

Despite such threats, Ghost Campus continued. The regime then employed the usual tactics of the stick and the carrot. A number of students, who went to inform the prime minister on 14 May that some students were still being detained, were arrested and severely beaten by the *ninjas* stationed around the prime minister's office. A few days later, the prime minister published a press release asking students to go back to school and calling on the university authorities to respect the 1993 university reform decrees. Parliament leaders, however, considered this to be a vague statement and demanded a text signed by President Biya confirming the prime minister's decision.

With the situation getting out of hand, the regime and the university authorities began to use the government-owned media as their negotiating table, proposing all kinds of concessions in these media without ever consulting the students. Parliament members felt that they were being taken for a ride and resorted to renewed violence, burning down another lecture room, beating and wounding a captured military captain, smashing windshields of university authorities' cars, and disrupting the examinations of students at

the Advanced Teachers' Training College which had been scheduled to be held on the university campus on 21 May. Several arrests were reported.

On 31 May, Parliament members assembled at Bassora, making new demands as a condition for their resumption of classes. Since the various levies imposed by the university authorities after the 1993 university reform decrees had been described as illegal by the prime minister in his press release of 16 May, they requested the reimbursement of all such extorted monies and reiterated their demand for a free catch-up summer session.<sup>22</sup> They called on the authorities to resolve their grievances within forty-eight hours or face the consequences of what was dubbed Operation Storm Campus, scheduled to take place on 3 June. Quoting President Biya's notorious proverb that 'if you want peace, you should prepare for war' (Ndjana 1997), they cautioned that they would turn into terrorists should their grievances not be met within the deadline. On 3 June, there were severe confrontations between Parliament members and the security forces and the Self-Defence group.

Annoyed that the university authorities had failed to control the situation despite previous assurances, President Biya issued a decree on 5 June announcing the sacking of Chancellor Dominique Obounou Akong and his replacement by Jean Messi Messi, who was known as a hard-liner. The new chancellor immediately made a number of far-reaching decisions. He withdrew the various levies and declared that the summer session that year would be free. Some of the levies already paid would be reimbursed. Since students nevertheless continued to boycott classes, he created a new vigilante group composed of non-students that started terrorising the students.

A meeting of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was to be held in Yaoundé on 8 July, so the government and the university authorities were anxious to re-establish control over the campus and to organise the second-semester examinations before that date. On 11 June, the dean of the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences issued a circular telling students who wished to sit the second-semester examinations (scheduled to take place on 24 June) to register. On the same day, a ministerial order was promulgated dismissing six Parliament leaders from the university for their role in the strike. The following day students stormed the campus to

revoke the dismissal of their colleagues. One philosophy lecturer, Ernest Menyomo, was beaten and almost lynched. Violent confrontations followed between Parliament members and the security forces, the Self-Defence group and the vigilante group. One of the arrested students, Benjamin Mvogo, was reported to have died the next day as a result of having been tortured. In the following days violent confrontations continued after the vigilante group destroyed maize fields near Bonamoussadi belonging to Anglo-Bami and the security forces raided students' rooms in Bonamoussadi, arresting about 300 students.

The strikers' morale rapidly deteriorated. The arrest and dismissal of their leaders, the reimbursement of some of the levies and the promise of a free summer session, the lengthy nature of the strike, and the wish of most students, especially those in their final year, to sit examinations were decisive factors in Parliament members' ending their strike. As a result of the prolonged strike action, students were to sit their examinations having attended few or no classes at all.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that the political liberalisation process in Cameroon was marked by protracted and violent strike actions on the campus of the University of Yaoundé during the period 1990-96. Political liberalisation provided space for students to organise and to voice their multiple grievances about the poor living and study conditions on campus and the process of 'institutional liberalisation' that blocked their entry into the circle of the elite. While these conditions were aggravated in the 1990s with the introduction of tuition fees and the imposition of additional levies, the university authorities and the regime nevertheless continued to refuse to enter into any meaningful form of dialogue with the newly established student union.

The unprecedented degree of violence that accompanied these protracted strikes must be attributed mainly to the fact that the political liberalisation process tended to divide students along party and ethno-regional lines. The major lines of division were between the Anglo-Bami students organised in Parliament and closely allied



to the radical opposition and the autochthonous Beti students organised in the Committee for Self-Defence and Beti militia and closely allied to the regime in power. In their fight with Parliament, the latter groups resorted to violent forms of ethnic exclusion to re-establish control over 'their' university and to maintain 'their' regime in power. Allowed by the regime to be armed, they provided invaluable support to the forces of law and order in the brutal repression of Parliament strikes.

It is interesting to observe that in the aftermath of the 1996 student revolt, the Committee for Self-Defence and Beti vigilante groups have been replaced on campus by a new group called PRESBY (or President Biya's Youth). This group, which expresses its unshakable loyalty to President Biya, is composed mainly of university students and other sections of the educated youth either engaged in informal-sector activities or unemployed, including a number of university graduates and dropouts. Although the Beti youth appear to play a dominant role in this new movement, young people from other ethnic groups in search of prebends have also joined the group, thus giving PRESBY a national or multi-ethnic outlook. Recent experience has shown that PRESBY is creating a new recruiting ground for the formation of ethnic militia used by the regime to intimidate and terrorise Parliament members.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to Domenic Boyer for suggesting this term to me.
2. The chapter is based on several interviews held at the University of Yaoundé between 1991 and 1998. I also received written reports of the strikes by students and consulted a large number of newspapers and journals. Unless annotated otherwise, comments and quotations have their sources in these conversations.
3. There is an extensive literature on the political liberalisation process in Cameroon. See, for instance, Banock (1992), Ngniman (1993), Konings (1996a), and Takougang & Krieger (1998). In this chapter I focus only on a few aspects.
4. The name 'Beti', like other ethnic labels such as 'Anglo-Bami', is a historical construct. Beti identity was shaped from the crystallisation of a myriad of ethnic groups in the forest region of the Centre and



South Provinces and, to a lesser extent, the East Province which was provoked by Paul Biya's accession to power in 1982 and subsequent attempts by the opposition to unseat him. Indeed, the present regime's ethnic policies have been highly instrumental in creating a wider sense of ethnic identity and unity. See Bayart *et al.* (2001) and Monga (2000).

5. Petition of English-speaking students, University of Yaoundé, to the Minister of National Education, 19 November 1983, reproduced in Mukong (1990: 26).
6. Following the partitioning after World War I of the erstwhile German Kamerun Protectorate into French and English mandate/trust territories, Anglophone Cameroon was administered as an integral part of Nigeria until the 1950s when it attained a quasi-regional status (1954) and later full regional status (1958) within the Federation of Nigeria. Due to the growing dissatisfaction of the Anglophone minority with their alleged recolonisation by the Francophone majority, the regime regularly accused Anglophones of secessionist tendencies and striving to rejoin Nigeria. See Chapter 5.
7. *Jeune Afrique*, 11 June 1990, p. 17.
8. *Cameroon Post*, 31 July -17 August 1990.
9. *Cameroon Post*, 4 - 18 October 1990, pp. 1 and 7.
10. *Cameroon Post*, 26 November – 3 December 1990, p. 10.
11. *Cameroon Post*, 19 - 26 November 1990, p. 1.
12. Quoted in *Le Messenger*, 18 April 1991, p. 4.
13. See *Cameroon Today*, 25 May 1992, p. 6; Lisinge [n.d.]: 43-45.
14. *Le Messenger*, 2 February 1993, p. 16.
15. *The Herald*, 5 - 12 May 1993, p. 1.
16. *The Herald*, 3 - 5 January 1997, p. 8.
17. *The Herald*, 13 - 15 May 1996, pp. 1 - 3; and 3 - 5 January 1997, p. 8.
18. *The Herald*, 5 - 12 May, 1996, p. 1.
19. *The Herald*, 13 - 15 May 1996, p. 2.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *The Herald*, 3 - 5 June 1996, p. 3.

## Solving transportation problems in Africa cities during neoliberal reforms: Innovative responses by the youth in Douala, Cameroon

### Introduction

It is widely recognised that young people have been among the most seriously affected by the current economic crisis in Africa (Trani 2000; Jua 2003a). Their chances of finding a job in the state bureaucracy and the formal sector have been drastically reduced by economic liberalisation and state withdrawal from the economy. While these trends have narrowed their range of possibilities for securing a sustainable livelihood, it would be an exaggeration to call them as a 'lost' or 'abandoned' generation (Cruise O'Brien 1996). Faced with dramatic changes in the labour market, they have adopted a variety of livelihood strategies, varying from those with a long history in African cities to more recent imaginative innovations.

This study focuses on two responses by young people in Cameroon to the transportation problems facing residents of the enclaved and marginalised neighbourhoods in African cities (Godard & Teurnier 1992; Godard 2002). The first such activity, 'bendskin', is the use of motorbikes as taxis. *Bendskin* is both a Pidgin English expression meaning 'bend yourself' (to hold on tightly to the driver), and the name of popular music introduced in the 1960s by the famous Bamileke singer André-Marie Talla (Nyamnjoh & Fokwang 2003:192). According to informants, *bendskin* originally referred to motorbike-taxis with a higher backseat, on which the passenger's posture resembled that of a bendskin dancer. Only later did the term *bendskin* come to refer to the operation of motorbike-taxis in general. The second young people's response is *pousse-pousse*, a Francophone Cameroonian expression referring to the use of handcarts for transporting merchandise.

The introduction of these two-wheel vehicles for the transportation of people and goods has been of great significance to neighbourhood development. Firstly, these vehicles offer employment and a reasonable, secure income for a growing number of young people. Second, they provide forms of transport well adapted to local road conditions and the people's income levels. Third, they stimulate growth in other local economic activities, particularly those that, in one way or another, provide services to *bendskin* and *pousse-pousse*.

*Bendskin* and *pousse-pousse* demonstrate the determination and agency of marginalised urban youth, but their deepest roots and developments cannot be fully understood without reference to the corruption and authoritarianism of the post-colonial state, which characteristically strips young people of the dignity of meaningful citizenship – with citizenship here being understood in both political and social terms. Political citizenship may be broadly defined by the individual's capacity to participate in certain political institutions and processes, notably in the election of local and national governments. Social citizenship, which is more relevant to our discussion, is based on the individual's right to a decent livelihood in society, especially through state-guaranteed access to education, health, housing and employment (Fokwang 2003:175). It is therefore unsurprising that in the early 1990s many Cameroonian youths were at the forefront of radical opposition parties' violent struggles for democratic change, and that they demanded a substantial improvement in the living standards of subaltern social groups (Takougang & Krieger 1998; Konings 2002a; Fokwang 2003). This was a period marked by what the Comaroffs (2000: 330) have cogently called 'millennial optimism' and a messianic vision - that the radical opposition parties were about to seize power from the ruling Biya regime and transform marginalised and powerless people's living conditions. This vision largely explains the appeal of the populist slogans propagated by the major opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF): 'Power To The People', 'Equal Opportunity For All', 'Change' and 'Suffer Don Finish', a Pidgin English expression meaning 'your suffering has come to an end' (see Chapter 3).

Given this situation, it was a painful experience for marginalised youth that Cameroon's path to democracy rapidly stalled, not only because of the regime's capacity to manipulate and control the rate at which democratic reforms were introduced, but also because members of the opposition became preoccupied more with 'the politics of the belly' (Bayart 1989) than with pursuing a political agenda that would benefit the interests of the masses (Takougang 2003b: 427). Young people soon lost confidence in party politics as a solution for improving their existence and started searching for other ways to advance their position in society. Bendskin and *pousse-pousse* formed a viable alternative to party politics. These forms of self-employment provided not only a feeling of self-esteem, but also new means of resistance against the state. Bendskin drivers and handcart operators have constantly displayed a remarkable capacity for evading state control, and they have managed to maintain a large degree of autonomy. Bendskin drivers in particular have been engaged in frequent collective actions to protect their interests against local representatives of the state.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I argue that one of the unexpected consequences of oppositional activities during political liberalisation in the early 1990s was the emergence of bendskin and the expansion of *pousse-pousse* in Douala and other Cameroonian towns and cities. In the second section, I analyse some of the socioeconomic characteristics of bendskin drivers and *pousseurs* (handcart operators). I highlight that their occupational activities tend both to divide and unite. They are inclined to organise themselves in small groups based on ethnic and friendship bonds. Each group has its own parking space at a strategic position in its neighbourhood, and its members demonstrate a large degree of solidarity, both during working hours and in their leisure time. In the third section, I show that these groups appear capable of overcoming group boundaries and mutual competition when outsiders threaten their individual and common interests. Bendskin drivers and *pousseurs* tend to ignore administrative and traffic regulations, behaving as if they are 'masters of the road' - which is strongly contested by other road users and, especially in the case of bendskin drivers, by the police. To protest persistent police

harassment and extortion, bendskin drivers have even taken control of the cities by chasing the police from the streets and bringing traffic to a standstill.

This study is based on intensive research in New Bell, one of the largest and poorest immigrant quarters in Douala (Mainet 1985; Schler 2003), in November and December 2003. Douala is the largest city of Cameroon, and has grown rapidly since independence, from 155,000 inhabitants in 1960 to approximately 2 million in 2006. Being the economic capital of Cameroon, it attracts between 60,000 and 100,000 migrants every year, the majority of whom are Bamileke (Boupda 2000), members of the largest ethnic group in Cameroon, living in the Francophone part of the Grassfields. Searching for gainful employment, they have been migrating to Douala on an ever-growing scale since the early colonial period. Over the years, they have become the majority population in most neighbourhoods of the city, including New Bell, far outnumbering the autochthonous Duala. That is why some people refer to Douala as a 'Bamileke City' (Mainet 1985).

Since I carried out my research in Bamileke-dominated neighbourhoods, it is not surprising altogether that the large majority of interviewed bendskin drivers and handcart operators were Bamileke (around 80 per cent). Nevertheless, I was told that the Bamileke also tend to dominate these occupations in most other quarters of the city. Several factors help explain Bamileke dominance. First, the Bamileke are known, and often feared, for their assumed dynamism and entrepreneurial spirit (Dongmo 1981; Warnier 1993), being always on the look-out for new ways to accumulate capital (Geschiere & Konings 1993). Second, they have always shown a keen interest in the transport sector, looking upon it as a major avenue to capital accumulation. According to Warnier (1993: 19), they own 80 per cent of all taxis in Douala and 50 per cent of all buses and minibuses that run from Douala to other towns in Cameroon. They are strongly represented in the maintenance and repair of vehicles. Bendskin and *pousse-pousse* appear to have further increased Bamileke dominance in the transport sector.

## The emergence and growth of bendskin and *pousse-pousse* in New Bell

An unintended effect of political liberalisation in the early 1990s has been the emergence of bendskin and the rapid growth of *pousse-pousse* in New Bell and other neighbourhoods of Douala. In 1991-1992, the newly created opposition parties in Cameroon organised the so-called *villes mortes* (ghost town) campaign (see Chapters 2 and 3), which was particularly successful in the opposition stronghold of New Bell. Numerous violent confrontations between demonstrators and the forces of law and order resulted in injuries and deaths.

The *villes mortes* campaign aggravated the already critical transport situation in Douala, since the usual means of transport – buses, minibuses, lorries, taxis, and private cars – were prohibited from operating on weekdays. According to a New Bell motorbike-taxi driver, this state of affairs eventually led to bendskin:

During the *villes mortes* campaign, owners of motorbikes were regularly requested by colleagues, relatives and friends to assist them in reaching their destination. With growing demand they started charging some money for this service. However, the idea of turning motorbikes into taxis and making a living out of it occurred to young people only when it became more and more evident that bendskin could help solve the grave mobility problems in the various neighbourhoods of Douala.<sup>1</sup>

This narrative overlooks the fact that motorbike-taxis were already in existence in some West African countries even before the 1990s, when the process of political liberalisation started (Godard 2002). The so-called *zémidjans* had by then already become the major means of transport in the urban centres of Benin (Noukpo 2003). Even in Cameroon, motorbike-taxis were not totally unknown in this period; they operated on a large scale in the less-developed northern part of the country. Evidently, these regional examples of the use of motorbikes as taxis must have served as a source of inspiration to bendskin drivers.

Since its introduction during the early political liberalisation era, bendskin has expanded rapidly in New Bell, and in Douala in general. In 1997, the number of bendskins in Douala was estimated at 10,000 (Godard & Ngabmen 2002), but their number may now have tripled.<sup>2</sup> Bendskin provided young people with a sustainable livelihood and a feeling of self-esteem, and it formed an adequate response to the deterioration of the city's road networks and transport facilities.

Like many other African cities (Godard 2002), Douala in the 1990s saw the disappearance of public bus companies that had been created by the post-colonial state for the purpose of meeting urban transport requirements. Since its foundation in 1973, the state-owned *Société des Transports Urbains du Cameroun* (SOTUC) had been enjoying a monopoly position in bus transport in Douala. Understandably, its area of operation remained largely restricted to paved streets; nevertheless, it used to provide a necessary service to low-income groups, because it transported passengers at a cheap rate, thanks to state subsidies. Its great potential, however, was thwarted by gross mismanagement and the withdrawal of state subsidies during structural adjustment, leading to enormous financial losses. It was never able to recover fully from the *villes mortes* campaign, in which opposition members threatened to set fire to any bus found on the roads (Ngabmen 2002; Séraphin 2000:69-70), and it was liquidated in 1995. Conscious of the consequences of its liquidation, the government decided in 1997 to hand over the running of large buses in Douala to a private initiative, in conformity with its policy of economic liberalisation. A newly founded Cameroonian company, the *Société Camerounaise du Transport Urbain* (SOCATUR) eventually received monopoly in providing bus services in Douala, and it began operating in 2001. At present, it lacks enough buses to carry out its mission satisfactorily.

With the disappearance of public buses, people in New Bell came to depend primarily on taxis, but they remain dissatisfied with the services these taxis offer. They claim that the number of taxis is insufficient to meet popular demand, particularly during rush hour. Mobility at peak times has become a painful experience: one has to wait for hours before finding a taxi, transportation costs have risen



to more than double the official fare, and daily traffic jams are worsened by poor roads. Travelling in the city is therefore extremely time-consuming, and one's time of arrival at work or home is highly unpredictable.

People in New Bell maintain that taxi drivers often refuse to go to any neighbourhood that is not easily accessible or is far from the city centre, and they often drop passengers somewhere along the road. This is a principal reason for the appearance of nonregistered taxis, the so-called *clandos* or *opeps*, in these neighbourhoods (Fodouop 1985). One of my informants aptly described them as 'mobile coffins', on the grounds that they tend not to be roadworthy, are overloaded, and are driven by drivers who have no driver's licence and frequently cause accidents. According to him, they continue operating because their owners are members of the forces of law and order, or their drivers perform the '*countri* fashion' at police checkpoints - i.e., they pay bribes (*gombo*) to policemen.

New Bell residents are feeling more and more reluctant to use taxis because of an alarming increase in armed robbery by taxi drivers themselves or their accomplices, particularly at night. They are nevertheless often obliged to take the risk in the absence of any other option. Despite the introduction of professional badges in 2000, problems regarding personal security still prevail in the taxi business.

Given this situation, New Bell residents greatly appreciate the emergence of *bendskin* in their neighbourhood, stressing that it forms a welcome addition to the available means of transport and that it is well adapted to their local conditions. In sharp contrast to taxi drivers, they make three points: *bendskin* drivers charge 'reasonable' prices, which are always negotiable, depending on the distance and nature of the terrain; they take passengers into the heart of the neighbourhood, dropping them right on their doorsteps; and they can weave in and out of traffic jams during rush hour, saving time.

Compared to *bendskin*, *pousse-pousse* has a much longer history in New Bell and other neighbourhoods of Douala. Boupda (2000: 145) mentions that handcarts for the transport of merchandise have been used in the city since the early 1960s. The *villes mortes* campaign, however, led to a rapid expansion of *pousse-pousse*. In 2000, the



number of handcart operators in Douala was estimated at about 3,500, and each of them were capable of transporting 300 to 800 kilogrammes of merchandise (Boupda 2000: 144). Most of them are at the service of any customer, but some are under a more or less regular contract with large-scale traders and entrepreneurs. Like bendskins, handcarts are well adapted to local conditions in New Bell, and their expansion has been welcomed by local residents as much as the introduction of bendskins. Handcarts can operate in areas that are inaccessible to motorised forms of transport, and can even move inside local markets. Above all, they are much cheaper than motorised forms of transport, such as taxis, minibuses and lorries. Transport prices charged by handcart operators depend on several factors, including the volume of goods, the distance, the density of traffic, the period of the year (rainy or dry season), and any existing relations between handcart operators and customers. Operators are inclined to reduce prices for regular customers.

The burgeoning of bendskin and *pousse-pousse* has promoted local entrepreneurial activities in New Bell and other quarters of the city. Several small and medium-sized enterprises have started selling motorbikes and handcarts. The Douala port allows for large-scale formal and informal imports of (second-hand) motorbikes from Nigeria, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia. Recently, a new enterprise, Cocenicam, was set up to assemble motorbikes locally. The development of enterprises offering services to bendskin and *pousse-pousse* have emerged - for example, those that provide general repairs and others selling spare parts, petrol, and engine oil.

### Bendskin drivers and *pousseurs*: Some socioeconomic characteristics

Bendskin and *pousse-pousse* are characterised by hard working conditions. They demand long hours of work and, especially in the case of *pousse-pousse*, a lot of physical effort. My respondents gave three main reasons why these occupations nevertheless attract job-seekers. First, they create rare avenues to gainful employment for young people during the economic crisis and structural adjustment; many of these operators had opted for one of these occupations only after repeated failure to find an alternative job. Second, they

offer a relatively secure and good income. Third, they do not require a long and expensive apprenticeship. Anybody able to acquire a *pousse-pousse* or a motorbike can start working immediately or after a few days' practice. Although bendskin drivers are obliged by traffic rules to pass a driving test, few of them actually follow these rules.

A major constraining factor to start working in the transport sector is the availability of capital resources to buy or hire a vehicle, particularly in the case of a motorbike, which demands a substantial investment: a second-hand motorbike costs between FCFA 250,000 and FCFA 700,000. I was told that the first bendskin drivers were recruited mostly among victims of mass dismissals; they were tempted to invest their redundancy pay in this new activity. They were later joined by others who had failed to find employment in the state bureaucracy or formal sector; some of them could start bendskin with the financial support of family members or, more often, with their personal savings in formal and informal banking systems, particularly in *tontines*, traditional rotating-credit associations (Henry *et al.* 1991). Most young job-seekers, however, came to rely on hiring motorbikes. It did not take long before big businessmen discovered bendskin as a potential form of capital accumulation. They bought motorbikes in large numbers, sometimes even hundreds, and employed young job-seekers as drivers. Most of these businessmen were Bamileke, who dominate the transport sector in Douala. During my research, I found that 63 per cent of bendskin drivers in New Bell were employed by such large entrepreneurs.

Employers offer bendskin drivers various forms of contracts, similar to those in the taxi business. A common form requires bendskin drivers to hand over a substantial proportion of their daily earnings to their employer, usually around FCFA 4,000, in return for ownership of the motorbike after two years. Bendskin drivers who do not come under this type of contract are obliged to hand over a smaller amount of money, usually between FCFA 2,000 and FCFA 3,000 a day.

Compared to bendskin, *pousse-pousse* requires less capital investment. Middle-sized enterprises, specialising in the production of handcarts, sell these vehicles at a price of FCFA 70,000 to 80,000; however, local artisans in New Bell offer handcarts at a much lower price, between FCFA 25,000 and FCFA 35,000. Young job-seekers

without the needed capital resources can still hire a *pousse-pousse* at FCFA 300 a day (FCFA 9,000 a month) from long-established *pousseurs*, many of whom own several handcarts, or from other entrepreneurs.

In November and December 2003, I carried out a survey among more than one hundred bendskin drivers and 50 *pousseurs* to explore some of their socioeconomic characteristics. All were male, and most were quite young: 81 per cent were between 15 and 35 years old, 61 per cent were single, and 76 per cent had been in the profession for less than 5 years. They tended to be relatively well educated: 45 per cent had attended primary school, 43 per cent had enjoyed some secondary school education, and 7 per cent had been university students. Only 5 per cent were illiterate. All complained that they had to work for long hours six or seven days a week under difficult conditions. Older men in particular stated that they suffered from regular backaches, rheumatism, and even hernia. Most participants in the survey (79 per cent) were therefore inclined to look upon their present occupation as a transitional phase to a future form of employment, one that they considered to be less demanding and higher rewarding. A large number of them (56 per cent) aspired for another job in the transport sector; bendskin drivers aimed to buy a taxi, and handcart operators aimed to own a bendskin. The bendskin drivers' aspirations appear to have been based upon their income levels, which enabled them to make higher savings in the local *tontines*. Compared with handcart operators, who earned between FCFA 30,000 and FCFA 75,000 a month, bendskin drivers earned between FCFA 40,000 and FCFA 100,000 a month. Variations in income within both occupations largely depended on experience and ownership of vehicles. The monthly income of both income groups tended to be well above the guaranteed minimum wage in the formal sector, which was about FCFA 25,000 (Konings 1993a).

A certain measure of individual competition occurs, but most bendskin drivers and handcart operators appear to be organised in small groups. Each group constitutes a spatial and social 'neighbourhood' within the neighbourhood of New Bell. Members of such groups park their vehicles at certain strategic places in New Bell, such as traffic intersections and markets. They look upon parking

places as spaces reserved for members only, and are inclined to protect them against intruders or competitors. Each group is expected to respect its zone of operation, and competition in this zone is not tolerated. Members form a tight social community, displaying a large measure of solidarity during and outside work time. Most of them belong not only to the same ethnic group (Bamileke), but also often to the same family, village or subregion. The group does not altogether exclude members of other groups, but non-Bamileke are usually close friends, such as ex-schoolmates or ex-colleagues. Its members tend to spend their leisure time together and frequent the same bars. They often participate in the same *tontines*, which serve not only as savings clubs but also as social gatherings, where they enjoy each other's company, settle conflicts (Henry *et al.* 1991), and receive moral and financial support in times of sickness, disability or death.

Such groups tend to create boundaries among bendskin drivers and handcart operators; nevertheless, they appear to be able to transcend these boundaries and rally round when they see outsiders threaten their colleagues or a common interest. By their sheer numbers and their ability to mobilise rapidly, using their motorbikes to warn their colleagues, bendskin drivers in particular form a formidable power in the neighbourhood and the city as a whole.

### Benskin drivers and *pousseurs*: Masters of the road

New Bell residents tend to display an ambivalent attitude towards bendskin drivers and handcart operators. On the one hand, they highly appreciate their transport services; on the other hand, they point a finger at their generally irresponsible behaviour on the road. Many bendskin drivers and handcart operators do not know the most elementary traffic rules, or simply flout them. I regularly heard people in New Bell saying 'Bendskin drivers and *pousseurs* behave as if they are masters of the road'. Some bendskin drivers and *pousseurs* are convinced that they have the right of way anywhere on the road because they perform essential public services. Handcart operators ignore pedestrians and moving cars, forcing them to manoeuvre carefully so as to avoid being hit. Young bendskin drivers are renowned for driving recklessly: they tend to drive at high speed,

ignore red traffic lights, overtake on the left and the right, stop without warning and do U turns, exposing themselves and their passengers to untold dangers. As a result of their recklessness, bendskin drivers cause numerous accidents. The Laquintenie Hospital in Douala has even given the name *bendskin* to a ward that it largely reserves for victims of bendskin road accidents. Despite the dangers involved in bendskin driving, New Bell residents insist that they have no other choice than to continue making use of it. For them, bendskin driving has become a necessary evil (*un mal nécessaire*).

Bendskin drivers and *pousseurs* are characterised not only by their total disregard of traffic rules, but also by their attitude to any other road user who may cross their path or may dare to confront them, even not hesitating to attack them physically. I once witnessed how a bendskin driver almost collided with a smartly dressed young man who was about to cross the road; though being shabbily dressed himself, he shouted *Dégagez, fils de pauvre* (Get off the road, you son of a beggar).

Bendskin drivers and *pousseurs* are often at war with taxi drivers. Although taxi drivers themselves also tend to disregard traffic rules, they regularly complain that bendskin drivers and handcart operators 'behave as if the road belongs to them' and show an 'almost blind solidarity' when one of them is reproached for his 'misuse of power' on the road. One of them explained:

We submit ourselves already too often to their laws, and this is becoming more and more annoying. At the least altercation with one of them, they come and encircle you like bees and attempt to lynch you.<sup>3</sup>

Animosities between taxi drivers and bendskin drivers have precluded any form of coalition against their common enemies, namely the state and the police. In recent years, bendskin drivers have benefited from general strikes by taxi drivers in Douala. In March 2004 taxi drivers went on strike against regular police harassment and extortion, and in January 2005 they demonstrated against the government's excessive rise in petrol prices.<sup>4</sup> On both occasions, bendskin drivers took advantage of these strikes to triple or even quadruple their fares.

Bendskin drivers and handcart operators maintain similar relations to other users of the road, but their relations to the police are different: handcart operators are largely exempted from police controls because their activities are not regulated by the state; bendskin drivers have become subject to frequent police harassment and extortion following government promulgation of a series of administrative and fiscal rules concerning their occupation in 1994 (Ngabmen 1997: 261-265). Some of the most important regulations are the following: bendskins should be painted in yellow and be provided with a number plate; both bendskin drivers and passengers should wear helmets; every bendskin driver should possess certain documents, such as a tax certificate, showing that the annual tax of FCFA 12,000 had been paid, a road-tax sticker (*vignette*), vehicle insurance, and a driving licence for motorbikes. Most bendskin drivers ignore these regulations, all the more so because the police are usually not inclined to enforce them strictly, being more interested in extorting money from drivers. 'Why should you bother to obtain these documents', a bendskin driver wondered, 'for even if you have all of them, the police still request a beer'.

The relations between bendskin drivers and the police and other state agents are extremely hostile, and the deepest roots of this hostility appear to be a fierce contest for power and control over the road. The police attribute the confrontations between both parties to bendskin drivers' persistent refusal to submit to government regulations concerning their activities and traffic rules, and their lack of respect for police officers. Bendskin drivers, in turn, claim that most confrontations are caused by their refusal to yield to cash demands of the corrupt police known as *mange mille* (thousand-eater) because their extortions from drivers typically amount to FCFA 1,000. They stress that the police are quick to pick a quarrel with road users, notably those who assert their rights, and too quickly resort to the use of force. They are therefore inclined to engage in collective action as soon as they see that the police are violating the rights of one or more of them. Many examples of such actions can be found in New Bell and other quarters of the city. I will relate here just a few that have attracted a lot of attention in the media.<sup>5</sup>

In early 2001, a heated confrontation between a policeman and a group of bendskin drivers occurred in the quarter of Madagascar. The group had come to the rescue a colleague who was being harassed by a policeman. Feeling threatened, the policeman drew his pistol, and at the moment that he wanted to fire, he was pushed from behind by a group member. During his fall, he accidentally shot and killed himself.

In November of the same year, bendskin drivers occupied the most important traffic intersections in Douala, bringing all traffic to a standstill. They blew their horns continuously and carried placards protesting the corruption of municipal agents charged with collecting taxes from bendskin drivers. According to the demonstrators, these agents were behaving like policemen and gendarmes, demanding not only their tax certificates, but also other documents, such as proof of vehicle insurance and a driving license. If they could not produce these documents, the agents threatened to seize their motorbikes unless they paid a bribe of between FCFA 2,000 and FCFA 5,000. The protesters were later received by the senior divisional officer, Laurent Mindja, who ordered the municipal agents to restrict themselves to collecting taxes.

In March 2002, a police vehicle hit a group of bendskin drivers standing at their parking place on the road near Tunnel Ndoketi, killing one of them. In reaction, the group immediately set fire to the vehicle and wanted to lynch the two policemen in it. The latter narrowly escaped by firing several shots into the air.

On several occasions, bendskin drivers have protested against police harassment and extortion by erecting barricades on the Wouri Bridge, which forms the only connection between the two parts of Douala. During a demonstration in the city on 23 February 2003, they used sticks to chase the police away. Only a few months later, a renewed incident between the police and a bendskin driver in New Bell gave rise to a violent rebellion in the city.<sup>6</sup>

In the early morning of 9 July 2003, a police control post tried to stop a bendskin driver at Nkolouloun, a Bamileke-dominated neighbourhood in New Bell. Suspecting he would have to pay a bribe, the bendskin driver attempted to escape. Infuriated by his conduct, one of the policemen hit him on the head with a plank of wood. He fell and died soon afterward. News of his death spread



like wildfire across the city, and bendskin drivers immediately stopped work and started mobilising for action. Being frequent victims of police harassment, they were unwilling to tolerate the murder of one of their colleagues.

Some of their representatives went to see the governor of the Littoral Province, Gounoko Haounaye, to demand harsh sanctions against the policemen responsible for their colleague's death. Probably underestimating the gravity of the situation, the governor refused to meet and negotiate with them. This response raised the bendskin drivers' tempers. They began to erect barricades at the main road junctions in the city and on the Wouri Bridge and to burn tyres in the streets, bringing the transportation of goods or passengers to a standstill. They then drove in a long procession to the police commissariat at Nkolouloun, where the policeman who had caused the incident was posted.

On their arrival, they started attacking the police with sticks, machetes, and stones, and eventually forced them to retreat into the building. They then began to throw Molotov cocktails in an attempt to set fire to the building and the police vehicles parked nearby. In response, the police started shooting at them to keep them at a distance. A large crowd of New Bell residents watched the scene, applauding the bendskin drivers. Some young people, especially the unemployed and criminals, soon joined the protests, seeing the riot as an outlet to vent their frustrations at the economic crisis and their own harassment by the police. Together with the bendskin drivers, they went in search of policemen in the streets of New Bell and other quarters of the city, chanting 'Policemen, murderers, where are you? Come with your rifles and we shall welcome you with our stones'. Fearing reprisals from bendskin drivers after the incident, the police had already disappeared from the streets; most of them had taken refuge in police stations or in their own homes.

In the afternoon, after many injuries and several deaths, the atmosphere became tenser. It was then that the governor arrived on the scene. To protect the Nkolouloun police commissariat from further attack, he called upon the demonstrators to walk with him to a junction called Shell-New Bell. He promised that he would address their grievances there. On his arrival, he requested an end



to all violent actions, stressing that the administration was already investigating the matter. He assured the bendskin drivers that the policemen responsible for the event were to be arrested and tried in accordance with the law. He subsequently moved to the Wouri Bridge, where he appealed to the demonstrators to remove the barricades and allow vehicles to pass.

The governor's intervention did reduce tensions, but it did not bring an end to the riots. Armed with machetes, sticks, and stones, groups of bendskin drivers and other young people continued to block traffic at the city's most important intersections. They set fire to kiosks along the streets and wooden police posts placed at the road junctions, and started looting shops and stalls in the market places.

By the end of the day, five people had been killed by police bullets, and many others, including policemen, had been wounded. The material damage was heavy: the police commissariat at Nkolouloun was partly destroyed, numerous police vehicles were burnt out, and those involved in the transport of goods and passengers had suffered huge losses.

A fragile calm was restored in New Bell and the other quarters of Douala the next day. Although the revolt had generated fear in administrative and police circles, no serious attempt was made to resolve the problem. As a result, drivers continued to disregard the law and the police. The senior divisional officer claimed that no negotiations between state and bendskin drivers could take place as long as it was unclear who the true representatives or leaders of the bendskin drivers were. He urged administrators in Douala to help organise bendskin drivers into trade unions, which could serve as intermediaries between the state and the bendskin drivers.

Only two municipal administrators took up the matter, namely the Deputy Mayor of Douala V, Françoise Foning, and the Mayor of Douala II, Abraham Tchato. Both are Bamileke, and each, in addition to other entrepreneurial activities, owned a fleet of bendskins. They held a series of meetings with bendskin representatives in their municipalities. During the meeting held on 16 June 2003, they signed a 'partnership convention' with a newly created organisation of bendskin drivers, the *Groupement des Associations et Syndicats de Motos-Taxis* (Grasmota), led by Fongang

Sanchang. According to the terms of the convention, the municipal councils were to take on the responsibility of training bendskin drivers at professional driving schools. The bendskin drivers, for their part, agreed to henceforth seek to resolve their problems with the police and government officials through peaceful negotiation, and to register their organisation with the local administration.

This new organisation seems not to have had a major impact on bendskin drivers' behaviour. They remain inclined to mistrust the formation of trade unions, which they largely view as vehicles of state control (Konings 2003b). They therefore continue to rely on informal modes of organisation at any moment when they feel that their common interests are being threatened by outsiders, especially government officials and policemen.

On 15 January 2004, the local administration made a renewed attempt to control bendskin drivers. On that day, the Douala II subdivisional officer, Boniface Bayaola, signed a strongly worded order, stipulating that bendskin drivers had until 20 January 2004 to register their vehicles at his office, to paint them yellow, and to purchase helmets for themselves and their passengers. Refusal to comply would be sanctioned severely. Again, bendskin drivers ignored the order, threatening that they would confront anyone who would 'dare to place obstacles on our paths'.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

Surprisingly little interest has been paid in African studies to the transportation problems facing inhabitants of African cities and the agencies and actors involved in urban transportation (Godard 2002). Clearly, bendskin and *pousse-pousse* were never devised in the offices of the Cameroonian Ministry of Transport, or by international development agencies. Instead, they were young men's responses to deteriorating transport facilities in enclaved and marginalised neighbourhoods. They have proved advantageous, not only to neighbourhood residents, but also to bendskin drivers and handcart operators, providing a sustainable livelihood and a feeling of self-esteem that the ruling political elite tends to deny them. Having become a popular mode of transport in Douala, bendskin has rapidly spread from Douala to other cities and towns in Cameroon.

Bendskin drivers and handcart operators have displayed a remarkable capacity for organising informally at several levels and protecting their own interests. They usually organise in small groups based on ethnic and friendship bonds, which protect the interests of each group against others. While mutual competition between these groups tends to divide bendskin drivers and handcart operators, they quickly group together as soon as their common interests are threatened by outsiders. Bendskin drivers in particular have been engaged in a series of collective actions to contest police harassment and extortion, using revolt as a last resort in an attempt to assert control over the road and even the city.

Although bendskin and *pousse-pousse* have in many respects been advantageous to young people and other residents of Douala's neighbourhoods, the picture is imperfect. Citizens and administrators increasingly complain about the aggressiveness and recklessness of bendskin drivers and handcart operators on the road, causing many accidents. They tend to condemn their habit of solving problems through violence, rather than peaceful negotiation. There is substantial evidence that bendskin drivers, just like taxi drivers, have become involved in armed robbery of their passengers. Bendskin drivers have fiercely resisted the government controlling efforts, which have failed dismally.

Worried about the increasingly negative image of their occupation among the public, some older and generally respected bendskin drivers in Douala and elsewhere have begun to create formal organisations, mostly in the form of associations or trade unions, which they claim to be independent of the state. These organisations appear to have a double responsibility: on the one hand, the promotion of discipline and professional conduct among their members; and on the other hand, the representation and defence of their members' interests versus the state through rational discussion. It remains to be seen whether these initiatives will be more successful than earlier ones.

## Notes

1. Interview with a bendskin driver in New Bell on 23 November 2003.
2. *Mutations*, 26 January 2005.
3. Interview with a taxi driver at New Bell on 27 November 2003.
4. *Le Messenger, World Edition*, 22 March 2004; and 1 February 2005.
5. *Le Messenger*, 8 October 2003, pp. 1-2.
6. *Le Messenger*, 15 July 2003, pp. 1-11; and *The Herald*, pp. 1-3.
7. *The Herald*, 22 January 2004, pp. 1-2.



## Trade unionism in Cameroon and neoliberal globalisation: From crisis to revitalisation?

### Introduction

Trade unions across Africa are facing similar challenges in the current period of neoliberal globalisation but their responses to the far-reaching economic and political reforms have varied (cf. Thomas 1995; Kester & Sidibé 1997; Beckman & Sachikonye 2001; Konings 2006b). Some have shown a remarkable capacity to adjust to the dramatic effects of neoliberal reforms and even to revitalise their organisations. They have taken a number of innovative steps to tackle their organisational problems in the rapidly changing economic and political environment in order to remain meaningful to their memberships. Others, however, are in deep crisis. Cameroonian trade unions, as I intend to demonstrate in this chapter, clearly belong to this latter category. I shall first describe some of the major problems and then assess the future prospects of trade unions in Cameroon.

### Cameroonian trade unionism in deep crisis

Compared to a number of other African countries, there is a striking absence of any detailed research on trade unionism in Cameroon. However, existing studies agree that the long-standing crisis in the Cameroonian trade-union movement has deepened during the current economic and political liberalisation processes (Eboussi Boulaga 1997; Abega 1999; Konings 2006b, 2009a). Cameroonian trade unions appear to have failed dismally to cope with the new situation let alone achieve a much-needed revitalisation. The movement faces a multitude of problems and I restrict myself here to presenting the gravest.

*Lack of autonomy*

One of the trade-union movement's major problems is continuing state intervention in trade-union affairs. Following independence and reunification in 1961, the Cameroonian post-colonial state succeeded in 1972 in merging the existing central labour organisations in Francophone and Anglophone Cameroon into a single body and subordinating it to the state for the sake of national reconstruction and unity. The new, state-controlled trade-union movement was first called the *Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Cameroun* (UNTC) and later, in 1985, the *Organisation Syndicale des Travailleurs du Cameroun* (OSTC) (Kendrick 1979; Konings 1993a; Tsafack-Nanfosso 1999). Considering the fusion between state and organised labour, it is not surprising that the OSTC leadership refused to adhere to the growing calls in civil society by the end of the 1980s for political liberalisation and the introduction of a multi-party system. In May 1990, like other loyalists of the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), the then OSTC president, D. Fouda Sima, expressed 'his total rejection of what the head of state has called political models imported from abroad' (Konings 2000: 179). Together with other OSTC leaders, he subsequently participated in anti-democracy marches organised by the regime.

Following the introduction of a multi-party system and a limited degree of political liberalisation in December 1990, a large number of the rank and file and even some local and regional leaders demonstrated their growing disenchantment with the OSTC's continuing alliance with the ruling CPDM party and its blatant neglect of the defence of workers' interests during the economic crisis by supporting the newly created opposition parties. Under mounting pressure, the OSTC leadership finally recognised the right of its members to join the political party of their choice on 2 April 1991. Eventually, the new Labour Code of 1992 guaranteed a large measure of trade union autonomy to the state and abolished the existing practice of trade-union monolithism, allowing a group of at least twenty workers to form a union outside the OSTC (Republic of Cameroon 1992).

Unfortunately, although officially commending trade-union autonomy, the Cameroonian government continued to devise a number of strategies to keep the unions under control. First, the 1992 Labour Code clearly stated that a newly formed trade union should be registered. This enabled the state to deny legal existence to any trade union suspected of supporting the opposition. Second, the government continued to intervene in the existing unions and to harass any members and leaders engaged in 'oppositional' actions. This was already manifest during the OSTC's 1992 congress. To mark a new beginning, the central labour organisation changed its name again to *Confédération Syndicale des Travailleurs du Cameroun* (CSTC) and held new elections. In its efforts to achieve state control over the new trade-union centre, the government succeeded in buying the support of a number of delegates to elect Etame Ndedi, the trade-union representative in the CPDM central committee, as its president. However, it failed to forestall the election of some leaders who championed trade-union autonomy, including the new secretary-general Louis Sombès.

Government intervention in the CSTC became even more overt in late 1993 when it engineered, with the aid of the union president Etame Ndedi, the ousting of Louis Sombès from his post as secretary-general for having called a general strike among civil servants in protest at severe cuts in their remuneration, amounting to some 70 per cent. Not even protests from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) could dissuade the government and the union president from unilaterally installing Jules Mousseni, a CPDM loyalist and second vice-secretary-general of the CSTC, as the union's new secretary-general. This led the ILO to rebuff Etame Ndedi and the government at its June 1994 Annual Convention in Geneva by refusing to accredit Mousseni. Given the stalemate Sombès's dismissal had caused in the union and during the Geneva debacle, the first vice-president of the CSTC convened a meeting of the union's executive in July 1994 that decided to reinstate Sombès and sack Etame Ndedi instead. A few months later, in September 1994, security forces raided the union's headquarters in Yaoundé and forcibly removed Sombès from office and threw him in jail (Fondation Friedrich-Ebert 1994: 78; Eboussi Boulaga 1997: 347-48). It was only after renewed protest actions by the ILO, the



International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and other international organisations that Sombès was freed and eventually re-elected.

After this painful defeat, the regime decided to sponsor a rival trade-union centre, the *Union des Syndicats Libres du Cameroun* (USLC). According to the Minister of Territorial Administration, this state-controlled union ‘would help counteract the activities of the leaders of the CSTC who, in the majority, are members of the radical opposition’.<sup>1</sup> One of the prominent leaders of the new union was Salomé Ntsogo, a well-known relative and confidant of Chantal Biya, the wife of Cameroon’s head of state. The emergence of power conflicts within the CSTC since 1997 has opened up new avenues for the government to meddle once again in trade-union affairs in an effort to exploit the situation to its advantage.

One promising development, however, was the emergence of several autonomous trade unions in the civil service, especially in the educational sector, during the early days of political liberalisation. Their emergence was all the more significant because civil servants are prohibited by law from forming trade unions, and the Biya government has simply ignored repeated ILO demands that civil servants be given the right to unionise in conformity with Convention 87 signed by Cameroon. Their leaders, who soon became victims of severe state repression, strongly condemned the inactivity of state-controlled trade unionism and pledged to contribute to the introduction of militant trade unionism in the country and to serve as a countervailing power to the ruling regime (Konings 2004c, 2005a). The first union in the educational sector, the *Syndicat National des Enseignants du Supérieur* (SYNES), was formed by university lecturers on 1 June 1991, and its foundation inspired the creation of several autonomous trade unions in primary and secondary education. These unions quickly transformed the educational sector into a battlefield between the government and teachers, calling for educational reforms and an improvement in their living and working conditions, which had seriously deteriorated during the economic crisis and structural adjustment. Due to apparent government insensitivity to their plight, they have undertaken a variety of militant actions that have tended to paralyse the educational system, including demonstrations, the regular

boycotting of examinations, and intermittent strikes. Eventually, in 1997, they forced the government to start negotiations with organisations it considered 'illegal'. As the results of these negotiations proved unsatisfactory to the unions, their leadership decided to continue the struggle.

*Divisions within and between the unions*

From 1997 onwards, the CSTC executive was split into two factions, both claiming leadership. Their struggle for power appears to have been primarily motivated by personal ambitions and material interests rather than by pronounced differences in union policy and strategy. Leadership positions in the central labour organisation offered the incumbents high salaries as well as opportunities to divert the substantial union dues to personal ends, to cement gainful patron-clients relations with the state authorities, and to travel abroad regularly at the invitation of international labour organisations. The leadership struggle almost completely paralysed trade-union activities in defence of its members' interests. Instead, it gave rise to numerous court cases, the organisation of several unity conferences held under the auspices of the ILO and international labour organisations, and renewed government interference in the CSTC. The then Minister of Labour, Pius Ondoua, has persistently refused to recognise the leadership of the faction that turned out to be the victor in the struggle and was being backed by the ILO and the ICFTU, openly supporting the other faction that appeared to be closer to the government and its policies, and to meet and negotiate with the central labour organisation.<sup>2</sup>

The leadership wrangling was not resolved until 2002 when the government-aligned faction of Maximilien Ntone Diboté seized power with the support of the Minister of Labour and was subsequently recognised by the government. The defeated faction led by Benoît Essiga then broke away from the CSTC and launched another central labour organisation, the *Confédération Générale des Travailleurs-Liberté* (CGTL). Essiga claimed that his union would be truly independent of the state and strongly defend its members' interests. He was arrested twice in 2003 on charges that, in his

capacity of president of the railway union, he was responsible for his members' attempts to sabotage the railway and murder the railway corporation's general manager. He was eventually released after several protest actions by the ILO and the ICFTU.

After the start of the new millennium, the trade-union movement became even further fragmented when three other central labour organisations were formed, namely the *Union Générale des Travailleurs du Cameroun* (UGTC), the *Confédération des Syndicats Indépendants du Cameroun* (CSIC), and the *Centrale Syndicale du Secteur Public* (CSP). Their leaders tend to display characteristics similar to those of the older central labour organisations: opportunism and fierce competition for power. Several of them were deciding to form unions of their own when their chances for gaining or maintaining power within the mother union seemed to dwindle, and they later became involved in regular struggles for power within their newly created unions. They quickly discovered that open or secret alignment with the government was most likely to advance both their careers and capital accumulation. No wonder then that they have frequently been accused of being bought over by the government in an attempt to refrain the rank and file from mobilising and demanding an improvement in their precarious living and working conditions. The increasing fragmentation of trade unionism in Cameroon tends to thwart any united action. Generally speaking, the various central labour organisations are inclined to fight each other rather than form a common front against employers and the state.

Table 11.1 *Central Labour Organisations in Cameroon*

Name	% of trade union membership
<i>Confédération des Syndicats Autonomes du Cameroun</i> (CSAC)	38
<i>Confédération Syndicale des Travailleurs du Cameroun</i> (CSTC)	17

<i>Union des Syndicats Libres du Cameroun (USLC)</i>	15
<i>Confédération Générale des Travailleurs-Liberté (CGTL)</i>	11
<i>Centrale Syndicale du Secteur Public (CSP)</i>	10
<i>Union Générale des Travailleurs du Cameroun (UGTC)</i>	7.5
<i>Confédération des Syndicats Indépendants du Cameroun (CSIC)</i>	1.5
TOTAL	100.0
N	270,000

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*Source:* Compiled from various files at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in Yaoundé.

A recent split in the CSTC would appear to be significant for the future of trade unionism in Cameroon. This split occurred in the aftermath of the CSTC's third elective congress held in Yaoundé from 9-10 November 2005 when the incumbent president, Maximilien Ntone Diboté, was re-elected. On the first day of the congress, two of its most outstanding leaders, Louis Sombès and Cornelius Vewessee who are renowned in Cameroon for their constant championing of autonomous and militant trade unionism (Konings 2006b), severely criticised Ntone Diboté for his refusal to debate the causes of the crisis in trade unionism in Cameroon in general and in the CSTC in particular. They alleged that he had been bribed by the government on several occasions and claimed that the CSTC was not living up to members' expectations.<sup>3</sup> The outspoken Anglophone trade union leader, Cornelius Vewessee, even had to be forcibly removed from the congress by the forces of law and order. On 16 December 2005, Vewessee (president) and

Sombès (secretary-general) created a new central labour organisation, the *Confédération des Syndicats Autonomes du Cameroun* (CSAC), comprising about 65 per cent of the CSTC membership. In the aftermath of its first congress in early April 2006, Sombès declared that the new central labour organisation planned to introduce the country to ‘an autonomous and action-oriented trade unionism so that things will change’.<sup>4</sup>

### *Decline in trade-union membership*

Like elsewhere in Africa, trade unions in Cameroon tend to be small because of the low level of wage employment that traditionally constitutes their recruitment base. Wage labour comprises about 15-20 per cent of the country’s workforce, which was estimated to be 6.2 million in 2001 (International Labour Organisation 2004). There is a total absence of statistical data on trade-union density in the country but during earlier research undertaken in the mid-1980s I concluded that it was quite high. Union membership was around 50 per cent of the labour force during the greater part of the one-party state (Konings 1993a), with several factors accounting for this high level. First, there was considerable pressure put on workers by the state and the union leadership to be both party and union members. And second, there was the social pact concluded by the state and its junior partner – the trade-union movement – during this period of relative economic prosperity that led to a measure of job security, regular salary increases and a variety of social benefits that appealed to the workers.

Membership numbers seem to have fallen dramatically during the current period of economic and political liberalisation. Trade-union membership is now estimated by government and union officials to be about 25-30 per cent of the labour force (see Table 11.1). It is evident that public and private-sector retrenchments during structural adjustment have led to heavy losses. Many workers are now being forced to seek alternative survival strategies in the informal sector but no attempts have ever been made by the various central labour organisations to organise workers in this sector. Another major factor contributing to the substantial decline in trade-union membership is the widespread loss of confidence of the rank

and file in its leadership during political liberalisation for the reasons explained above, which led members to resign from the unions. The drastic decline in trade-union membership has had far-reaching consequences for trade unionism in the country. It has depleted trade-union treasuries, which has created serious obstacles to recruiting sufficient staff. This has made the unions highly dependent on international trade-union organisations for activities such as legal aid to challenge the dismissal of union activists in court and financial support and expertise for holding trade-union seminars. Moreover, it has further diminished the unions' political power and collective bargaining strength.

*Weakened collective bargaining strength of the unions*

The 1992 Labour Code provides for collective bargaining between workers and management locally, as well as between labour federations and business associations in each sector of the economy. The problem is that trade unions' collective bargaining strength has been substantially reduced at both levels during the current economic crisis and economic liberalisation. There are several reasons for this unfortunate situation which dashes workers' hopes of an improvement in their deteriorating living and working conditions and creates potential social unrest.

First, there is the serious unemployment rate. Recent surveys have revealed that no less than 39 per cent of the labour force is either unemployed or underemployed (International Labour Organisation 2004). Such a large labour reserve puts pressure on the labour market and wage levels. Second, there is the neoliberal demand for a deregulation of labour laws, which aims at creating a certain flexibility in the labour market. While the 1974 Labour Code introduced during the one-party state was generally seen as labour-friendly, the 1992 Labour Code enhanced the management's position when it came to hiring, firing and remunerating workers. Rules governing employment security and minimum wages (Kendrick 1979; Konings 1993a; Sindjoun 1999) for instance, were deregulated, withdrawing the protective safeguards and rights achieved by the trade-union movement in the pre-adjustment era. Employers increasingly resorted to casualisation, outsourcing and

temporary employment contracts, which enabled them to cut labour costs and increase their control over the labour force. Moreover, the new Labour Code abolished the Joint National Commission for Collective Agreements and Wages composed of government representatives, employers and unions, which used to set the national minimum wage for each of the twelve established categories of workers in the public and parastatal sectors. As a result of these changes, working and living conditions of Cameroonians have become increasingly precarious. Third, collective bargaining has actually become more decentralised, since sectoral collective bargaining has been regularly postponed. Local unions are mostly ill-prepared for this development, lacking the power, competence and financial-economic information to bargain effectively with employers. Some employers are even blatantly violating workers' rights by delaying the implementation of collective agreements. This is especially the case with clauses related to wages, benefits, and the health and safety of workers. Even though the right to strike is recognised in the 1992 Labour Code, the process of embarking on a *legal* strike is long, frustrating and tedious.

Since the start of the structural adjustment programme in 1987, there has been a remarkable absence of any form of regular dialogue between the government, employers and trade unions. The channels for dialogue provided in the 1992 Labour Code, such as the National Consultative Commission on Labour and the National Commission for Health and Security at Work, are not functioning. And, last but not least, the unions have never been invited by the government to participate in the framing and implementation of structural adjustment measures.

### Prospects for trade-union revitalisation

This chapter has shown that the trade-union movement in Cameroon has largely failed to meet the challenges of neoliberal globalisation, leading to widespread disillusion among the rank and file who consider trade-union revitalisation a necessary precondition for an improvement in their deteriorating living and working conditions. Neoliberal economic and political reforms appear to have weakened rather than strengthened the political power and

bargaining strength of organised labour after many years of subordination to the state. Given this situation, trade-union leaders should, as a matter of urgency, come to an agreement on the root causes of the current crisis in trade unionism in the country and then devise a series of innovative strategies to address them effectively. Similar initiatives have been taken by trade unions elsewhere in Africa (Kester & Sidibé 1997; Beckman & Sachikonye 2001; Konings 2006b), and union leaders in Cameroon could fruitfully explore which of these innovative strategies could be applied in the specific Cameroonian context that is marked by different institutional and organisational legacies. This study has also identified a number of steps that Cameroonian union leaders need to take to revitalise trade unionism, and shown that a promising start has been made in implementing some of them.

A first step is to cut the existing links with the authoritarian, neopatrimonial state that has given rise to a widespread loss of confidence in the union leadership among the rank and file. The emergence of autonomous and militant trade unionism, first in the Cameroonian teachers' unions and recently in a large part of the central labour organisation, provides grounds for optimism that the Cameroonian labour movement will eventually succeed in loosening the controls of the corporatist state machine and become more meaningful to its members.

A second step is to organise the unorganised. To make up for its shrinking membership, the unions need to start recruiting outside their traditional areas, especially among workers in the informal sector, the increasing numbers of casual, temporary and contract workers, and the young male and female workers in the formal sector. Such a recruitment drive would help refill the union treasuries and finance a variety of trade-union activities as well as strengthen the unions' bargaining power.

A third step is to cement alliances with other civil-society organisations and social movements in pursuit of common objectives which go beyond the protection of the vested interests of union membership and include political struggles for a more democratic and just society, the advancement of civil, human and labour rights, and the achievement of a durable and environmentally sound economic policy. Political struggles must also aim to include



civil-society organisations, like the trade-union movement, in the framing of socio-economic policies. The achievement of this goal should stimulate these organisations to develop and defend an alternative growth path that is less harmful to the interests of workers and other subaltern groups than the current neoliberal policies.

A fourth step is to strengthen existing contacts with international organisations. The reassertion of labour rights has in recent years received fresh support at the international level. The international labour movement has been reactivated since the end of the Cold War and has intensified its activities globally. The Cameroonian labour movement has already greatly benefited from the assistance of international labour organisations in the field of capacity-building and protection against government violations of trade-union rights. It is now widely acknowledged that the challenge of global capital can only be met by international solidarity and that the forging of strategic links between organised labour in different countries is imperative in the era of neoliberal globalisation.

## Notes

1. Quoted in *The Diasporan*, 14 April 1995.
2. *Le Messenger*, 1 October 2001.
3. *The Herald*, 21-22 November 2005.
4. *Le Messenger*, 4 April 2006.

## Structural adjustment and trade union identity in Africa: The case of Cameroonian plantation workers

### Introduction

It is now widely recognised that wage workers were among the most seriously affected by the economic crises and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1990s in Africa. SAPs conventionally prescribed devaluation, major cuts in public expenditure, privatisation, rehabilitation or elimination of most parastatals, as well as liberalisation. As a result, wage workers were faced with managerial efforts to intensify supervision and increase labour productivity, retrenchments, curtailments in pay, suspension of benefits compounded by soaring consumer prices and user charges for public services.

The World Bank attempted to justify these anti-labour measures not only in economic but also in political terms (Bangura & Beckman 1993; Adesina 1994; Gibbon 1995). They argued that the historical influence of African trade unions has led to excessive levels of wage employment, inflated wages and a pro-urban, pro-worker allocation of public funds. It is interesting to observe that this view approximates earlier populist positions regarding 'labour aristocracy', 'urban bias' and 'urban coalition', all of which portrayed workers as a privileged minority, pursuing narrow self-interests at the expense of the urban poor and peasantry in coalition with the urban elite (Waterman 1975, Lipton 1977, Bates 1981). Although these views have been severely criticised by various authors (Jamal & Weeks 1993, Adesina 1994, Thomas 1995), they were nevertheless used by African leaders, like Rawlings in Ghana, to legitimise the implementation of SAP measures and to suppress trade union opposition (Kraus 1991).

Given the formidable challenge SAPs posed to trade unions in Africa, there was a surprising dearth of studies on the actual trade union response to SAPs. Existing studies focus mostly on the national level. They show that some trade union centres, notably in countries like Zambia, Ghana and Nigeria where trade unionism managed to preserve a certain degree of autonomy *vis-à-vis* the state in the post-colonial era, attempted to oppose SAPs (Akwetey 1994, Panford 1994, Hashim 1994). This opposition, however, proved unsuccessful in the end. SAPs seriously weakened the position of trade unions in African states. Mass retrenchment of labour in the public and private sector led to substantial losses in trade union membership and trade union revenues, whilst government abolition of legislative provisions concerning job security, participatory rights or guaranteed collective bargaining rights, and outright government oppression of any trade union oppositional action forced trade unions' backs against the wall.

In these circumstances, there was little the trade unions could do for their suffering members. Increasing job insecurity and falling real earnings forced the rank and file to search for alternative sources of income, 'straddling' between the 'formal' and 'informal' sectors and subsistence farming, as well as engaging in illicit income-generating activities such as theft, corruption, black-marketeering and prostitution. The 'fusion' of labour markets ensured the survival of workers, but, according to some authors (Jamal & Weeks 1993), it also signified the virtual collapse of the wage-earning class as a distinct entity. Consequently, trade unions faced a deep crisis of identity. It would appear that they have not yet devised any new strategies to deal with their dramatic loss of membership and the fusion of labour markets.

Even less research was done on the impact of such changes in trade union bargaining strength and labour markets on workers' trade union identity. Studies of industrial workers in Nigeria contradicted each other. Some claimed that workers no longer had faith in their unions and were inclined to embark instead on individual survival strategies and income-generating activities (Oloyede 1991). Others argued that workers often still relied on their unions to settle individual and collective grievances (Isamah 1994). Still others pointed out that workers combined individual survival strategies

with union activities. For example, Bangura & Beckman (1993) illustrate how workers attempted to pursue individual strategies via trade union actions: their actions were directed at obtaining levels of termination payment that would enable them to set up farms or petty transport and trading operations.

These studies caution against easy generalisations. There may indeed be a considerable variation in workers' trade union identity under SAPs, dependent on factors such as the differential impact of SAPs on economic sectors, the historical strength of trade unionism, the location (urban/rural) of affected enterprises, among other factors. In this study the focus is on changes in trade union identity during the economic crisis and SAP in rural Cameroon on the Ndu Tea Estate. The estate, established in the Bamenda Grassfields of Anglophone Cameroon in 1957, was owned by an English-Indian multinational, the Estates and Agency Company Ltd (EAC) until 1977, when it was transferred to the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) (see Chapter 6).

### Estate production and occupational change at Ndu

In 1957 the EAC began constructing a tea estate at Ndu, a small town situated in the Donga-Mantung division of the Bamenda Grassfields. It was at that time the only agro-industrial enterprise in the entire Bamenda Grassfields and one of the few enterprises in the region offering wage employment.

The local population belongs to the Wimbun, the most important ethnic group in the Donga-Mantung division. Wimbun society, like most other societies in the Bamenda Grassfields, is characterised by a highly complex socio-political form of organisation headed by powerful, even sacred, chiefs. The chief of Ndu is the most influential of the Wimbun chiefs and for this reason is seen by some as the leader of all the Wimbun. The chief is assisted by quarter-heads, councillors and a number of other important (hereditary) title and office holders. Efforts to rise within existing institutions to a position of influence and prestige are common throughout the population and internal flexibility is thus introduced into an otherwise stiffly stratified social system (Probst & Bühler 1990). In fact, traditional institutions have from time immemorial

co-opted prominent members of the community within their ranks. The most common mechanism is to honour such persons with a non-hereditary title. Titles and membership of titled societies become important pieces of 'symbolic capital' and an object of accumulation (Goheen 1993).

There used to be a clear sexual division of labour. Women were largely responsible for food farming while men hunted and traded in livestock, kola nuts and palm products (palm oil, palm wine and raphia). A considerable number of men were engaged in lucrative long-distance trade in kola nuts to Nigeria. Following the example of Fulani in the area, they also began raising cattle. After the Second World War, there were two significant changes in men's roles. Firstly, there was a steady increase in male labour migration to the coastal plantations, especially to CDC estates. Secondly, the introduction of arabica coffee growing provided a new, major source of revenue for men.

With the opening of the estate, the EAC management began to recruit local male labour. This was by no means accidental. It was the outcome of two potentially conflicting factors: the capitalist preference for female pluckers and the 'traditional' male control over women's vital productive and reproductive labour (Kaberry 1952, Goheen 1993). In prior negotiations between the chief of Ndu and the EAC on the local community's supply of land and labour for estate production, the company had proposed employing female pluckers for various reasons. There was a general belief in management circles that women were *naturally* more suited to picking tea (they had 'nimble fingers'), more docile (they were accustomed to subordination), and cheaper (their income was defined as supplementary to that of the so-called breadwinner, namely the husband). The company's long experience with tea plucking in India and Sri Lanka had strengthened this managerial belief (Kurian 1982). The idea of enjoying similar benefits on a tea estate in Cameroon must have been particularly attractive to management. The chief, however, strongly opposed the company's proposal, saying that:

women are responsible for farm work. That is why we call them 'mothers of the farm'. They are also responsible for feeding and caring for the household. Women are very important people, but

they are expected to obey male orders. Employment on the estate would incite women to neglect food production and household work, to behave 'headstrongly' and independently, and even to become 'harlots'.

He insisted instead on employing local male labour as a prerequisite for allowing the estate to be set up in his area of jurisdiction. This condition would not only halt the migration of local male labour to coastal areas but would also avert the construction of labour camps, which were frequently found on the coastal estates. In this way he hoped to safeguard not only 'traditional' male control over women's productive and reproductive labour, but also the continuing integration of male workers into the local community and their loyalty to traditional code of ethics and authority patterns. He finally agreed that women could be employed on the estate for specific activities, notably weeding, on a casual or temporary basis, provided their employment would not affect their productive and reproductive responsibilities in the local community. It was not until 1983 that his newly elected successor - a university graduate - allowed the employment of women as pluckers on a permanent basis.

The newly created estate never experienced any shortage of labour. Wage-earning opportunities were few in the area, and manpower resources abundant. The local population increased from approximately 17,000 in the mid 1960s to approximately 35,000 in the mid 1980s. The labour force expanded from 300 in 1957 to 1,750 in 1987. It has remained predominantly male (94 per cent). Generally speaking, estate workers are men who have failed to be selected as the successor to the family head. In Ndu, as elsewhere in the Grassfields, there can only be one such successor, who is not necessarily the eldest son. After his installation as head of the family, he has control of all family property. Estate work is highly valued by the non-successors, as it enables them to escape from the successor's control and to build up an independent existence. It also serves as an important avenue to social mobility in the local community.

The majority of non-successors use part of their wages to achieve specific objectives which can 'compensate' them for the loss of the successorship and enhance their status within the local community.

One can usually observe a certain pattern in the pursuit of these objectives: a man first attempts to build a house and marry one or more wives who can look after the cultivation of food; he then tries to set up a coffee farm and raise cattle, and eventually to invest in the acquisition of honorific titles which give the non-successors, like the hereditary office and title holders, access to power and wealth in the community. This is naturally a difficult project. It takes years of hard labour for low-waged estate workers to achieve even some of these objectives. As a result, male workers showed long-standing commitment to their jobs: 53 per cent of the male labour force in the mid-1990s were employed on the estate for more than ten years. In a situation where supply was far greater than demand, labour was often recruited through informal channels. One consequence of this was that jobs tended to be 'monopolised' by certain families. Workers often approached their direct superiors to recommend their sons or other relatives for employment when vacancies occurred. The management was usually inclined to accept such recommendations if they came from workers who were known as being hard working and committed.

The Ndu male workers have continued to resist female employment on the estate (Konings 1995a). Only 6 per cent of the mid-1990s labour force consisted of women. Most of them were pluckers who were recruited since 1983 following an agreement between the newly elected chief of Ndu and the CDC on permanent female employment. The women tended to be younger and better educated than the men and were usually those who wanted to escape from 'traditional' farm work and male dominance, but were not yet able to find any employment other than plantation work. Hence, they tended to be less committed to their jobs than male pluckers.

It would be difficult to describe plantation workers as 'labour aristocrats' (Loewenson 1992) given the relatively low remuneration they receive for their hard labour. Ndu pluckers were placed in category 2 (semi-skilled workers, zone 2 of the primary sector) of the standard national classification of occupations, being entitled to a monthly basic wage of approximately FCFA 25,000. Primary sector wages were the lowest in the country; industrial semi-skilled workers in the urban areas earned about FCFA 35,000. Primary sector wages also appeared lower than the average household

income in the area, estimated by Goheen (1996) at about FCFA 447, 270 a year. Goheen, however, admits that her income figures were skewed somewhat by the fact that several households in her sample were headed by relatively wealthy men; households headed by men with wage/salaried jobs had substantially more income than those where male employment was confined to farming. Moreover, quite a number of Ndu pluckers were unable to earn the basic wage, mainly due to the link between the remuneration of workers and the system of task work operating on the plantations.

Completion of the daily task set by the management entitled a worker to the daily basic wage; non-completion was punished by a *pro rata* payment. Because of their low remuneration, estate workers usually displayed a rather ambivalent attitude towards plantation labour. In some ways they valued it for providing them with a regular source of income. In other ways they had an acute feeling of exploitation and subordination in the labour process. Paradoxically, the close links workers continued to maintain with their local community appeared not to be an obstacle to class action. In several ways, such ties increased workers' inclinations to resist control and exploitation in the labour process:

First, they seemed to stimulate workers' efforts to resist capitalist norms and authority and to preserve a certain degree of autonomy at the workplace. For instance, managerial staff frequently complained about the alarming rate of absenteeism on the estate. A few examples illustrate the close connection between absenteeism and the continuing adherence of workers to local norms and authority:

During the annual harvesting period in August-September the men are customarily obliged to assist the women in transporting the harvest from the farm to the compound. As this period approaches, the rate of absenteeism on the estate tends to rise.

Ndu has the largest market in the Donga-Mantung Division. Market days are not only of great economic importance, but are also social happenings. On market days workers are often either absent or leave the estate before closing time.



Second, they may have fuelled workers' demands for better conditions of service because workers tried to invest any capital derived from wage employment in their social advancement within the local community.

Third, they could have provided workers with an 'exit option', protecting them against severe managerial disciplinary action, in the form of dismissal.

### Trade unionism on the Ndu estate and structural adjustment

On 27 July 1958 a trade union, the Ndu Estate Workers Union<sup>1</sup>, was founded on the estate due to the determination and organisational skills of what Millen (1963) has called an 'outside' leader. This leader was Mr E.Y.K. Barthson who had been active as a journalist in Lagos. Living in Ndu, he had been invited by senior estate workers to organise a union.

The new union was immediately opposed by the estate management and the chief, who regarded it as a threat to their authority. Both continually intimidated workers to discourage them from joining. Eventually, however, they realised they could not impede the growing popularity of the union because it persevered in defending workers' interests. The union's successful organisation of a first strike in 1962 boosted worker confidence in its leadership and forced the chief and the management to recognise the union. Gradually, both came to accept the union as the 'normal' mediation channel between workers and management. The union's persistent struggle for improvement in the workers' living and working conditions triggered a rapid growth in union membership. By 1968, a year after the introduction of the check-off system on the estate, it was estimated that more than 90 per cent of estate workers were paid-up union members. Ndu workers at that time demonstrated a remarkable degree of participation in union affairs:

Each time we convene an Annual Conference we get nearly every registered and potential member present and eager to attend so that it looks more like a general meeting than a conference as stipulated in sections 5 to 7 of our constitution. On the other hand, previously

we had encouraged General Meetings of workers every month. At these meetings workers prefer to discuss not only the difficulties facing them on the estate but all the matters that should be handled by the Annual Delegates Conference.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, the relatively small size of the union allowed for close contact between the leadership and the rank and file, as well as more ready participation in trade union affairs. Active participation in the union enabled Ndu workers to exercise a considerable measure of control over the union leadership's representation of their interests.

In 1972 trade unionism in Cameroon was put under state control, with the aim of transforming trade unionism from a vehicle of labour resistance into an instrument of labour control. Unions were henceforth expected to play a major role in national development, especially through the education of workers on the 'need' for increased production and constant 'dialogue' with employers. In a subsequent reorganisation of trade unionism, the Ndu Estate Workers Union was dissolved and its members were requested to join a newly created Divisional Union of Agricultural Workers of Donga-Mantung (DUAW/DM).

State control over the union together with a virtual statutory prohibition of strike action formed a serious obstacle to the new union's representation of workers' interests. The situation was aggravated by the union's lack of funds, as a result of the introduction of a new system for distributing the check-off contributions which prevented the union from paying staff members, holding regular meetings, and organising trade union activities. Little wonder that the rank and file lost confidence in their leadership, a condition that was manifest in an increasing number of 'illegal' strike actions after 1972 which the union could not control (Konings 1995a). The economic crisis that hit the CDC from 1986 onwards further weakened the union's bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the management.

There is no doubt that the sharp fall in commodity prices on the world market and the 40 per cent increase in the value of the CFA franc relative to the US dollar (which made CDC commodities even less competitive on the world market) were the principal causes of

the virtual bankruptcy of the corporation. The CDC suffered a loss of about FCFA 19 billion between 1986 and 1991. Nevertheless, there were other factors that also contributed to the emergence and continuation of the crisis. First, there was the political elite's inability or unwillingness to stop the imports of cheap tea and palm oil, which impeded CDC sales on the domestic market. Second, there were frequent reports of the managerial elite's involvement in massive embezzlement, reckless expenditure, waste, and power struggles. It is therefore understandable that many workers did not believe that the management could effectively combat the crisis (Konings 1995b).

The government had previously subsidised parastatal enterprises annually, irrespective of performance, but faced with a severe economic crisis in the second half of the 1980s, it was no longer able to render any assistance to the CDC. To save the corporation from total collapse, the management was forced to adopt a series of adjustment measures aimed at cost reduction and productivity increases, including intensified task work, drastic cuts in workers' salaries and fringe benefits, and retrenchments. This managerial strategy for economic recovery was reinforced in 1989 when the government adopted a World Bank and IMF-inspired SAP which demanded, among other things, a restructuring of the parastatal sector. The CDC was then obliged to sign a four-year performance contract with the government, under which the corporation was expected 'to meet certain standards of efficiency and to become self-supporting and profitable'.<sup>3</sup> Soon after the signing of this contract, the CDC General Manager announced a managerial crusade against 'undisciplined and unproductive' workers.

The various adjustment measures brought some relief to the company's liquidity problems but its survival remained precarious. It was not until January 1994, when a 50 per cent devaluation of the CFA franc made CDC products more competitive on the world market, that prospects for economic recovery appeared. Six months later the government surprisingly announced the privatisation of the corporation, prompting feelings of job insecurity among the workers. After vehement protests by the workers and the regional population as a whole, the actual privatisation was postponed (Konings 1996c).

In response to the corporation's unprecedented crisis, the union presidents on the CDC estates decided to assist the management in its struggle for economic recovery. There were a number of factors behind this decision. Since the reorganisation of trade unionism in 1972, the unions had become accustomed to solving problems with the management and the state through peaceful negotiations rather than through confrontation. In this particular case, the union presidents agreed with the management that, given the corporation's inability to secure any loans or public subsidies during the crisis, cost reduction and productivity increase were absolute prerequisites for economic recovery. Furthermore, they were assured by the management that no one in the corporation would be exempted from making sacrifices for the sake of economic recovery. They also hoped that the implementation of an adjustment programme would safeguard the jobs of the sizeable CDC labour force estimated at about 15,000.

On 23 August 1987 the union presidents agreed with the management on a substantial increase in the productivity required of estate workers. For example, the daily quota required from tea pluckers was raised from 26 to 32 kg of green leaves. When the corporation's financial position continued to deteriorate, management proposed further austerity measures to the union presidents. Following negotiations, a new agreement was signed on 6 January 1990, which entailed drastic cuts in the salaries and fringe benefits of all workers and managerial staff, amounting to some 30 to 40 per cent of their previous incomes. The most draconian measure, however, was the introduction of a compulsory savings scheme, forcing workers to save at least 15 per cent of their basic salary to aid the corporation's recovery.

In the wake of the political liberalisation process in the country, the unions regained a certain degree of autonomy in 1991. The union presidents then became more responsive to the sufferings of the workers and began to criticise the adjustment programme they had previously supported. At their urgent request, the CDC General Manager organised a meeting to review the January 1990 agreement. During this meeting on 1 March 1992, the union presidents insisted upon the termination or modification of the workers' financial contributions to the corporation's economic recovery. They justified this remarkable change in the union's position as follows:

First, the union had expected that the increased output and financial sacrifices of the workers would have forestalled, or at least minimised, any retrenchments. This had proved to be wishful thinking as the management had embarked upon mass layoffs of workers. Between 1986 and 1990, the labour force at the Ndu Tea Estate had been reduced from 1,750 to 1,333. Labour retrenchment has been facilitated by the new Labour Code of 1992 which allowed employers to lay off workers during 'an unfavourable economic situation and internal reorganisation' without previous consultation with the Labour Office or unions.

Second, the unions had expected the government to take appropriate measures to stabilise the prices of essential commodities and to standardise the wages of the agro-industrial parastatals. This had not happened. Neither had the National Social Insurance Fund continued to pay family allowances to the workers. In fact, prices had skyrocketed after the political opposition's 1991 'ghost town' campaign, wages had been frozen since July 1985, and taxes had increased by 100 per cent (see Chapter 2). As a result, CDC workers 'would now seem to be carrying out forced labour as the majority of the labour force has no take-home wage at the end of the month'.<sup>4</sup>

The management, however, refused to go beyond some minor concessions in relation to the January 1990 agreement. The union presidents then declared a collective trade dispute on 13 May 1992. When the management tried to employ delaying tactics, CDC workers went on strike from 21 to 26 May 1992. After this strike, the management agreed to various amendments of the January 1990 agreement including the reintroduction of certain fringe benefits.

Although there was a certain improvement in the relationship between the union leadership and the CDC management after these amendments, tensions and conflicts continued to simmer beneath the surface. The union presidents complained regularly about the management's lack of consultation with the unions and shop stewards, while the management, in turn, constantly insisted that, in a situation of crisis, the unions should have concentrated on an increase in labour productivity rather than on the representation of workers' interests.

## Ndu workers and trade union identity under structural adjustment

The SAP and the union's extensive cooperation with the CDC management in the planning and implementation of adjustment measures had a disastrous effect on trade union membership and the rank and file's trade union identity.

A considerable number of workers ceased to be union members, because they were laid off by the management during the economic crisis and SAP. Although Ndu workers maintain close links with the local community, which serves as a kind of social protection against retrenchment, retrenchment nevertheless thwarted workers' social mobility projects in the local community. Best off were usually the older workers who had been able to invest part of their savings in coffee production, cattle rearing, trade or other entrepreneurial activities. Nonetheless, even for some of these men, survival became precarious during the economic crisis: by the early 1990s the government had not paid them for their coffee for over two years.

Worst off were usually the young men and women who lacked the financial resources to continue building up an autonomous existence. They were often looked upon as social failures. A man who had not been able to establish at least a coffee farm commanded no respect in society (Manga 1984). An educated woman who refused to engage in 'traditional' farm work and to subordinate herself to male control through marriage was seen as 'lazy' or 'loose'. In their efforts to earn some income and preserve a certain degree of autonomy towards the family head, a growing number of young men and women were forced to engage in petty trade - often in smuggled or stolen goods - and to accept all kinds of casual, menial jobs. Some young men formed work groups offering their labour to local farmers (Courade 1994). Others decided to migrate to urban centres to try their luck, some returning to their hometown after a while, having failed to secure gainful employment during the crisis (Gubry *et al.* 1996). Still others started growing food, a domain previously reserved for women, to earn some cash. They often experienced difficulties in finding land for food cultivation in an area where land had become an increasingly scarce commodity due to estate production, coffee farming and cattle grazing. Being

engaged in a traditionally female occupation, they also risked social ridicule and consequently had to farm in the forest where land was still available and where they could not be seen.

Educated women wishing to escape from 'traditional' farm work and male control had often no other choice than to prostitute themselves. Given the continuing male opposition to female employment on the estate, it was not surprising that male workers and shop stewards brought strong pressures to bear upon the management to fire women first whenever retrenchments were necessary.

An increasing number of union members were also inclined to retire 'voluntarily' from the estate. This was mainly due to the growing demotivation of workers with the intensified control and exploitation at the workplace and their dissatisfaction with the union's defence of their interests during the crisis. While some workers were still reluctant to resign and thereby lost their monthly wage income, however meagre it may have been, others were no longer interested in keeping their job at any cost, especially having lost confidence in the corporation's eventual recovery. The latter wanted to collect their long-service awards and gratuities and their voluntary and compulsory savings, and invest the capital in farming, trade and other potentially lucrative activities such as taxi-driving or setting up a bar or shop.

A tiny minority of the remaining labour force continued to identify itself with the union, relying on it to protect its interests. The vast majority of workers, however, lost whatever confidence they still had in the union and employed a variety of strategies to cope with the managerial adjustment measures. Some of them opted for a single strategy, others for several strategies, simultaneously or consecutively.

A number of tea pluckers became survival-oriented in the climate of insecurity and tended to acquiesce in any economic recovery measures the management introduced, however stringent, for the sake of keeping their jobs. They tried to impress the management with above-average output and avoided conflicts with their supervisors. This intensified the element of competition in the labour process, undermining the previously high degree of solidarity among workers who shared similar living and working conditions.



Unexpectedly, most workers still seemed to cling to the strategy they had always employed in times when the union had failed to protect their interests and 'deliver the goods': engaging in individual and collective modes of resistance. It should be noted, however, that collective actions became more sporadic than in the past. This is understandable, since collective actions were extremely risky in a situation where strikes were virtually outlawed and were likely to elicit severe managerial reprisals in the form of summary dismissals.

When the union president, Mr Johnson Tanto Massa, informed the Ndu workers of the union's agreement with the management on an increase of task work from 26 to 32 kg of green leaves, workers complained that the new norm was too high, as many of them already experienced difficulties in reaching the old quota. They protested against the agreement in various ways. They refused to re-elect Mr Johnson Tanto Massa in the DUAW executive elections shortly afterwards and instead voted a non-estate worker, Mr G.N. Majam, a brother of the chief of Ndu and a clerical worker in the local coffee cooperative, into office. In addition, they started a go-slow in November, which resulted in all of them being paid a *pro rata* rate. The pluckers agreed to raise output only after the estate manager promised to allow some of their representatives to visit the other CDC tea estates to investigate whether their colleagues on these estates were also carrying out the new norm.

Promptly after the signing of the January 1990 agreement between the management and the unions, the newly elected union president, Mr G.N. Majam, barely escaped being beaten up by angry workers when he informed them of the terms of the agreement. Because of Majam's total failure to obtain the workers' consent, the CDC General Manager himself had to come to the estate to seek their cooperation. At a mass meeting, he stressed that non-acceptance of the drastic cuts in their real incomes would inevitably lead to the closure of the estate. This left the workers with no other choice but to comply.

A year later, on 4 January 1991, workers went on strike. After the severe cuts in their income, they were angry because their family allowances had not been paid for eighteen months and because they had not enjoyed Christmas advances as had their colleagues on other CDC estates. Attempts by the Labour Department, management



and the union to settle the strike failed. After an appeal had been made to the chief of Ndu on 7 January to intervene, the latter promised the administration that he would order the workers to return the next day. The workers indeed came to the estate on that day, but they left by 9 a.m. Only after family allowances were paid on the following day did they finally resume work.

Notwithstanding the sporadic collective actions, workers had become more inclined to resort to individual informal actions which were more difficult for the management and state to control. The CDC Annual Reports document managerial concern with the increasing rate of uncompleted work, absenteeism and workers' insubordination at the workplace. Apparently the managerial crusade against 'undisciplined and unproductive' workers had not yet been successful. In addition, workers were engaged in a variety of informal actions such as sabotage and involvement in illicit income-generating activities, to protest against the reduction in their incomes. Some pluckers did not keep to the plucking standards: they mixed bad leaves with good ones, a practice which enabled them to complete their task faster and to achieve more weight and income. Others cut the tea bushes and prunings and used them for firewood, while others stole tea from the factory and sold it to middlemen. The management periodically complained that the theft of tea had reached unprecedented levels since the economic crisis and had caused serious losses to the company.

## Conclusion

Economic crisis and SAP brought about a serious decline in trade union membership and in the rank and file's trade union identity. Workers, no longer union members after retrenchment or 'voluntary' retirement from the company attempted to eke out an existence in the local community with varied success. While young men and women usually found it hard to survive, older workers were more likely to be successful. In the course of their working careers the latter had often been able to invest their savings in various forms of self-employment, including coffee farming, cattle raising, trade and business, and in the purchase of honorific 'traditional' titles which were potential sources of political and economic power in the local community.

Several authors (Lubeck 1986, Peace 1979, Oloyede 1991, Warnier 1993) have shown that West African workers aspire very intensely to self-employment since it commands far more social respect and prestige than wage labour. Workers place considerable weight on the entrepreneurial ethos prevailing in most West African societies, and they are therefore inclined to look upon wage labour as an unavoidably 'transitional phase in a moment of social ascent'. They greatly admired any of their colleagues who succeeded in setting up some kind of business, well aware of the 'many sacrifices such an achievement demands from an ordinary worker'.

This entrepreneurial ethos served to fuel workers' militancy when their efforts for self-employment were being threatened by declining incomes and deteriorating working conditions. Faced with a relatively large increase in task work and a dramatic cut in their real incomes during the economic crisis and structural adjustment, most union members rapidly lost whatever confidence they still had in the union leadership's bargaining power, and became inclined to engage in various forms of individual and collective forms of resistance.

As a result of these developments, the union encountered a serious crisis of identity. Management and state constantly tried to impress upon the union leadership that workers should take their due share of the sacrifices necessary for national recovery and that it is the union's responsibility to solicit the workers' cooperation. The cooperative role the state-controlled unions were willing to play during the economic crisis and structural adjustment compromised their representation of workers' interests. Moreover, the union leaders were often not properly consulted by the management in the planning of austere adjustment measures, but they were nevertheless requested to assist in their implementation, thus risking accusations by the rank and file of 'betrayal of workers' interests'. Workers saw it as a situation whereby they made sacrifices for the economic recovery of the company while the political and managerial elite 'continued to loot the parastatals'.<sup>5</sup>

Although the union achieved a certain measure of autonomy vis-a-vis the state during the political liberalisation process in the 1990s and became more concerned to defend workers' interests, the logic of structural adjustment continued to constrain its ability

to defend their members' rights effectively. In only a few cases were the unions able to challenge some of the management's more stringent anti-labour adjustment measures (Konings 2006b).

In October 2002, the CDC tea estates were finally privatised. The government sold them to a South African consortium, Brobon Finex PTY Limited and the estates were renamed the Cameroon Tea Estates (CTE). The unions were not consulted about the privatisation of the CDC tea estates. The management ignored the unions, even refusing to enter into any negotiations with the union leaders about the introduction of drastic measures to alter the labour process, including growing casualisation of the labour force, outsourcing of certain tasks to contractors, increases in task work, a 50-percent slash of wages, and non-payment of various fringe benefits. Given this situation, the workers had no other choice in the defence of their interests but to resort to a variety of formal and informal protest actions, notably protracted strikes (Konings 2011).

The usual management response to strike actions was summary dismissal of strikers. It was only after state intervention in a long and violent strike in 2006 that the management was prepared to pay dismissed workers their termination benefits. Little wonder that the rank and file lost confidence in the union leadership, and new recruits refused to join the unions, well aware of management's hostile attitude towards trade unionism.

Contrary to government expectations, the privatisation of the tea sector has not given rise to an increase in the quality, output and sales of tea, due not only to severe mismanagement but also to frequent labour protests against the deteriorating conditions of service.

## Notes

1. In 1963, the union changed its name to Cameroon Union of Plantations, Industrial and Agricultural Workers (CUPIAW)
2. See letter of General Secretary of CUPIAW to Registrar of Trade Unions, dated 17 July 1968, in File MTPS/WCD/BU.99, CUPIAW.

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3. See Report of the Consultation Meeting with the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance at Provincial level by Mr P.M. Kamga, dated 28 October 1989, in File MEPS/SWP/BU.134, Vol. 4, General Correspondence CDC.
4. See Minutes of the Second Appraisal Meeting of 6 January 1990 Agreement between the CDC Management and the Workers' Union which was held in the General Manager's Office on 14 March 1992, in File MTPS/IDTPS/SWP/LB.2, Vol. 27, Complaints from CDC.
5. See Labour Day Speech by Mr C.P.N. Vewessee, President of FAWU, on 1 May 1991, in *Messenger (e)*, 13 May 1991, p. 4.



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