

The Anglophone Struggle for Federalism in Cameroon

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INTRODUCTION

The current debate on democracy in Africa has once again raised the issue of what form of constitution is appropriate to accommodate the enormous ethno-regional diversities within the framework of a broader national unity. The unitary approach to the nation-state project was the predominant choice of African leaders in the decades following independence (Wunsch, 1990). Usually this amounted to a continuation of the colonial state's top-down 'nation-building' programme, whose primary concern had been to integrate the diverse ethno-regional groups into the state and to subordinate them to one centralised authority. It was seen as a *sine qua non* for avoiding administrative chaos and civil war and for achieving rapid development in Africa. Today it is generally agreed that this approach fostered political monolithism and the entrenchment of presidentialism, at the expense of constitutionalism. Alternative constitutional arrangements, notably federalism - which according to Elaigwu and Olorunsola (1983: 282) 'basically emanates from the desire of people to form a union without necessarily losing their various identities' - were either ignored or consciously violated by African leaders; or, as in Nigeria, they experienced an increasing concentration of power in the federal center (Thomas-Woolley and Keller, 1994; Woodward and Forsyth, 1994; Olukoshi and Agbu, 1997). In the

current processes of liberalisation in Africa, highly centralised unitary states are facing a serious crisis of political legitimacy.

In this chapter, I wish to demonstrate that the political agenda in Cameroon has become increasingly dominated by what is known as the 'Anglophone problem'. This issue poses a major challenge to the efforts of the post-colonial state to forge national unity and integration, and it has led to a widespread demand in the Anglophone region of the country for the reintroduction of a federal state. The root of the problem lies in 1961, when the political élites of two territories with different colonial legacies - one French and the other British - agreed on the formation of a federal state. The 1961 federal constitution provided for a highly centralised form of federalism, the result of an uneasy compromise between the Anglophone and Francophone leaderships. The leaders of the Anglophone minority had advocated a 'loose' form of federalism, which was to guarantee equal partnership for both partners and preserve the cultural heritage and identity of each. The leaders of the Francophone majority favoured instead a highly centralised unitary state, and they regarded the 1961 constitutional arrangements as merely a transitory phase in achieving this ultimate objective. In 1972, they succeeded in imposing a unitary state on the Anglophone minority.

Gradually, an Anglophone consciousness developed - a 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 the political liberalisation process in the early 1990s, however, that a growing number of the English-speaking elite began openly resisting the alleged subordinate position of the Anglophones and demanding self-determination and autonomy. The major Anglophone organisations initially called for a return to the federal state, and they even drew up a federal draft constitution aimed at fulfilling the continuing Anglophone desire for a 'loose' form of federation in Cameroon. Confronted by the blunt refusal of the government headed by President Paul Biya to discuss the reintroduction of a federal state, most Anglophone organisations later began adopting a secessionist stand.

Not surprisingly, the government has devised various strategies to bolster the unitary state, including attempts to minimise or even deny the

existence of an 'Anglophone problem', to create divisions within the English-speaking elite while taking advantage of existing ethno-regional contradictions in the Anglophone community, to reward some of its allies with prestigious positions in the state apparatus previously reserved for Francophones, and to repress all actions designed to alter the status of the Anglophone territory. At the same time the government has expressed a willingness to concede a larger measure of decentralisation within the unitary state, based on the ten existing provinces in the country. There is ample evidence that the government's stand on the 'Anglophone problem' is supported by the majority of the Francophone elite and by a section of the Anglophone elite closely allied to the regime in power.

THE ANGLOPHONES AND THE FEDERAL STATE, 1961-1972

The birth of the Federal Republic of Cameroon on 1st October 1961 marked the reunification of two territories that had undergone different colonial experiences since World War I (Johnson, 1970; Le Vine, 1971; Benjamin, 1972). The erstwhile German Kamerun Protectorate had then been partitioned between the British and the French, first as 'mandates' under the League of Nations and later as 'trusts' under the United Nations (Gardinier, 1963; Le Vine, 1964; Joseph, 1977).

While the French administered their mandate/trust territory as a separate unit, the British attached one part of their territory, which came to be called Southern Cameroons, to the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria. There is no doubt that the administration of Southern Cameroons as an appendage of Nigeria encouraged the growth of nationalism and autonomist tendencies in the region, particularly because this administrative construction led to the blatant neglect of the territory's development, as well as to a dominant position of Igbo and Efik-Ibibio migrants in its economy. In response to Southern Cameroonian pressures for self-government or more autonomy within the Nigerian political system, the British first granted Southern Cameroons a quasi-regional status and a

limited degree of self-government within the Federation of Nigeria in 1954, and then full regional status in 1958.

With the approaching independence of Nigeria, it became clear that the Southern Cameroonian elite was seriously divided on the political future of the territory. The key players were Emmanuel Endeley and John Ngu Foncha. Endeley, a physician by training, was the leader of the Kamerun National Convention (KNC), a party based mainly in the coastal forest part of Southern Cameroons (the present South West Province). Foncha, originally a teacher, was the leader of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), a party based in the inland, grassfield part of Southern Cameroons (the present North West Province). Following his party's victory in the 1959 elections, Foncha took over the post of prime minister from Endeley.

Both politicians had begun by championing reunification with French Cameroon. They had been influenced by the *French Cameroons Welfare Union* - an organisation of Francophone immigrants (Amaazee, 1994) - and the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) - the radical nationalist party in French Cameroon (Joseph, 1977; Johnson, 1970) - both of which had propagated the idea of reunification in the Southern Cameroons. The strong anti-Nigerian sentiments prevailing in the Southern Cameroons generated some support for reunification in the territory. Endeley, however, later changed his stand, becoming a strong advocate of integration into Nigeria. This change may be explained by the promulgation of successive Nigerian constitutions in the 1950s (Ngoh, 1990) - which eventually resulted in full regional status of the Southern Cameroons within the Federation of Nigeria - as well as by the outbreak of a civil war within French Cameroon. With regional status, Endeley believed, Southern Cameroonians could rule themselves, develop their territory, maintain their ties to the British heritage, and avoid the violence and chaos of the war in French Cameroon. Unlike Endeley, Foncha was not content with regional status, and he continued to campaign for separation from Nigeria. He did feel obliged, however, to somewhat alter his position with regard to reunification with French Cameroon. There was widespread resistance among the region's modern and traditional elite to reunification with a territory with a

different colonial legacy and torn by civil war, and a third option was becoming increasingly popular - outright secession from Nigeria and the creation of an independent Southern Cameroons state. Foncha no longer favoured *immediate* union with French Cameroon, but envisaged a period either of continuing British trusteeship or of complete autonomy after Nigerian independence. He argued that this would foster the region's political and economic development and strengthen its bargaining position vis-à-vis the much larger, and more economically advanced, French Cameroon (DeLancey, 1989).

Since the leadership failed to arrive at a compromise, and the wishes of the citizens with regard to the future of the territory remained unclear, a United Nations-sponsored plebiscite was organized on 11th February 1961 to enable Southern Cameroonians to express their views. Unfortunately, the choices given to the voters did not allow them to clearly indicate their will, and this probably forced an outcome that was contrary to their wishes. Only two choices were offered: independence as part of Nigeria or independence as part of the Republic of Cameroon (the new name of Francophone Cameroon after its independence on 1st January 1960). Both choices were to take effect almost immediately (1st October 1961). Alternative options, such as continued trusteeship or complete independence, both of which appeared popular in the period leading up to the plebiscite, were not offered as choices. The anti-colonial powers in the United Nations found the idea of delaying the territory's independence objectionable. They also opposed an independent Southern Cameroons state, mainly because of doubts as to its economic viability and fears of a further balkanisation of Africa. The voters eventually chose union with the Republic of Cameroon by a vote of about seven to three. Most close observers of the plebiscite process agree that, had the alternative options (continued trusteeship or independence) been provided, they would have won considerable support, and perhaps even victory (Chem-Langhëë, 1976; DeLancey, 1989).

The plebiscite did not establish the content of the constitution for a reunified Cameroon. Anxious to be relieved of their responsibilities in the area, the British had informed the Southern Cameroonian authorities that sovereignty would be turned over to the new, reunified state on 1st

October 1961, whether or not Southern Cameroons had negotiated an acceptable constitution. Prime Minister Foncha had met with Ahmadou Ahidjo, who had been elected president of the Republic of Cameroon, on several occasions before the plebiscite to try to find a mutual basis for the constitution of the reunified state, but without success. Both leaders agreed that the new state should be a federation, but in their discussions it became evident that they differed on the nature of federation.

Foncha and the KNDP had a knowledge of federal institutions and a familiarity with the machinery of federal government which derived from their experience within Nigeria. Kalu Ezera's (1964) extensive analysis of the development of Nigeria's pre-independence constitutions reveals several important points. First, the trend throughout the period was towards greater and greater regional autonomy. At every stage, one or more of the regions felt the constitutional arrangements were inadequate to protect them from incursions by a federal government dominated by some other ethnic group. Thus the process can be seen as an effort to devolve as much authority as possible from the central government. Second, in this process of constitutional experimentation there was a preoccupation with the *form* of federalism rather than with the sense of it. The suitability of a federal system of government for a country characterised by distinct cleavages was never questioned. The contention that extensive regional autonomy would promote national unity went largely unchallenged. In short, there appears to have been no discussion on whether minimum preconditions existed for a successfully functioning federal system (Walker, 1992). Being familiar with the form of federalism existing in Nigeria, and well aware of the widespread opposition in the Southern Cameroons to immediate reunification with the Republic of Cameroon, Foncha and the KNDP understandably came to advocate a loose form of federation, almost resembling a confederation, which they felt would ensure the equal partnership of both parties and help preserve the cultural heritage and identity of each.

Ahidjo, however, rejected Foncha's proposals as incompatible with the highly centralised constitution he advocated. Ahidjo lacked Foncha's

experience with the intricate workings of federalism. His thoughts had been shaped by the centralised and assimilative administrative structure characteristic of the French colonies. He had also been engaged in the drafting of a constitution for the Republic of Cameroon, which laid the foundation for a highly centralised state and a strong executive power largely based on the constitution of the Fifth French Republic (Le Vine, 1964). Moreover, the paradigm of 'modernisation' which dominated the literature on political and economic development in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s reinforced Ahidjo's views on the importance of a strong unitary state for nation-building and economic reconstruction in Africa (Cameroon National Union, 1968). Given the particular situation of uniting two territories with different colonial legacies, Ahidjo eventually expressed willingness to accept a highly centralised form of federation, almost a non-federation, which he saw as a necessary transitory phase to his ultimate goal - the full integration of the two component entities into a strong, unitary state.

In the event, discussions were further delayed until after reunification was effected. In the period preceding the plebiscite, Foncha largely created the impression that the federation would be a loose one. A few months after the plebiscite, in June 1961, the Southern Cameroonian political and traditional leaders, including those opposed to reunification, met at Bamenda to draft a comprehensive set of proposals as a basis for negotiation with representatives of the Republic of Cameroon. Foncha, who in the meantime had secretly received a copy of Ahidjo's proposals for a highly centralised form of federalism, concealed this from most delegates, probably to avoid a possible boycott of the meeting by the opponents of reunification (Ngho, 1990). As a result, the delegates eventually adopted proposals for a loose federation, which were greatly at variance with what the Ahidjo government had already decided. The Southern Cameroon proposals included a ceremonial rather than an executive head of state; a bicameral federal legislature; a governor or head of each state, with a prime minister as head of an accountable government in each of the component states; separate state and federal citizenship; the allocation of a wide range of legislative powers to the states, particularly in the early stages after union though with an acknowledgement that some of these could be transferred to the

central government at a later date; the entrenchment of a large number of provisions by means of a procedure that would make amendment difficult, and depending either on the consent of a two-thirds majority in each state legislature or approval in separate state referenda; specific provisions for the protection of fundamental human rights; power vested in the president to veto legislation considered detrimental to the rights of states, or of minorities within them; as well as matters of some particular concern to the Southern Cameroons itself, such as the maintenance of the general legal system and of the state, the retention of the House of Chiefs, and safeguards for the continued existence of the customary court system (see Rubin, 1971: 111-12).

From 17-21 July 1961 delegations from both territories led by Ahidjo and Foncha met for constitutional talks at Foumban. Despite all rhetoric, it was clearly a meeting of unequal partners. Obviously the bargaining strength of the Francophone delegation was far superior to that of the Anglophones. In retrospect, it is now evident that Ahidjo had few illusions about the eventual relationship between the two territories: the Francophone state ten times the size of its Anglophone partner, with almost five times its population, immeasurably greater resources, and a much higher level of economic development, had to be the dominant element in the new union (Ndongko, 1975). And even more important, by the time of these negotiations, the Southern Cameroons was obliged to achieve its independence by *joining* the sovereign Republic of Cameroon, enabling Ahidjo to dictate the terms for federation by capitalising on his territory's 'senior status'. Ahidjo refused to consider the Bamenda constitutional proposals. He even did not hesitate to proclaim that he would accept recommendations concerning his own constitutional proposals but that he and his delegation would be the final arbiters of what would be accepted (Stark, 1976: 112).

The Southern Cameroons delegation examined Ahidjo's proposals in three sessions and produced a number of recommendations, which largely reflected the over-optimistic proposals of the Bamenda Conference for a loose form of federation. By no means all their recommendations were dismissed, but clearly the most important ones - those in-

tended to safeguard the greatest degree of autonomy for each state - were overridden.

The final version of the federal constitution changed the names of the two states that came to constitute the Federal Republic of Cameroon: the former Republic of Cameroon would henceforth be called the federated state of East Cameroon, and the former Southern Cameroons would be called the federated state of West Cameroon.¹ The official languages of the federal republic would be French and English. To the consternation of West Cameroonians, the final version of the constitution appeared to deny the equal status of both languages, stipulating in Article 59 that 'the revised constitution shall be published in French and English, the French text being authentic'. To assign English an inferior place to French was utterly unacceptable to the Anglophone elite. Dual citizenship, as proposed by the Southern Cameroons delegation, was rejected by Ahidjo, but he eventually agreed to insert a clause into the constitution, affirming the federal state's adherence to the fundamental freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the United Nations (Article 1).

The most important constitutional arrangements were the following:

- The constitution granted practically all authority to the federal state. According to Article 5, a number of tasks were to come under federal jurisdiction immediately upon independence, such as foreign affairs; the internal and external security of the federal state; development planning; foreign aid; the monetary system; taxation; civil, criminal, and contract law; and secondary and post-secondary education. Article 6 stipulated that a very comprehensive list of further tasks were to become federal matters as time went on. Most of these transitional powers had been taken over by the federal government to some extent or another by 1967. No specific list of tasks which were to fall permanently within the jurisdiction of the state governments was provided. Article 38 reads: 'Matters other than those specified in Articles 5 and 6 and other than those which under the present constitution are

¹ The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon is reproduced in ENON-CHONG (1967), pp. 253-266.

to be subject of a federal law shall lie exclusively within the competence of the federated states'. The customary courts of West Cameroon and primary education had some constitutional warrant for being taken as state tasks. Other tasks left to the states in the early years, by convention rather than constitutional prescription, were local government, social welfare, archives and antiquities, agriculture, forestry, cooperatives, internal trade, state public works, and some other minor projects. In 1965, in fact, parts of these tasks were also taken over. Moreover, the constitution provided for no autonomous financial resources for the federated states, thus depriving them of any means of exercising real power. West Cameroon was to give up its sources of customs and other revenues and was to be financed by federal subventions until a formula could be fixed. However, such a formula was never found and West Cameroon continued to be dependent on the federal government from the beginning to the end of the federation. Indeed, by claiming for itself nearly all the most important functions of state business, the federal government ensured the redundancy of the governments of the federated states and denied them any *raison d'être*, except a political one.

- The constitution created a presidential regime at the federal level. In contrast to the Bamenda proposals, the president of the federal republic was to be an active, powerful chief executive rather than a mere figurehead. He was to be head of state, head of the federal government, and head of the armed forces. He was responsible for the conduct of the affairs of the federal republic, and was not accountable to the legislature for his actions. Since no real separation of powers was provided for by the constitution, the president could play an important role in the legislative process through his ability to propose legislation or to delay or prevent the passage of legislation he did not like. Moreover, in many instances he had the power to legislate by decree without reference to the national assembly, and he could even declare a state of emergency on his own and rule entirely by decree. Nor did he need to seek legislative approval for his appointments. He appointed ministers, governors, judges and high civil servants, and they were entirely dependent on his favour to remain in office. It is not surprising, therefore, that the constitution has been judged in terms of

its contribution to 'presidentialism' rather more than for its accomplishments for federalism (Rubin, 1971).

The president was to be assisted in his duties by a vice-president. On the recommendation of the Southern Cameroons delegation, it was laid down in Article 9 of the constitution that the president and vice-president must not be natives of the same federated state. Both were to be elected, on a single list, by universal suffrage and direct, secret ballot. The function of vice-president was held by Anglophones (Foncha, 1961-70; Muna, 1970-72) until 1972, when it was abolished following the creation of a unitary state. It should, however, be pointed out that the subordinate position of the vice-president was made very clear by the constitution. Undoubtedly, he had some *potential* powers - he succeeded to the presidency automatically if that office became vacant for whatever reason, although he was only to remain in office until a new president was elected not more than fifty days later - but he was not given any specific powers of his own.

While Article 4 of the constitution defined federal authority as residing in the federal president and the federal national assembly, the latter played a far more inferior role within the framework of federal power. In the framing of the constitution, the Southern Cameroons proposal for a bicameral legislature was rejected, and a unicameral system was adopted. The choice was justified on the grounds of economy and efficiency, but it is most likely that Ahidjo saw the proposal as a threat to the centralised character of the constitution, as well as a means to impede the federal government. Representation of the federated states in the federal assembly was proportionate to the population of each state, and each member was to represent 80,000 citizens. On the basis of the figures given in the constitution, there were to be fifty seats in the assembly, forty of which represented East Cameroon and ten West Cameroon. Both the number and the duration of the assembly's sessions were limited by the constitution: it was to meet twice a year for sessions not to exceed thirty days, although it could also be convened for an extraordinary session of not more than fifteen days at the request of the president or of two-thirds of its members. The role of the legislature was both limited, in the sense that specific legislative powers were conferred on the president, and

diluted in the sense that the president was able to exercise powers concurrently with the legislature on those tasks not exclusively set aside by the constitution for the attention of the national assembly. Curiously, Ahidjo eventually allowed a Southern Cameroons recommendation to be incorporated into the constitution which created a potential safeguard against the adoption of federal legislation harmful to one of the federated states. Article 18 created a procedure whereby the president might require a bill to be read a second time, either of his own accord or at the request of the prime minister of either federated state. At the second reading, the bill had to receive the approval of a majority of the national assembly members from each federated state. This element of a 'second reading' was one of the few respects in which the constitution envisaged curtailment of the powers of the federal authority through the actions of state representatives. Although this provision could have made a significant contribution to the safeguarding of West Cameroon interests, it was never actually applied. Relations between West Cameroon and the federal government in the first five years were mediated mainly by the decree powers of the president, and from 1966 all West Cameroonian representatives in the national assembly belonged to the Cameroon National Union (CNU), the single party in the federal republic.

- The constitution provided for a state structure whereby a presidential regime at the federal level was combined with a parliamentary regime at the level of the federated states. Although the federated states had almost no powers, they were furnished with separate constitutions outlining the character of their respective institutions.² Both states had a parliamentary form of government, with governments collectively responsible to their legislatures. Remarkably, the constitution made no major modifications to the formal governmental structures that had existed in the two states prior to reunification. West Cameroon retained its House of Assembly (renamed West Cameroon Legislative Assembly), its House of Chiefs, and its ministerial system, complete with a prime minister and cabinet (ministers in both states

² The Constitutions of the federated states of East and West Cameroon are reproduced in ENONCHONG (1967), pp. 267-291.

are now called secretaries of state). East Cameroon retained its own legislature unaltered, save in name (from National Assembly to East Cameroon Legislative Assembly) and its ministerial system of prime minister and secretaries of state. Not wishing to create an 'autonomous' power base for chieftaincy in the federal republic, Ahidjo only reluctantly agreed to the Southern Cameroons delegation's demand for the preservation of the bicameral character of its state legislature, in recognition of the important role Anglophone chieftaincy had played in the coming about of reunification (Konings, forthcoming), but he bluntly refused to create a House of Chiefs in East Cameroon, where none had existed before reunification. As a result, a potentially dangerous disequilibrium was created between the two federated states, which could in the long run have frustrated the chiefs in East Cameroon. No wonder that Ahidjo was quick to abolish the West Cameroon House of Chiefs after the promulgation of the unitary state in 1972.

- The constitution created a judicial system that largely reflected the governmental system established in the federal republic. The court system in both federated states remained unaltered, and the courts continued to function on basis of the pre-unification legal systems - that is, based on French principles and procedures in East Cameroon and on British ones in West Cameroon. As the crown of the legal structure, however, the constitution treated two new courts: the Federal Court of Justice to handle appeals from the highest state courts, to adjudicate interstate or state-federal disputes, and to give advisory opinions to federal authorities in certain limited situations; and a special panel, the High Court of Justice, to try cases involving high treason, conspiracy against the state, or various crimes committed by the highest federal or state officials.

The final version of the constitution left no room for legal secession from the federation, although some Southern Cameroons delegates had wanted a proviso inserted into the constitution sanctioning the peaceful withdrawal from the federation.

The constitution laid down a federal system significantly different from the one Foncha had promised Southern Cameroonians. The majority of

the Anglophone elite felt that the dominant Francophone majority had imposed its will on the Anglophone minority. What embittered them even more was that Ahidjo never submitted the federal constitution for final approval to a constituent assembly composed of Anglophone and Francophone representatives. The final version of the constitution was approved only by the parliament of the Republic of Cameroon on 1 September 1961, one month prior to reunification. That is why 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).

Another issue that was soon to become a source of conflict between the West Cameroonian leaders and president Ahidjo was the question of territorial administration. There is no indication that the Anglophone delegation at Foumban gave much thought to the clause dealing with federal administration in Ahidjo's constitutional proposals. But Ahidjo was ready with the legislation immediately after reunification. Decree 61-DF-15 of 20 December 1961 specified that the whole federation should be divided into administrative regions under the authority of Federal Inspectors of Administration, who were to be directly responsible to Ahidjo. These federal inspectors were charged with 'representation of the federal government in all acts of civil life and in judicial matters, supervision of the enforcement of federal laws and regulations, and the maintenance of order according to the laws and regulations in force', having at their disposal the police force and gendarmerie, as well as federal services. Under this system, West Cameroon was designated as only one of six regions. Ahidjo thus created an administrative system that basically ignored the 'federal' nature of the country. The federal inspector in West Cameroon, a Francophone, considered himself the equal of the state's prime minister, and there was a running battle for jurisdiction between the two officials until the late 1960s (Stark, 1976: 432).

Having succeeded in imposing a highly centralised form of federalism, Ahidjo gradually and cautiously undertook to realise his ultimate goal, the establishment of a strong, unitary state. He employed various tactics to achieve this objective. He played Anglophone political factions off

against one another, eventually persuading them to join the Cameroon National Union (CNU), the single party formed in September 1966, and he was capable of penalising any Anglophone leader who remained committed to federalism. Hence his replacement of Augustin Ngom Jua by Solomon Tandeng Muna, a 'unitarist', as prime minister of West Cameroon in 1968, and his creation of 'clients' by according top posts in either the government or the party to representatives of major ethnic and regional groups in the Anglophone region. Simultaneously, he attempted to reduce the British legacy in the Anglophone territory to its barest minimum in order to ensure national integration. In 1962, he replaced the West Cameroon pound sterling with the CFA franc of East Cameroon, which thus became the only legal tender for the whole country. Likewise, in 1964, he replaced the West Cameroon imperial system of weights and measures with the East Cameroon metric system. He also tried to harmonise the legal and educational systems in favour of the Gaelic systems, but that failed (Chem-Langhéë, 1997: 91-92; Nkoum-Me-Ntseny, 1996).

On 6 May 1972, Ahidjo announced in the national assembly his intention to transform the federal republic into a unitary state, provided the electorate supported the idea in a referendum to be held on 20 May. This would abrogate Clause 1 of Article 47 of the federal constitution which read: 'Any proposal for the revision of the present constitution which impairs the unity and integrity of the federation shall be inadmissible'. This important clause had been specifically inserted into the constitution to assure Southern Cameroonians that the federation could not be dissolved. Even if the constitution were to be amended, that should not be done by referendum, for Clause 3 of the same article stipulated that 'proposals for revision shall be adopted by simple majority vote of the members of the federal assembly, provided that such majority includes a majority of the representatives in the federal assembly of each of the federated states'. The use of a referendum was probably chosen by Ahidjo to avoid any public debate on the new constitution and to secure an overwhelming turnout in its favour. The autocratic nature of his regime helps to explain why the inhabitants of Anglophone Cameroon voted massively for the draft constitution, and hence for the immediate establishment of the United Republic of Cameroon.

The ballot was far from secret, election results were arranged and known beforehand, and it was neither politically wise nor physically safe to hold and express views different from the president, let alone oppose in words or deeds any of his plans or actions. The new constitution even increased the already enormous powers in the hands of the president and abolished the position of vice-president as well as West Cameroon's separate assembly and House of Chiefs.³

The president's justification for the 'glorious revolution of 20 May 1972' was that federalism was too costly an administrative system for a developing country, and that it fostered regionalism and impeded economic development. A growing number of articulate Anglophones, however, were inclined to attribute the emergence of 'regionalism' and lack of progress not to federalism *per se*, but rather to the hegemonic and assimilative tendencies of the Francophone-dominated state. They came to see the unitary state as the greatest threat to their cultural identity and interests, and they denied its rulers any legitimacy. They started to resent their region's loss of autonomy and its allegedly subordinate position in the unitary state. Their political, economic and cultural grievances were, and still are, numerous, and include their under-representation and inferior role in national decision-making councils; the attempts at 'Frenchification'; the neglect of their region's infrastructure and the rape and drain of its rich economic resources by successive Francophone regimes (see in particular All Anglophone Conference, 1993). Anglophone sentiments were fuelled as early as the late 1970s when the regime set out to exploit the newly discovered oil resources in their territory. Anglophones alleged that oil revenues were used to develop the Francophone region rather than their own and to feed the 'bellies' of the regime's allies (Bayart, 1989). The *Société nationale de raffinage* (Sonara), the oil refinery near Limbe (or Victoria most Anglophones now again prefer to call it), continued to be headed and largely staffed by Francophones.

³ The Constitution of the United Republic of Cameroon is reproduced in GONIDEC and BRETON (1976), pp. 55-62.

To reduce the potential danger of united Anglophone action, Ahidjo decided after the 'glorious revolution' to divide the erstwhile federated state of West Cameroon into two provinces, being well aware of the internal contradictions within the Anglophone community between the coastal/forest people in the South West Province and the grassfield people in the North West Province. The former had acquired a head start over the latter by being exposed to early contacts with Western trade, religion, and education. The intelligentsia that had emerged in the coastal areas, notably among the Bakweri, had quickly risen to the forefront in the nationalist struggle and had dominated the Anglophone political scene up to 1959. In 1959, however, there had been a transfer of power from the South West to the North West, when Foncha's KNDP defeated Endeley's ruling KNC. During the 1961 UN plebiscite, the inhabitants of the South West showed considerable sympathy for alignment with Nigeria, but the choice for Cameroon prevailed mainly on the strength of the votes in the North West. Since the early 1960s the North West elite has continued to play a dominant socio-economic and political role in both provinces, and its acquisition of the best jobs and lands in the South West has provoked strong resentment (Kofele-Kale, 1981). While these regional contradictions may be predominant within the Anglophone community, one should not overlook the ethnic contradictions *within* each of the two provinces (Ardener, 1967), stirred up from time to time by ethnic political entrepreneurs.

POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION AND ANGLOPHONE DEMANDS FOR A RETURN TO THE FEDERAL STATE

Lack of unity and severe repression precluded Anglophone leaders from openly expressing criticisms about Francophone domination until 1982, when Paul Biya took power, but in the wake of his introduction of a limited degree of liberalisation they began voicing their long-standing grievances.

In 1983 the government promulgated an order modifying the Anglophone General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination, making it similar to the *Baccalaureate*. The ensuing demonstrations and boycotts

of classes were brutally repressed by the police at the University of Yaoundé and in urban centers in Anglophone Cameroon (Nyamnjoh, 1996a). On 4 February 1984, president Biya, without warning and without popular consultation, unilaterally changed the official name of the country from United Republic of Cameroon to simply Republic of Cameroon, despite vehement protests that this was what independent Francophone Cameroon had been called by Ahidjo before reunification. The new name appeared to deny that the Cameroonian state was composed of two distinct entities. For Anglophones, this was clear evidence that, as far as Biya was concerned, the Anglophone territory and people had lost their identity and had become an indistinguishable part of the former Republic of Cameroon, thus carrying to its intended conclusion Ahidjo's designs to absorb and assimilate the Anglophone minority into the Francophone-dominated state. In 1985 a prominent Anglophone lawyer and paramount chief, Fon Gorji Dinka, was arrested after distributing a statement declaring the Biya government to be unconstitutional and calling for the Southern Cameroons to declare its independence and be re-baptised as the Republic of Ambazonia. Almost concurrently, two memoranda, submitted to the Bamenda Congress of the ruling UNC by members of the North West and South West elites resident in Douala, drew attention to the plight of the Anglophone minority, stressing that it felt sidelined from political power.

Other factors fuelled frustration with the Francophone-dominated state in the late 1980s. Prominent among them was the increasing monopolisation of key posts by members of the president's ethnic group, who proved much bolder in staking out claims to the state's resources than had Ahidjo's *barons*. As of August 1991, 37 of the 47 senior *préfets* were Beti, as were three-quarters of the directors and general managers of the parastatals, and 22 of the 38 high-ranking bureaucrats who had been appointed in the newly created bureau of the prime minister (Takougang, 1993). In addition, there was the deepening economic crisis, which Anglophones were inclined to attribute first and foremost to the corruption and mismanagement of Biya's regime. There was also great anxiety in Anglophone Cameroon that its major agro-industrial enterprises would be either liquidated or sold to Francophone or French

interests during the ongoing structural adjustment programme (Konings, 1996c).

It was not altogether surprising that in the wake of the emergent political liberalisation process in Africa the first opposition party in Cameroon appeared in the Anglophone territory. In 1990 the Social Democratic Front (SDF) was formed at Bamenda, the capital of the North West Province. Its chairman was John Fru Ndi, a bookdealer by profession, who was to achieve great popularity among the urban masses because of his courage and his populist style of leadership. After the massive rally to launch the SDF in May had ended in the deaths of six young Anglophones, the state-controlled media tried to disclaim the government's responsibility for this bloody event and to distort the facts (Nyamnjoh, 1996b). Leading members of Biya's ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), sharply condemned the Anglophones for this 'treacherous' action, and their reaction to this peaceful demonstration shocked many in the country.

In June 1990, the Anglophone architect of the federal state resigned as the first vice-president of the CPDM. As Foncha explained:

*The Anglophone Cameroonians whom I brought into union have been ridiculed and referred to as 'les Biafrais', 'les ennemis dans la maison', 'les traîtres' etc, and the constitutional provisions which protected this anglophone minority have been suppressed, their voice drowned while the rule of the gun replaced the dialogue which the Anglophones cherish very much.*⁴

Under considerable internal and external pressures, the government introduced a greater measure of political liberalisation. In December 1990 it announced the advent of multi-partyism, as well as a certain degree of freedom of mass communication and association, including the holding of public meetings and demonstrations. As a result, several political parties, pressure groups, and private newspapers were established in Cameroon which began to express and represent Anglophone interests.

Subsequently, the SDF spread its influence to the South West and soon became the major opposition party in Anglophone Cameroon. Never-

⁴ John Ngu Foncha's letter of resignation from the CPDM is reproduced in MUKONG (1990), p. 155.

theless, the elite in that province continued to be suspicious of the aspirations of the SDF leaders, fearing renewed North West domination. The leaders of the SDF helped to turn the Anglophone region into a veritable hotbed of rebellion, organizing several serious confrontations with the regime in power (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997). The impact of this on the Anglophone community was particularly visible during the ensuing presidential elections, when Fru Ndi received respectively 86.3 and 51.6 per cent of the votes cast in the North West and South West Provinces. The declared victory of Biya in October 1992 was obviously a traumatic experience in Anglophone Cameroon, and there were violent protests throughout the North West against his 'theft of Fru Ndi's victory'. The president imposed a state of emergency on this province for three months, and Fru Ndi was kept under surveillance in his house in Bamenda.

Paradoxically, although the SDF and Fru Ndi have contributed immensely to Anglophone consciousness and action, the party has increasingly presented itself as a 'national' organisation, evidenced by a growing number of Francophone supporters, most of them from the neighbouring West and Littoral Provinces. The SDF appears to have adopted a rather ambivalent attitude to calls from newly emerging pressure groups for a return to the federal state. Its 1992 national convention at Bamenda emphasised 'devolution of powers', and 'decentralisation' was the rhetorical focus the following year at Bafoussam, where the word 'federalism' was not used a single time by Fru Ndi. Although the party has maintained its half-hearted stand on the 'Anglophone problem', it has given the green light to its members to belong to any Anglophone movement they choose.

Following political liberalisation in 1990, many associations and pressure groups were created or reactivated by Anglophone elites to represent and defend their interests. Some of these, notably the Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM) and the Ambazonia Movement (AM) of Fon Gorji Dinka, advanced outright secession; but most initially championed a return to the federal state, in particular the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM) and the All Anglophone Congress (AAC). Other pro-federalist organisations with more restricted agendas included the Teachers' Association of Cameroon (TAC), the Confedera-

tion of Anglophone Parents-Teachers' Association of Cameroon (CAPTAC), and the Cameroon Anglophone Students' Association (CANSAs). In 1993 they forced the government to create a General Certificate of Education Board, signifying an important victory for the Anglophones in their ten-year-old struggle against determined efforts to destroy the GCE (Nyamnjoh, 1996a).

These associations and pressure groups have regularly promoted demonstrations, strikes and boycotts in their fight against the Francophone-dominated unitary state, and the participation of various strata of the population demonstrates that the 'Anglophone problem' can no longer be perceived as solely an elitist concern. Interestingly, these actions are directed partly against the discourses, myths, and symbols spread by the regime in power. Anglophone movements have boycotted the celebration of the national holiday on 20 May, the 'day of the 1972 glorious revolution', declaring it a 'day of mourning' and a 'day of shame'. They have instead called upon Anglophones to celebrate the 'day of independence' on 1 October and the 'day of the plebiscite' on 11 February. On these occasions in 1992 and 1993, attempts by CAM activists to hoist the federation flag were reportedly answered by the police with 'extreme brutality'.

One can now also hear increasing references to the 'Southern Cameroons' by those who allege that the proper procedures for the enactment and amendment of the federal constitution were not followed by Ahidjo (All Anglophone Conference, 1993). From this perspective, some Anglophones claim that they are living in a pre-reunification trust territory, and the flag of the United Nations has consequently been seen in recent years as a symbol of their belief in the continuing responsibility of the UN for the Southern Cameroons. Although the provocative reintroduction of such terminology has the advantage of reminding the inhabitants of the historical foundation for their Anglophone identity, Sindjoun (1996) has rightly observed that Anglophone identity can actually only be claimed by inhabitants belonging to one of the territory's 'indigenous' ethnic groups, a distinction which would tend to exclude (Francophone) immigrants from Southern Cameroons citizenship, and which makes being 'Anglophone' more of a geographic and adminis-

trative reality than a cultural one. Hence the references made to a fictitious 'eleventh province' for those who are seen and treated as 'Francophones of Anglophone culture'.⁵

A major challenge to the Francophone-dominated state occurred in April 1993, when four Anglophones, Sam Ekontang Elad, Simon Munzu, Benjamin Itoe, and Carlson Anyangwe convened an All Anglophone Conference (AAC) following the regime's announcement in March 1993 of a national debate on constitutional reform. Over 5,000 members of the Anglophone elite met at Buea, the ex-capital of the Southern Cameroons, 'for the purpose of adopting a common Anglophone stand on constitutional reform and of examining several other matters related to the welfare of ourselves, our posterity, our territory and the entire Cameroon nation' (All Anglophone Conference, 1993: 8).

The Buea Declaration listed multiple grievances about Francophone domination and called for a return to the federal state:

The imposition of the unitary state on Anglophone Cameroon in 1972 was unconstitutional, illegal and a breach of faith... The only redress adequate to right the wrongs done to Anglophone Cameroon and its people since the imposition of the unitary state is a return to the original form of government of the reunified Cameroon (All Anglophone Conference, 1993: 29).

Like previous documents written by similar pressure groups (Mukong, 1990), it tended to blame the wicked Francophones as a whole for the plight of the poor Anglophones, comparing the two in rather idealised terms: the former, in full unity, agree among themselves to oppress the latter who, by their very nature, are peace-loving, open to dialogue, and committed to freedom (Sindjoun, 1996; Louka, n.d.). Of course, such a demagogic approach, commonplace in ethno-regional discourse, serves to emphasise the 'insurmountable' dichotomy used to justify the AAC's call for autonomy. This approach may be effective in mobilising Anglophones, but it has hardly aided the struggle against their 'real' enemy - the Francophone-dominated unitary state, which has allies and opponents in all parts of the country. In addition, it denies the existence

⁵ Indeed, in June 1995, the national radio carried an announcement on the creation of 'une association des Francophones de culture anglophone'.

of various ethnic links between the Anglophone provinces and the neighbouring Francophone Littoral and West Provinces (Johnson, 1970), and it creates serious obstacles to any Francophone sympathy for the Anglophone cause.

In May 1993 the 65-member Anglophone Standing Committee established by the AAC submitted a draft constitution to the government-appointed Technical Committee for the Revision of the Constitution.⁶ This draft constitution proposed a loose form of federation which was clearly influenced by the recommendations of the 1961 Bamenda Conference. It also displayed remarkable similarities with the United States federal system, including a Federal House and Senate, a presidential system, and procedures for impeachment, as well as with the 1994 Nigerian federal draft constitution, which accommodated several power-sharing devices such as a system of a rotating presidency amongst the federated states and the development of criteria for the sharing of federal revenues (Olukoshi and Agbu, 1996).

In their introduction to the federal draft constitution, the authors claimed that the constitutional formula most likely to meet the varied aspirations, ideals and values of the people of the two founding territories of the Cameroonian state was

the federal system based on the tenets of democracy, restricted government as well as the division and distribution of power on the horizontal and vertical level (Federal Draft Constitution, p. III).

The authors admitted that their draft constitution was lengthy, containing no less than 309 articles, but they argued that such a detailed constitution was absolutely necessary in the specific Cameroonian context characterised by 'the Anglophone-Francophone divide, inter-ethnic suspicions and rivalries, bad governance, unequal distribution of the "national cake" and arbitrary and despotic government since independence and reunification' (Federal Draft Constitution, p. XV). Before addressing the structure of the federal state, they therefore devoted considerable attention to the basic principles of the federal state's politics and

⁶ See *Avant-Projet de Constitution de la République Fédérale du Cameroun*, Buea: AAC Standing Committee, 1993.

action. They stressed in particular the federal state's adherence to the tenets of liberal democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental liberties (freedom of conscience, religion, organisation, and press), equality before the law (equality of all citizens, the two official languages and the two component states), and good governance (the major political, economic, social, and cultural objectives the federal state should pursue).

As to the structure of the federal state, the authors proposed two levels of federation: an external federation composed of the erstwhile federated states of East and West Cameroon, and an internal federation composed of the provinces within each of the two federated states. By introducing an internal federation, the authors hoped to solve, or at least to diminish, the persistent problems of interethnic and inter-provincial conflicts over the unequal distribution of employment, social services and development projects. The proposed federal system would accord a large measure of political, economic, financial and fiscal autonomy to the two federated states, the provinces within each of the two federated states, and even the municipalities within the provinces. Articles 296-300 provided for a relatively limited number of tasks which were to fall under the exclusive authority of the federal state, notably national defence, foreign affairs, oil and other natural resources, and infrastructural facilities such as airports, harbours, and railways. A much larger number of tasks were to fall under the concurrent jurisdiction of the federal state, the federated states and the provinces. An additional list covered tasks reserved for exclusive municipal jurisdiction. Future federal legislation would have to establish the sources of revenue of the federal state, the two federated states, the provinces and municipalities, as well as the equitable distribution of these revenues, taking into account demographic data, the need for a regional development equilibrium, and the origins of the revenues (Article 294). A committee for the distribution of revenues was to be created, composed of six to ten members of each federated state, to make the necessary recommendations (Article 214).

The authors further proposed a strict separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judiciary:

- All legislative power was to be vested in the legislatures, which would be bicameral at all levels. The federal legislature would be composed of a Senate and a National Assembly, with the members of both chambers elected by direct universal suffrage. The Senate was intended to represent the two federated states on an equal basis. It would consist of twenty-four members from each federated state and two additional members from the region of the federal capital. The National Assembly, on the other hand, was to reflect the population of the federal state, with each member representing one hundred thousand inhabitants. In addition to separate sessions, the Senate and National Assembly would have three common sessions per year of two months each. The element of the 'second reading' from the 1961 federal constitution was to be reintroduced (Article 100).

The legislature of each federated state would be composed of a House of Representatives and a House of Traditional Chiefs. Members of both chambers would not be elected by direct universal suffrage. Each Provincial Assembly and each Conference of Traditional Chiefs would send an equal number of deputies, elected from amongst their members, to the House of Representatives and to the House of Chiefs. Interestingly, the prime ministers of the two federated states would be authorised to nominate an additional number of members to the House of Representatives, not exceeding one-fifth of the total number of its members. In making use of this prerogative, the prime ministers were to take care to nominate persons of high standing in society, representatives of the various socio-economic groups, and also members of the indigenous minority groups in each province who experienced difficulties in getting elected (Article 257).

The legislature of each province would be composed of a Provincial Assembly and a Conference of Traditional Chiefs. Four-fifths of the members of the Provincial Assembly were to be elected by direct universal suffrage, one for every electoral district. Like the prime ministers of the federated states, the governors of each province would have the prerogative to nominate one-fifth of the total membership of the Provincial Assembly to ensure an adequate representation of minority groups in the provinces (Article 278).

- As for the executive branch, the authors of the federal draft constitution opted for a presidential system at the federal level. The president of the federal republic would continue to be head of state, head of government, and head of the armed forces. The choice for a presidential system seems to have been made for two reasons. In the specific Cameroonian context marked by great ethnic and regional diversities, a presidential system, according to the authors, was more likely to forestall administrative chaos and political instability than any other form of government. Moreover, it would enable the party in power to design and implement its policies and to assume full responsibility for its actions. Nevertheless, the authors also recognized that government must be transparent, accountable, and restricted in the exercise of its powers to avoid the re-emergence of 'arbitrary and despotic' government in the country. That is why the draft constitution clearly stipulated that some acts of the president would need previous approval or confirmation by parliament and that others would need previous consultation with parliament or with institutions specifically designed for the purpose (Article 107). Every administrative act would be subject to judicial control. Furthermore, the president and the vice-president, like other public authorities, were to declare their assets to the newly created General Auditor of Public Accounts before taking office (Article 109). In the event of grave misconduct or malfeasance, they could even be removed from office (Article 106).

The president and vice-president were to be elected on a single list by direct universal suffrage. The federal draft constitution provided some guarantees that citizens of both federated states have access to the highest executive offices at the federal level. Like the 1961 federal constitution, the draft stipulated that the president and vice-president could not originate from the same federated state. Unlike the former, it proposed a rotary system. The office of president could not be held by the same person for more than two consecutive five-year terms and, more significantly, that person then had to be succeeded by a citizen of the other federated state. A similar rotary system would also apply to the highest executive authorities at the state and province levels.

The highest executive authorities at the level of the federated states were to be the prime minister and vice-prime minister, also elected on a single list by direct universal suffrage. They were not to originate from the same province, and after a maximum of two five-year mandates the retiring prime minister could not be succeeded by a citizen of the same province. The prime minister of a state would be accountable to the state legislative assembly and, like the president of the federal republic, would be subject to removal from office for serious misconduct or incapacity of whatever nature, provided at least two-thirds of the House of Representatives supported a motion to that effect (Article 263).

The highest authority at the provincial level would be the governor. While governors were formerly nominated by the head of state, the federal draft constitution proposed that they be elected by direct universal suffrage for a maximum of two four-year terms. The governor could not be then succeeded by a member of the same ethnic group or municipality. He could be removed from office by an absolute majority of the provincial assembly (Article 282).

- Turning now to the judiciary, the draft constitution outlined a justice system that closely resembled the one provided for in the 1961 federal constitution. The Chief Justice, presiding over the Federal Supreme Court, would head a justice system comprising a Federal Supreme Court, the Supreme Courts of the federated states, the Provincial Appeal Courts and other inferior and customary courts created by law. An Attorney General would head the Federal Ministry of Justice. Unlike the 1961 constitution, the 1993 draft strove to guarantee the independence of the judiciary at all levels. No member of the executive or legislative branch was to interfere with the exercise of judicial power.

Finally, the federal draft constitution provided for two ways of revising the constitution (Articles 300-1). The parliament could revise any part of the constitution on the condition that two-thirds of its members voted in favour. However, any proposal for amendments which might affect the unity or the federal or republican character of the state would require the verdict of the people in a referendum, and would be approved

only if at least sixty per cent of the electorates of both federated states participated in the referendum and endorsed the amendment.

This federal draft constitution was never seriously discussed by the Technical Committee for the Revision of the Constitution. The new constitution that was ultimately promulgated on 18 January 1996 completely disregarded the Anglophone demand for a return to the federal state and strongly upheld the unitary state.⁷

THE UNITARY STATE AND ANGLOPHONE CALLS FOR AUTONOMY AND SECESSION

Confronted with the government's persistent refusal to discuss the AAC constitutional proposals, the CAM, one of the key organisations affiliated to the AAC, spoke out on 3 December 1993 in favour of the 'zero option' - total independence for the Southern Cameroons. The CAM's shift from federalism to secessionism was more or less endorsed at the Second All Anglophone Conference (AAC II), organized in Bamenda from 29 April to 2 May 1994. It was decided there that if the government 'either persisted in its refusal to engage in meaningful constitutional talks or failed 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 of the Southern Cameroons, and take all measures necessary to secure, defend and preserve the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the said territory'.

The Bamenda Proclamation stated further that following any such declaration of independence, the Anglophone Council should 'without having to convene another session of the All Anglophone Conference, transform itself into the Southern Cameroons Constituent Assembly for the purpose of drafting, debating and adopting a constitution for the independent and sovereign state of the Southern Cameroons'. Delegates also voted to continue the AAC as the Southern Cameroons Peoples

⁷ See Law n° 96-06 of 18 January 1996 to amend the constitution of 2 June 1972. The 1996 constitution is reproduced in *L'Effort Camerounais* n° 40, 10-23 February 1996, pp. 4-11.

Conference (SCPC), and subsequently, in August 1994, the Anglophone Council was renamed the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC).

The SCNC has since made strenuous efforts to secure the wholehearted backing of the Anglophone community for its strategies to create an independent Southern Cameroons state, and it has also endeavoured to muster international support for its cause (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997). Several delegations were sent to the United Nations in 1995 to protest against 'the annexation of its ex-Trust Territory, the Southern Cameroons', and to petition it to intervene on behalf of the Anglophone minority. Such missions may not have yielded any tangible results, but they did give wide publicity to the Anglophone cause and they helped to discredit the Biya regime. The SCNC leaders also tried to block Cameroons' admission to the Commonwealth, and when this failed (Cameroon joined on 1 November 1995) they evidently adopted a new strategy. At the November 1995 Commonwealth summit in Auckland, New Zealand, they pled the case for a Quebec-style independence referendum for the Southern Cameroons, and filed an application for separate membership, although the Commonwealth, as an association of sovereign and independent states, is generally adverse to admitting 'separatist movements of minority groups'.

The SCNC eventually set 1 October 1996 for the declaration of independence for the Southern Cameroons, but that date came and passed with nothing but an 'Independence Day' address by its new chairman, Henry Fossung, in which he called upon Southern Cameroonians to use their 'national day' as 'a day of prayers', asking God 'to save us from political bondage', and reiterating that independence was 'irreversible and non-negotiable'. In 1997 the Biya government alleged that the SCNC had created a youth guerrilla movement. Between 28 and 31 March 1997 several gendarmerie posts and government offices in the North West Province were attacked by armed men suspected of being SCNC guerrillas. These events triggered a campaign of brutal repression by government security forces in the North West.⁸

⁸ *Jeune Afrique*, n° 1892, 9-15 April 1997, pp 13-15

The Francophone-dominated state has employed various strategies to deal with Anglophone claims for autonomy and secession. The Biya government has regularly attempted to play down the Anglophone-Francophone divide by pointing out that it did not exist in the German colonial era. At the same time, it continues to emphasise that Cameroon is officially a bilingual and multicultural nation, claiming this guarantees the preservation of its differential linguistic and cultural heritage. It has often argued, moreover, that the unitary state is the outcome of the massive endorsement of the Cameroonian people, voluntarily expressed during the 1972 referendum. In reply to the Anglophone demand for a return to the federal state, Biya has argued, like Ahidjo, that that would be costly, weak as far as state power is concerned, and divisive, fostering ethnic and regional sentiments rather than national consciousness. From the very start, Biya has also tried to equate federalism with secession, and for years he has used this to justify a strategy of repression. While persistently refusing to discuss the federal or so-called 'two-state option', he has regularly declared in public that he is willing to concede some degree of decentralisation to the existing ten provinces, still within the unitary state. He has never made any consistent effort, though, to implement this so-called 'ten-state option'.

There is ample evidence that the regime's views on the 'Anglophone problem' are shared by most Francophones, who have repeatedly pointed out that several regions in the Francophone part of the country are more marginalised than the Anglophone region. Aren't such regions, then, more entitled than the Anglophone one to demand a federal state or secession? Many Francophones also argue that the Francophone-Anglophone dichotomy has been exaggerated by some Anglophone 'power-seekers', and they point in particular to the existing close relations between certain ethnic groups in the Anglophone provinces and those in neighbouring Francophone areas. Such relations, in fact, were one of the major reasons why many Francophone supporters of the SDF in the Littoral and West Provinces proposed a federation of states based on two differently constituted entities: the two Anglophone provinces and the Francophone West and Littoral Provinces together as one state, and the remainder of Francophone Cameroon as the other.

In a recent article, Olinga (1994), a Francophone scholar, has come close to Biya's efforts to minimise the 'Anglophone problem' and to counteract the Anglophone demands for autonomy by promising a larger degree of decentralisation for the ten existing provinces. Olinga argues that the introduction of a decentralised state structure, possibly - but not necessarily - based on the existing ten provinces, would kill two birds with one stone. First, decentralisation offers a neat formula to fulfil the widespread desire for a larger measure of autonomy in both the Anglophone and Francophone parts of the country, as well as to avoid the current 'dramatisation' of the Anglophone-Francophone divide. Second, decentralisation will bring about a significant - and necessary - modernisation of the country's administration, providing the state with an adequate tool to experiment with new forms to manage its geographical, human and socio-political space. Olinga concludes that if one abstracts the 'Anglophone problem' from its historical context, it is merely a problem of the Cameroonian state, which should take more seriously the potential benefits of a decentralised state structure. An anonymous Francophone author appears to arrive at a similar conclusion:

Au Cameroun, la question des Anglophones en tant que tels apparaît moins comme un problème de minorité nationale que comme un problème des institutions de l'Etat et de leur fonctionnement. Il n'y a pas que les Anglophones, il y a également le nord et l'ouest dont les rapports tendus avec le pouvoir central ne revêt pas un caractère linguistique.⁹

Finally, one should not overlook the fact that Biya's views are equally supported by some members of the Anglophone elite who are closely allied to the regime in power. Biya has often used his Anglophone allies for the defence of the unitary state, and they have been adequately rewarded. Paradoxically, the 'Anglophone problem' has enhanced the chances of such Biya loyalists to be appointed to government posts previously reserved for Francophones. Obviously, the decision to enhance the position of Anglophones in the state apparatus is designed to belie charges that they only play second fiddle in the Francophone-domi-

⁹ L.P., 'Les minorités nationales', *Le Courrier des ACP*, n° 140, July-August 1993, p. 81. For similar views, see LOUKA (n.d.).

nated unitary state, and simultaneously to recruit new members of the Anglophone elite into the 'hegemonic alliance' (Bayart, 1979).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to show that the current crisis of the nation-state project in Cameroon must largely be viewed in terms of the 'Anglophone problem'. For Anglophones, the 1961 federal constitution has remained a historical and symbolic reference point for their opposition to the Francophone-dominated unitary state and their pursuit of self-determination and autonomy. In the wake of political liberalisation in the early 1990s, Anglophone interests came to be represented first and foremost by various associations and pressure groups that initially called for a return to the federal state, a process which culminated in the 1993 federal draft constitution. This document aimed at correcting the 'historical error' of the 1961 constitutional arrangement providing for a highly centralised form of federalism, and it laid down instead a framework for a 'loose' form of federation. The latter has always been advocated by the leadership of the Anglophone minority as a safeguard for the equality of the two partners and as a way of preserving the cultural heritage and identity of each.

It was only after the persistent refusal of the Biya government to discuss this scenario that secession, which used to be covertly debated by a limited few, became an overt option of mounting popularity. The government's denial of any 'Anglophone problem' in Cameroon and its determination to defend the unitary state by all available means, including repression, could still lead to an escalation of Anglophone demands past a point of no return. In any confrontation in the near future, however, the government can count on the support of most Francophones and a minority of the Anglophone elite who are closely allied to the regime in power. The latter equally condemn Anglophone actions for a return to a federal state or outright secession, favouring instead the government's proposed alternative project of a 'decentralised, unitary state'. That plan was eventually incorporated into the 1996 revised constitution with little further elaboration.

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