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Anglophone university students and Anglophone nationalist struggles in Cameroon

Piet Konings

Although the current generation of Anglophone students in Cameroon feels even more marginalized than their Francophone counterparts because of their Anglophone identity, they have actually displayed a rather ambivalent attitude towards the Francophone-dominated regime that they hold responsible for their predicament. On the one hand, there are students who are seen as rebels and heroes. They have played a vanguard role in the Anglophone protest and, following political liberalization, have formed the leadership of the most militant Anglophone nationalist movement. However on the other hand, there are students who are seen as both predators and victims of the regime. They have been prepared to join the youth militia created by the regime to combat Anglophone organizations in exchange for a share in the ever-diminishing state resources.

Introduction

The dramatic changes that have been affecting the position of university students in African countries since the 1980s are being highlighted in an increasing number of studies (cf. Kpatinde 1991, Cruise O'Brien 1996, Lebeau 1997, Federici *et al.* 2000). Students in the first decades following African independence belonged to the most privileged group in the political system and were assured the desired elite status after graduation, but successive generations have been faced with deteriorating living and study conditions on campuses and bleak prospects after graduating.

African universities are in deep crisis nowadays (cf. Lebeau & Ogunsanya 2000, Nyamnjoh & Jua 2002). Academic standards have been falling rapidly because universities lack the basic infrastructure needed to cope with the massive growth in the student population (Mbembe 1985, Tedga 1988, Lebeau 1997, Konings 2002) and the severe economic crisis and the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) are aggravating the situation further. The increasing withdrawal of state support for universities, university students and university graduates is seen in the drastic cuts in university budgets, the imposition of tuition fees and additional levies on the student population, and a virtual halt in the recruitment of new graduates into already over-sized state bureaucracies (Caffentzis 2000). Many graduates are finding themselves obliged to defer their entry into adulthood indefinitely as they are unable to achieve economic independence, to marry and start a family of their own. They are also being forced to abandon their aspirations for elite status.

Given these conditions, the question to be posed is: how is the current generation of African university students reacting to their growing marginalization? Most of the existing studies (cf. Kpatinde 1991, Federici 2000, Amutabi 2002) claim that these students have refused to become a 'lost' or 'abandoned' generation (Cruise O'Brien 1996: 56). To bring about the needed reforms in the university system and society at large they have instead become engaged in struggles against the corrupt and authoritarian political elite whom they hold responsible for their predicament and have received the support of other groups including secondary school students, their teachers and organized labour, all of whom feel equally marginalized by the state (Bratton & Van de Walle 1992, Albert 1995). In a few countries they have been at the forefront of struggles for political liberalization (Smith 1997) but in most they have increased the intensity of their struggles after the introduction of political liberalization. It has created more space for students to voice their multiple grievances, to organize and to establish alliances with newly founded opposition parties and civil-society organizations. While in the past, with few exceptions, African student protest was sporadic, today it has become endemic in many countries, continuing year after year in spite of frequent university closures in what appears to have become protracted warfare. Federici and Caffentzis (2000: 115-50) have published a chronology of African university students' struggles between 1985 and 1998 that provides an impressive list of the violent confrontations between students and the forces of law and order in African states.

Some of the existing studies also attempt to explain why both parties appear to prefer violence to dialogue and negotiations in solving student problems. They emphasize that government authorities continue to look upon students as 'minors' or 'cadets' who, according to African tradition, should listen to their elders and simply obey orders. These officials therefore often fail to take

students and their grievances seriously and usually refuse to create channels of regular communication or to enter into peaceful negotiations. They continue to present students as a privileged and unproductive minority group that, on the basis of state largesse, is being offered the opportunity to prepare itself for its future leading role in national reconstruction. Consequently, students are expected to express their gratitude to the state through 'responsible' behaviour, devoting their time to study and not to politics (Mbembe 1985: 53).¹ In these circumstances, the use of violence has different meanings for the different actors. For students, it is often the only means of pressing home their demands to the government authorities. For government officials, it serves as a deterrent to the cadets from engaging in any similar 'irresponsible' behaviour in the future. As a result of increasing student activism, African governments have been inclined to treat students as if they were their countries' major enemies, turning campuses into war zones. Police intervention and the occupation of campuses by security forces are becoming routine in many places and so is the presence of intelligence officers and police informants in classrooms (Felici 2000, Amutabi 2002, Konings 2002).

While the existing body of literature has helped to underscore the growing importance of student politics in Africa, it nevertheless tends to present a one-sided picture, usually considering students as a homogeneous group, notably rebels and heroes. The situation is obviously more complex. Besides the rebels, there are students who tend to conform to the state model of student behaviour which the President of Cameroon, Paul Biya, defined in 1991 as follows: '*La politique aux politiciens, l'école aux écoliers*' (Konings 2002). They usually project themselves as responsible students who refuse to participate in any form of student activism, claiming that they have no other interest than advancing their academic careers. In addition, there are students who are designated as victims and predators alike. Unlike the rebels, they still appear to have faith in the state as a vehicle for upward mobility. They belong to the group of citizens that, as Bratton (1989: 414-15) has acutely observed, 'remains drawn to the state, because, even in diminished circumstances, it remains a major source of spoils and one of the available channels for getting what little there is to get'. They are eager to seek favours from the state in exchange for their expressed loyalty to the regime and its ideology and their offers of rendering services to the state. This is a group of clients that can be easily manipulated by the ruling regime to do any 'dirty work', especially in recruiting for the militia that were

¹ Although they have often warned students that the university is a temple of learning and not a haven of politics, one-party and military regimes have never discouraged student motions and demonstrations of support. They have often even encouraged the creation of a youth wing at universities.

created by the state to combat student rebels and other opponents of the regime.

In this chapter, I focus on Anglophone students in Cameroon, who feel even more marginalized than their Francophone counterparts because of the allegedly second-class citizenship of Anglophones in the post-colonial Francophone-dominated state. In the first section I briefly describe the development of the Anglophone identity, nationalism and organization. This serves as a background for my subsequent discussion of the role of Anglophone students in their current struggles against Francophone dominance. In the second section, I argue that Anglophone students have played a vanguard role in Anglophone protest actions in the wake of Paul Biya's accession to power in 1982. In the third section, I show that two new Anglophone youth organizations have emerged during political liberalization, in which students are playing a leading role. These organizations clearly differ in their attitude towards the Francophone-dominated state.

On the one hand, there is the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) that has identified itself with the Anglophone struggle to such an extent that its members are even prepared to defer their entry into adulthood and elite status until the 'Anglophone problem' has been solved. It agrees with the leadership of the newly created Anglophone movements on the main aim of the Anglophone struggles – namely the creation of an independent Anglophone state – but it disagrees with their strategy of realizing this objective. In sharp contrast to the Anglophone elite who have continued to pursue independence through peaceful negotiations, the SCYL opted for armed struggle after Paul Biya's persistent refusal to enter into any meaningful negotiations with the Anglophone movements.

On the other hand, the President Biya's Youths (PRESBY) has claimed to be opposed to the Anglophone struggle, having expressed its undivided loyalty to President Biya and his 'New Deal' ideals in exchange for a share in the ever-diminishing pool of state resources, thus facilitating their entry into adulthood and elite status. PRESBY has been transformed by the regime into a militia that intimidates and terrorizes the SCYL and other Anglophone organizations.

The development of Anglophone nationalism and organization

The emergence and development of what has come to be called the 'Anglophone problem' has been explained by several authors (cf. Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997, 2000, 2003, Nkoum-Me-Ntseny 1996, Eyoh 1998). Most agree that its roots can be traced back to the partitioning after the First World war of the erstwhile German Kamerun Protectorate (1884-1916) between the



Map 7.1: Cameroon

French and English victors, first as mandates under the League of Nations and later as trusts under the United Nations. Following this partitioning, the British acquired two narrow and non-contiguous regions bordering Nigeria in the western part of the country. The southern part, and the focus of this chapter, was christened Southern Cameroons, while the northern part became known as Northern Cameroons.² Significantly, the British territory was much smaller than the French, comprising only about one fifth of the total area and population of the former German colony.

The partitioning of the territory into English and French spheres had some significant consequences for future political developments. Importantly, it laid the foundation for the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities in the territory and the populations of each sphere came to see themselves as a distinct community, defined by differences in language and inherited colonial traditions of education, law, public administration and worldview. 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 part of Nigeria, leading to a blatant neglect of its socio-economic development and an increasing migration of Nigerians, notably Igbos, to the Southern Cameroons where they came to dominate the regional economy.

With the approaching independence of Nigeria in 1960, the population of the British Trust Territory had to decide on its own political future. It soon became evident that the majority of the Southern Cameroonians would opt for the creation of an independent state. That their expressed wish was eventually not honoured must be attributed to two main factors. First, internal divisions among the Anglophone political elite prevented them from rallying behind the majority option in the territory. Second, and maybe even more importantly, the United Nations refused, with the complicity of the British, to put the option of an independent Southern Cameroons state to the voters in the UN-organized plebiscite of 11 February 1961 on the grounds that the creation of another tiny state was politically undesirable (and likely to contribute to a further 'Balkanization' of Africa) and economically unviable. Being deprived of this preferred option, Southern Cameroonians were given what amounted to Hobson's choice: independence by joining Nigeria or reunification with Francophone Cameroon, which had become independent in 1960 under the new name of the Republic of Cameroon. In the end, they chose the lesser of the two evils

² During the 1961 UN-organized plebiscite on the political future of the British Trust Territory, the Northern Cameroons voted for integration into Nigeria. For the history of the Northern Cameroons, see, for instance, Le Vine (1964) and Welch (1966).

but their vote in favour of reunification appeared to be more a rejection of continuous ties with Nigeria, which had proved to be harmful to Southern Cameroonian development, than a vote for union with Francophone Cameroon, a territory with a different cultural heritage and that at the time was involved in a violent civil war (Joseph 1977).

By reuniting with the former French Cameroon, the Anglophone political elite had hoped to enter into a loose federal union as a way of protecting their territory's minority status and cultural heritage. Instead, it soon became evident that the Francophone political elite preferred a highly centralized, unitary state as a means of promoting national unity and economic development. While the Francophone elite received strong support from the French during constitutional negotiations, the Anglophone elite was virtually abandoned by the British who deeply resented the Southern Cameroons option for reunification with Francophone Cameroon (Awasom 2000). As a result, rumours quickly spread through the region that Charles de Gaulle looked upon the Southern Cameroons as 'a small gift of the Queen of England to France' (Jua & Konings forthcoming). In the end, during constitutional talks at Foumban in July 1961, the Francophone elite was only prepared to accept a highly centralized federation, regarding it as merely a transitional phase to a unitary state. Such a federation demanded relatively few amendments to the 1960 constitution of the Republic of Cameroon. In his recent book, Pierre Messmer (1998: 134-35), one of the last French high commissioners in Cameroon and a close advisor of President Ahmadou Ahidjo, admitted that he and others knew at the time that the so-called federal constitution provided merely a 'sham federation', which was 'save for appearance, an annexation of West Cameroon (the new name of the Southern Cameroons after reunification)'.³ Under the new constitution, West Cameroon lost most of the limited autonomy it had enjoyed as part of the Nigerian federation (Ardener 1967, Stark 1976). When Ahidjo created a unitary state in 1972 in blatant disregard for constitutional provisions, there was in reality little left of the federation, except perhaps in name (Benjamin 1972). To reduce the danger of any future united Anglophone action, Ahidjo then decided to divide the erstwhile federated state of West Cameroon into two provinces, albeit well aware of the internal contradictions within the Anglophone community between the coastal-forest people in South West Province and the Grassfields people in North West Province (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: 211-13). What many regarded as one of the last visible symbols of the 1961 union

³ Following reunification, the Federal Republic of Cameroon consisted of the federated state of East Cameroon (formerly French Cameroon) and the federated state of West Cameroon (formerly Southern Cameroons).

was removed in 1984 when Ahidjo's successor, Paul Biya, abolished the appellation 'United Republic of Cameroon' and replaced it with 'Republic of Cameroon', which was, significantly, the name of the Francophone part of the country when it became independent in 1960.

An even more decisive factor in the development of the Anglophone problem, however, was the nation-state project after reunification. For the Anglophone population, nation-building has been driven by the firm determination of the Francophone political elite to dominate the Anglophone minority in the post-colonial state and to erase the cultural and institutional foundations of Anglophone identity. 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-ranking positions in the administration, the military and parastatals (cf. Kofele-Kale 1986, Takougang & Krieger 1998). There is general agreement that Anglophones have been exposed to a carefully considered policy aimed at eroding their language and institutions even though Francophone political leaders had assured their Anglophone counterparts during the 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 substantially from its rich resources, particularly oil. Gradually this created an Anglophone consciousness: the feeling of being recolonized and marginalized in all spheres of public life and thus of being second-class citizens in their own country. The co-optation of the Anglophone elite into the 'hegemonic alliance' (Bayart 1979) and the autocratic nature of the post-colonial regimes prevented Anglophones from openly organizing in defence of their interests until political liberalization in the early 1990s.

Given the deep resentment in the Anglophone region of Francophone dominance in the post-colonial state, it is not surprising that the country's first opposition party emerged in Anglophone Cameroon. In 1990 the Social Democratic Front (SDF) was formed in Bamenda, the capital of the North West Province, demanding liberalization of public space and capitalizing on popular frustrations among Anglophones after three decades of marginalization. Its chairman was John Fru Ndi, who was to enjoy widespread popularity among the urban masses because of his courage and populist style of leadership. After a massive rally to launch the SDF on 26 May 1990 ended in the death of six young Anglophones, the state-controlled media tried to deny government responsibility for this bloody event and to distort the facts. Leading members of the ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), strongly condemned the Anglophones for this 'treacherous action' and what they considered the premature birth of multipartyism in the post-colonial state.

Their reaction to this peaceful demonstration shocked many people. Anglophone Cameroonians were termed 'Biafrans', referred to as 'enemies in the house' and were asked by the then Minister of Territorial Administration, Ibrahim Mbombo Njoya, 'to go elsewhere' if they were dissatisfied with national unity.

The leaders of the SDF helped to turn the Anglophone region into a veritable hotbed of rebellion leading to fierce confrontations with the regime in power, especially during the 1991-92 'ghost town' campaign, which was essentially a prolonged demonstration of civil disobedience organized by the SDF and the allied opposition parties to force the Biya government to hold a sovereign national conference (Mbu 1993). The impact of this on the Anglophone community was particularly visible during the ensuing presidential elections when Fru Ndi received 86.3 per cent and 51.6 per cent of the votes cast in the North West and South West Provinces respectively. It is hardly surprising that Biya's declared victory in these fraudulent elections was a traumatic experience in Anglophone Cameroon that sparked off violent protests throughout the North West against his 'theft of Fru Ndi's victory'.

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 evidenced by its growing membership in Francophone Cameroon, notably among the neighbouring Bamileke, who are closely related to the ethnic groups in the North West Province and are inclined to see the SDF as a springboard to political power (Socpa 2002). Subsequently, Anglophone interests came to be first and foremost represented and defended by associations and pressure groups that had been created by the Anglophone elite in the aftermath of political liberalization in December 1990.

The newly created Anglophone movements were able to place the Anglophone problem on the national and international agenda. In April 1993, they organized the First All Anglophone Conference (AAC I) in Buea, the former capital of West Cameroon. It turned out to be a landmark in the history of Anglophone Cameroon, bringing together over 5,000 members of the Anglophone elite. Significantly, some leading members of the old-guard politicians or 'Foumban generation', like John Ngu Foncha and Solomon Tandeng Muna (the Anglophone architects of reunification), expressed their satisfaction with the meeting and apologized for their shortcomings in representing Anglophone interests, especially during the federation era, and handed over the relay baton to a new generation of Anglophone technocrats, the leaders of the newly created Anglophone movements (Wache & Fualefeh 1993). The Buea Declaration, which was issued after this historic meeting, listed the numerous Anglophone grievances about Francophone domination, assimilation and exploitation, and

called for the return to a two-state (Anglophone-Francophone) federation (All Anglophone Conference 1993).

The Biya government's persistent refusal to enter into any negotiations caused a growing radicalization among Anglophone movements. In the so-called Bamenda Proclamation, adopted by the Second All Anglophone Conference (AAC II) held in Bamenda from 29 April-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 leadership would 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' (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: 218-20).

Following the AAC II, the Anglophone movements provocatively re-introduced the name of Southern Cameroons to refer to the Anglophone territory in an attempt 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 the Republic of Cameroon'.⁴ The umbrella organization of all the Anglophone movements was subsequently named the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC). Its leadership soon adopted a secessionist stand, striving for an independent Southern Cameroons state through peaceful negotiations with the regime, the 'sensitization' of the regional population and a diplomatic offensive. A sense of euphoria spread through Anglophone Cameroon when a SCNC delegation returned from a mission to the United Nations in 1995. During rallies attended by huge crowds in several Anglophone towns, the delegation displayed a huge UN flag, claiming it had received it from the United Nations to show that the Southern Cameroons was still a UN trust territory and that independence was only a matter of time.⁵

From 1996 onwards, however, Anglophone movements appeared to lose their initial momentum. Two factors were primarily responsible for this development. First, the Biya government was able to neutralize the Anglophone

movements to a large extent by employing a number of well-known tactics including divide-and-rule, co-opting Anglophone leaders into the regime, and severe repression. Second, there was the problem of leadership. With the resignation of its founding fathers, the SCNC lacked competent and committed leadership. Given the leadership problem and the government's reluctance to enter into any negotiations, a generational conflict developed within the Anglophone movements between the new generation of Anglophone leaders, who continued to adhere to a negotiated separation from *La République du Cameroun*,⁶ and the youths, who had concluded that the independence of Southern Cameroons would only be achieved through armed struggle. The Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) in particular opted for the latter strategy.

However, it would be a grave error to assume that the Anglophone movements became fully paralyzed or even defeated by divisive and repressive government tactics and their own organizational and strategic shortcomings. Of late, Anglophone struggles appear to have acquired new impetus. On 30 December 1999, Justice Frederick Alobwede Ebong, an SCNC activist with close ties to the SCYL, took over the Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) station in Buea proclaiming the restoration of the independence of the former British Southern Cameroons. This was followed by the nomination of a provisional government and the announcement of a coat of arms, a flag and a national anthem.

Significantly, due to these and past events, an increasing number of the pro-government Anglophone and Francophone elite now acknowledge, after long years of public denial, that there is indeed an Anglophone problem. In January 1999, even President Biya admitted for the first time, albeit in a dismissive fashion, that such a problem existed, even if he perceived it as one created by a handful of hotheads and vandals. Still, he has not yet shown any interest in negotiating with Anglophone movements in spite of regular appeals by Anglophone, Francophone and international dignitaries for dialogue to find a solution to the Anglophone problem.⁷

⁴ SCNC press release reprinted in *Cameroon Post*, 16-23 August 1994, p. 3.

⁵ The SCNC leaders alleged that the proper procedures for the enactment and amendment of the federal constitution had not been followed by Ahidjo and that Francophone Cameroon had seceded from the union in 1984 when the Biya government unilaterally changed the country's name from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon, the name of independent Francophone Cameroon prior to reunification. From this perspective, they claimed that the Trust Territory of Southern Cameroons had never really ceased to exist or had been revived. They therefore still believed in continued UN responsibility for the Southern Cameroons.

⁶ 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 replottting of the country's constitutional history as a progressive consolidation of the recolonization and annexation of Anglophone Cameroon by the post-colonial Francophone-dominated state. See Eyoh (1998: 264).

⁷ For example, during his visit to Cameroon in May 2000, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan pleaded for dialogue between Anglophone and Francophone leaders.

The vanguard role of Anglophone students in Anglophone nationalist struggles

In the wake of the limited degree of liberalization that Paul Biya introduced after assuming power in November 1982 (Takougang & Krieger 1998: 76-78), Anglophone students at the University of Yaoundé were the first to voice long-standing Anglophone grievances. Their initiative can be explained by the many hardships they experienced at the University of Yaoundé – the only university in Cameroon until the 1993 university reforms (Konings 2002). Though officially a bilingual institution, the University of Yaoundé has clearly remained a Francophone institute. Not only is it based on the French university system but courses are mostly given in French, thus putting English-speaking students at a disadvantage.

Government announcements of educational reforms in 1983 fuelled discontent among Anglophone students, which eventually led to their spontaneous organization. In September of that year, the Minister of National Education promulgated an order modifying the Anglophone General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination by making it similar to the *Baccalauréat*. The order was apparently intended to facilitate the entry of Anglophone students into professional and technical institutes in Cameroon, which were exclusively based on the French system. Anglophone students, however, interpreted the proposed reform as a subtle attempt by the Francophone-dominated state to absorb the Anglophone educational system. They maintained that the problem of Anglophone exclusion from the country's professional and technical institutes could not be resolved by assimilation but rather by the creation of institutes based on the English system.

The students used the unpopular educational reform issue to express some of their other grievances, including the dismissal of Dr Bisong, an Anglophone lecturer in the Faculty of Law and Economics, simply because he refused to yield to pressure by Francophone students to teach in French. In a petition addressed to the Minister of National Education, they took up the matter as follows:

With regard to the University of Yaoundé, we strongly condemn the discrimination in the teaching languages as glaringly exemplified by the ignominious suppression of the accountancy courses offered in English by Dr Bisong for the sole reason that such courses were offered in English. The Francophone students of the department had protested to the Chancellor of the University that such important courses could not be delivered in English. Immediately Dr Bisong was accused of inefficient delivery of his lessons and they were handed over to a Francophone lecturer. The

inefficiency was surely the use of the wrong language and not the substance of academic stuff delivered.⁸

They demanded his immediate and unconditional reinstatement, and called for a more rigorous policy of bilingualism based on justice, equality and academic honesty.

They then began to demonstrate and boycott classes. Instead of looking for ways to solve their grievances, government and university authorities initially tried to crush the students' actions by using extreme police brutality. This strengthened the students' belief that the authorities had no genuine concern for their plight. The situation did not calm down until eleven days later when students were informed that the Anglophone president of the National Assembly, Solomon Tandeng Muna, along with other Anglophone political elites, was to transmit an important message to them from the head of state. During the meeting, Muna said that the head of state was requesting that the students go back to class and pursue their studies while their grievances and other matters affecting their education received appropriate attention. He stressed that none of them would be allowed to raise any questions about the president's message because no parliamentarian would ever dare to do so. Expecting the students' respect either as the president of parliament where their parents met to discuss important issues, or at least as their 'white-haired grandfather', he asked them to applaud the president's message and to go back to class calmly and quietly, adding that 'a word to the wise is enough'. But the most radical students were not yet willing to listen to their elders and questioned the authenticity of the message since no written statement signed by the president had been handed over to the students during the meeting. They only agreed to call off the strike when the full presidential message was broadcast nationwide in the evening, announcing the installation of a commission of highly qualified and experienced Anglophones and Francophones to look into the students' grievances. It is striking that no report has ever been published by this commission and that Anglophone struggles for the preservation of the GCE have continued to the present day (Nyamnjoh 1996: 19-39).

In an open letter in 1985, Anglophone students urgently appealed to their parents 'to assume squarely their responsibilities before history concerning the grave [Anglophone] identity situation and help solve the problem'. They summed up the Anglophone population's multitude of grievances and those of the Anglophone students in particular and requested their parents take imme-

⁸ Petition of English-speaking students from the University of Yaoundé to the Minister of National Education, dated 19 November 1983, reproduced in Mukong (1990: 26).

diate action: 'apart from drawing up a new constitution, justice also requires the establishment of a fully-fledged English-speaking university based on the educational principles we cherish'. Should their parents fail to solve the Anglophone problem, they threatened to resort to violent action in the future.⁹ Apparently, this letter was not supported by the entire Anglophone student population. A group calling itself 'The Anglophone Students of the New Deal'¹⁰ strongly protested against the behaviour of students 'who falsely claim that the Anglophone community is being oppressed and threaten to disturb the scarcity and peace of our United Kingdom'. These 'subversive' elements should instead 'take stock of the achievements of the Man of the New Deal [Paul Biya] towards better integration of all ethnic and linguistic communities'. Most probably, this protest action had been organized by the then single party that used some Anglophone students to discredit their colleagues and the Anglophone cause in exchange for immediate or future rewards.¹¹

Relations between Anglophone students, the government and the university authorities rapidly deteriorated from the early 1990s onwards. On 26 May 1990, a group of students, most of them Anglophones, marched in support of launching the SDF in Bamenda and the introduction of multipartyism in the country. The government press accused them of singing the Nigerian national anthem (Kamto 1993). The implication of this false claim was that Anglophones did not see themselves as Cameroonians but rather as Nigerians or – even more common in government discourse – secessionist Biafrans. Subsequently, the gendarmes harassed and brutalized the demonstrators, looted their property and arrested about three hundred of them. This march by Anglophone students incited disaffection and resentment among the autochthonous Beti population on and off campus, which tended to support the ruling CPDM party led by President Biya, who was himself a Beti.¹² Some Beti landlords even threatened to remove Anglophone students from their houses. To forestall any

⁹ Open letter to all English-speaking parents of Cameroon from the English-speaking students of the North West and South West Provinces, dated 20 August 1985, reproduced in Mukong (1990: 109-19).

¹⁰ After assuming power in 1982, Paul Biya promised the Cameroonian people a New Deal.

¹¹ The Anglophone Students of the New Deal, 'Open Letter to the Cameroonian Patriotic Students of the North West and South West', reproduced in Nyamnjoh (1996: 64-68).

¹² It is important to emphasize here that the name 'Beti' as an ethnic label is a historically circumscribed construct and subject to constant change. Since the 1980s, the term has come to cover a number of ethnic groups in the Centre and South Provinces of Cameroon, in particular the Bulu and Eton or Ewondo. President Biya belongs to the Bulu group. See Socpa (2002).

further student protests, the regime stationed gendarmes permanently on campuses.

As I have shown elsewhere (Konings 2002), the political liberalization process that started in December 1990 not only created space for students to organize in defence of their interests but also tended to encourage a further polarization among student factions along party and ethno-regional lines. On the one hand, there emerged what was initially called the National Coordination of Cameroon Students that later changed its name to the Students' Parliament or simply 'Parliament'. It was by far the largest student union on campus. The core of its membership and leadership was formed by Anglophone and Bamileke students who in common parlance are often referred to as 'Anglo-Bami' students. Parliament soon came under the influence of the opposition parties, notably the SDF. It agreed with the opposition that the regime had to be overthrown in order to bring about real change in society at large and within the university in particular. Anglophone members also participated in the Anglophone struggles. Following AAC I and the Buea Declaration in 1993, they created the Cameroon Anglophone Students' Association (CANSAs), which operated under the umbrella of the SCNC and participated in various actions undertaken by the SCNC. Parliament members often presented themselves as revolutionaries who were prepared to use all the means at their disposal, including demonstrations, strikes and acts of vandalism, should the regime and the university authorities fail to listen to or give in to their demands.

On the other hand, a Committee for Self-Defence, a vigilante group or militia, was set up by the regime to counteract the actions of Parliament. Its membership and leadership was mainly made up of Beti students. Nevertheless, some students from other ethnic groups were also part of the Self-Defence group, for example, a few of its leaders were Anglophone and Bamileke students. They 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 organization of responsible students who were prevented from peacefully continuing their studies by the political actions of Parliament 'rebels' and 'vandals'. The Self-Defence group was well rewarded for its services: its members were given cash and, in some cases, free accommodation. A few leaders were even given lucrative jobs after graduation despite the freeze on public-sector employment. Since the Committee for Self-Defence was made up of only a small minority of students, they were allowed to carry weapons – clubs, knives and pistols – to attack Parliament members and sympathizers. It usually worked closely with other, even more extremist, 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 claimed that the Anglo-Bami students should

either recognize Beti control or 'go home'. Following the formation of the Committee for Self-Defence and the Beti vigilante groups, which received logistic support from the forces of law and order, Parliament created its own commandos to fight these hostile groups and to protect its members.

The University of Yaoundé barely functioned from 1990 to 1996, with university life being repeatedly paralyzed by student protests and unprecedented violent confrontations between the two camps. I mention here only the three most important confrontations. The first was in 1991 when 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 second took place in 1993 after Parliament's protest against the introduction of university tuition fees and the third occurred in 1996 following Parliament's resistance to the university authorities' imposition of special levies on students in addition to tuition fees (Konings 2002).

Interestingly, from the mid-1990s Parliament and the Self-Defence group became the cradle of two new Anglophone youth groups which turned out to be fierce opponents in the on-going Anglophone struggle: on the one hand, the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) and on the other, President Biya's Youths (PRESBY). Both groups sought to strengthen their positions by extending their membership from the Anglophone university student population to other sectors of well-educated Anglophone youths who were facing similar educational and employment problems. These included university graduates, university dropouts and other sections of the educated youth, many being either unemployed or scraping together a meagre existence in the informal sector.

The Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL)

The SCYL was founded in Buea on 28 May 1995 to reinforce the role of the educated Anglophone youth in the Anglophone struggle. It vowed to 'revive, defend, protect and preserve the independence and sovereignty of the once nation, the Southern Cameroons' and to serve as the militant youth wing of the SCNC.¹³ Its original leadership was largely made up of Anglophone members of Parliament and its membership was composed of 'young people who do not see any future for themselves and who would prefer to die fighting than continue to submit to the fate imposed on Southern Cameroons by *La République du Cameroun*'.¹⁴ SCYL members perceived the creation of an independent

Southern Cameroons state as the only avenue to a better future for themselves and the Anglophone population as a whole. They were even in the habit of swearing under oath to make the necessary sacrifices for the achievement of this goal and to never betray the Anglophone cause. Their fanatical commitment to the Anglophone struggle actually gave them a new feeling of self-esteem.

In 1996, soon after its foundation, the SCYL began to express its discontent with the Anglophone movements' rapid loss of momentum. It blamed the new SCNC leadership chaired by Henry Fossung, a retired ambassador, for its armchair approach to Southern Cameroons' independence as evidenced by its failure to mobilize the Anglophone population in the face of increasing government repression and its continued advocacy of dialogue with the Franco-phone-dominated state in spite of the Biya government's persistent failure to enter into meaningful negotiation with the SCNC. Having learnt from their Parliament days that violence was the only means of pressing home their demands with the autocratic Biya regime, the SCYL leaders declined to adhere to the SCNC motto of 'the force of argument' any longer. They instead adopted a new motto, namely 'the argument of force', which expressed their determination to achieve the independence of Southern Cameroons through armed struggle. Little wonder then that the relationship between the SCYL and the SCNC became even more strained.

While preparing for action in both Anglophone provinces, the SCYL was unexpectedly faced with the detention of its chairman, Mr Ebenezer Akwanga, following the failure of its members to steal explosives from the Razel Company in Jakiri in the North West Province during the night of 23-24 March 1997. It immediately reacted by attacking some military and civil establishments in the North West Province between 27-31 March. According to official reports, three gendarmes and seven unidentified assailants were killed in these operations. The government paper, the *Cameroon Tribune*, claimed that 'nearly 500 people had been trained to enable that part of the country to secede' and another newspaper, the pro-government *Le Patriote* went even further, claiming that '2000 gangsters had been trained to effect the liberation of Southern Cameroons'.¹⁵ Not even the passage of time has enabled the truth of these charges to be ascertained. Government repression of this ill-planned revolt was out of all proportion. It ruthlessly killed, tortured, raped and arrested hundreds of local men and women, and forced many others to go into exile. Above all, it seized the opportunity to clamp down on the SDF and the SCNC, accusing both

¹³ SCYL, 'Seventh Anniversary of the SCYL', *BSCNation*, 27 May 2002.

¹⁴ See Mr Fidelis Chiabi, chairman of the former Anglophone Youth Council, in

Cameroon Post, 1-2 February 1994, p. 7.

¹⁵ Cited in *L'Expression*, no. 107, 8 April 1997, p. 8.

organizations of being responsible for the uprising.¹⁶ A considerable number of SCNC and SCYL members were arrested and imprisoned in Yaoundé. Some 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 (Ball Maps 2002).

The SCNC chairman, Henry Fossung, who had gone into hiding after the revolt, publicly denied any SCNC involvement insisting 'that the SCNC motto "the force of argument and not the argument of force" has remained today as valid as yesterday'.¹⁷ He instead claimed that the incident had been orchestrated by a desperate government in an attempt to frustrate the legitimate struggles of the Southern Cameroons people to restore their independence. Strikingly, following the revolt, the SCNC leadership appeared to be even less inclined to sensitize and mobilize the Anglophone population. It was only after the proclamation of independence by Justice Frederick Ebong on 30 December 1999 that a more committed and radical leadership seized power in the SCNC.

There is sufficient proof that state brutality and torture have failed to dampen the SCYL tenacity and fervour to achieve its objectives. One indication is the following submission of SCYL President Ebenezer Akwanga before the military tribunal in Yaoundé in 1999:

I am the National President of the SCYL. Our fathers who took us into reunification have told us that its terms are being grossly and flagrantly disrespected. I believe in the SCNC which is fighting a just cause, to see how the violation of the terms of reunification can be corrected. (*The Post*, 19 July 1999)

Another indication is the publication by the SCYL of a document entitled 'The Southern Cameroons Independence is Here and Now' in which the SCYL champions a 'people's war' which 'has to be aggressive, not cool and cautious, bold and audacious, violent, and an expression of icy, disdainful hatred'. In furtherance of this goal, it reaffirms its commitment to the Anglophone cause: 'Nothing can stop us, we are not intimidated by the spectre of repression; today it is me, tomorrow it would be you.'¹⁸

¹⁶ In a report that was full of factual errors and based on spurious evidence, *Jeune Afrique Economie* supported the Biya government's allegation that the SCNC was responsible for the revolt. See *Jeune Afrique Economie*, no. 239, 14 April 1997, p. 8. The journal's support of the Biya government's allegation is not altogether surprising. Professor Titus Edzoa, a former Secretary-General at the Presidency, once revealed that the journal was used for public relations purposes by the regime. To this end, the regime had funded the journal to the tune of FCFA 1.5 billion (or US\$ 3 million).

¹⁷ *Le Messenger*, 23 April 1997, p. 8.

¹⁸ *The Post*, 15 May 2000, p. 3. For a reiteration of this position, see *The Post*, 24

Confronted with severe repression in Cameroon, the SCYL was forced underground. Like the *Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance* (MFDC) in Senegal (De Jong 2001: 211-15), it has almost become a secret society for security purposes. During my fieldwork I only succeeded in meeting some of its leaders through the intermediary of a high-ranking SCNC leader and even during the actual interviews I received little information about the size, organizational set-up, weapons and plans of the SCYL. I discovered later that most SCYL members lack this knowledge themselves and simply wait for instructions from their local leaders. Having become painfully aware that their organization still lacked the necessary weapons and training to engage in regular guerrilla warfare against the large and well-equipped Cameroonian armed forces,¹⁹ the SCYL leaders apparently decided after the dismal failure of the 1997 revolt to temporarily resort to less controllable forms of action.

The SCYL leadership in exile has discovered the importance of the Internet, using it to raise Anglophone consciousness and promote the visibility of the Anglophone cause in the Cameroonian and international community, thus frustrating the regular attempts of the Francophone-dominated state to control information to the outside world and cover up its frequently brutal repression of SCNC and SCYL actions. Strikingly, they have also become deeply concerned with naming and flagging. Although such activities may initially appear as somewhat 'banal' (Billig 1995), they turn out to be closely connected with the symbolic construction and preservation of the Anglophone identity and heritage and to be instrumental in raising Anglophone consciousness (Jua & Konings forthcoming).

Like other Anglophone movements, the SCYL refuses to recognize the government's designation of 20 May – the date of the inauguration of the unitary state in 1972 – as the country's National Day. It has continued to boycott its celebrations, declaring 20 May as a 'Day of Mourning' and a 'Day of Shame'. It also indicts the regime for declaring 11 February – the day of the 1961 plebiscite – as Youth Day. It sees the persistent failure of the government to highlight the historical significance of this day as a conscious attempt to reconfigure national history. It has thus 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. On these days, it has frequently attempted to hoist the Southern Cameroons flag; attempts that were often brutally challenged by the security forces.

February 2001, p. 3.

¹⁹ Although government authorities regularly allege that Anglophone leaders have imported large quantities of weapons, the 1997 SCYL revolt was carried out with bows and arrows, hunting guns and a few pistols captured from gendarmes.

Road signs also became a focus of SCYL protest action during the millennium year when the regime decided to put up French-only road signs on the Douala-Victoria (Limbe) road, the so-called reunification road linking Francophone and Anglophone Cameroon. Irritated by what it perceived as signs of recolonization, the SCYL then sprayed black paint on all the French road signs. The use of black paint was significant as it is the colour of mourning.

A few years later, in May 2002, the SCYL, together with 'SCNC North America', undertook a spectacular action called 'Operation Stamp Your Identity'. Eighteen thousand bumper stickers calling for the creation of a federal republic in Anglophone Cameroon were printed in the United States and sent to Anglophone Cameroon. They were symbolically flagged in Anglophone towns on 20 May 2002, the day that Cameroon celebrated its 30th anniversary of being a unitary state. On 1 October of the same year when Southern Cameroonians were celebrating their independence day, the Secretary-General of the SCYL, Lucas Cho Ayaba, who is living in exile in Germany, together with other SCYL members and sympathizers, took over the Cameroonian embassy in Bonn and hoisted the Southern Cameroonian flag on top of the building.²⁰

The Cameroonian government still sees the SCYL as the most dangerous Anglophone movement. It has therefore become the main target not only of the security forces but also of the newly created youth militia.

President Biya's Youths (PRESBY)

PRESBY was founded in Yaoundé in 1996 as the successor of the Committee for Self-Defence that had been operating at the University of Yaoundé. It was an attempt by the regime to transform a local, almost exclusively Beti, militia into a nationwide militia to fight opponents of the regime, including the SCYL. To attract a nationwide membership, it shifted the objective of the new group from the protection of Beti interests to the promotion of President Biya's New Deal policies, which became the regime's ideological basis after Biya's accession to power.

Soon after Paul Biya succeeded Ahmadou Ahidjo as president on 6 November 1982, he proposed a New Deal to the Cameroonian people. The New Deal policy guidelines were political liberalization, rigour and moralization, and national integration. They were intended to bring about a state characterized by a larger degree of individual liberty and a freer exchange of ideas, the judicious and stringent management of public affairs, transparency and public account-

ability by government officials, as well as a total absence of ethno-regional particularism and favouritism (Biya 1987, Krieger & Takougang 1998). It quickly became evident, however, that the New Deal policy guidelines were mere slogans, probably used by Biya to distance himself from Ahidjo's shadow (Konings 1996: 250). Political liberalization proved to be limited. Corruption and mismanagement in public life reached unprecedented levels, and Transparency International designated Cameroon as the most corrupt country in the world in 1998. National integration turned out to be an ideological justification for effacing and assimilating the Anglophone cultural legacy. Moreover, there was a growing monopolization of economic and political power by the Beti, the president's ethnic group. The ruling CPDM party has nevertheless continued to present Paul Biya as the 'Man of the New Deal' and to praise his wonderful achievements.

Since its foundation, PRESBY has indeed extended its influence to all regions in Cameroon, recruiting members among similar youth groups such as the SCYL. In 2001, it was estimated that the new organization comprised 120,000 members and 7,900 officials (Fokwang 2002: 13). Despite its national claims, it should not be forgotten that the Beti still continue to control the organization to a large extent and Beti members residing in various regions of the country have been used as vectors for expanding its sphere of influence, mostly initiating the launch of local chapters in their areas of residence. While autochthonous youths have adopted leadership roles at the local level, Beti youths still occupy most leadership positions at the national level. PRESBY's founder and self-imposed president, Philomon Ntyam Ntyam, is a Beti and other members of this ethnic group occupy three-quarters of the seats in PRESBY's National Bureau.

Far from being an apolitical organization as it has continued to claim, PRESBY is clearly affiliated to the ruling party. Not only is Philomon Ntyam Ntyam a member of the Central Committee of the CPDM but members of the group are also sooner or later expected to obtain CPDM membership cards. It enjoys widespread support and patronage from the CPDM elite. CPDM bigwigs openly attend and fund elections in the various local organs of PRESBY and when PRESBY in the South West Province organized a seminar in Mutengene in September 2001, Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge, a South Westerner himself, requested that all the heads of regional ministries contribute to its funding. In Cameroon, where officials owe their appointments to the president or prime minister, such a request is tantamount to an order (Jua forthcoming).

PRESBY members appear not to have lost faith in the neo-patrimonial state, the essence of which two leading Anglophone government members, Prime

²⁰ SCYL, 'Today is Independence Day', *BSCNation*, 1 October 2002.

Minister Simon Achidi Achu (1992-96) and his successor Peter Mafany Musonge (1996-present),²¹ have defined as follows: 'politics *na njangi*'²² and 'the politics of you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours', both meaning *quid pro quo* or 'one good turn deserves another' (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: 214). Unlike SCYL members, the Anglophone members of PRESBY publicly declare that they are being prepared to support and forcibly defend the Francophone-dominated unitary state in exchange for favours, including admission to the prestigious *grand écoles* like the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure* (ENS) and *Ecole Nationale d'Administration et de Magistrature* (ENAM), employment in the civil service and public sector, and assistance in the setting up or expansion of business – favours which are often denied to non-members nowadays. They tend to look upon PRESBY as a vehicle through which they can lobby for a share in the national cake and thus obtain access to adulthood and even elite status. PRESBY leaders have constantly emphasized reciprocal exchange. For example, during a trip to Bui Division in the North West Province in September 2001, Mr Roger Penandjo, one of PRESBY's leaders responsible for national missions, is said to have promised government favours to youths of the division who joined the organization. He then presented thirty forms to PRESBY members who had the minimum qualification of GCE Advanced Level to apply for Bangladeshi scholarships. After the presentation, he told his audience: 'So you see that it is only when you join PRESBY that you can have these opportunities' (Fokwang 2002: 12).

It should, however, be noted that, compared to SCYL members, PRESBY members tend to show less commitment to their organization's objectives. During my interviews, some confessed that they 'support the Anglophone cause with their hearts in private, but pretend to speak against it in public to protect their positions'.²³ They claimed that they had joined PRESBY for no other reason than to get sinecures, pointing out that even their elders in power, including the Man of the New Deal, Paul Biya, did not live up to the lofty ideals

²¹ Their appointment in the 1990s shows that the Anglophone problem has, paradoxically, enhanced the chances of pro-government Anglophone elites being appointed to government posts which used to be reserved for Francophones only. Obviously the decision to improve the position of Anglophones in the state apparatus is designed to belie charges that they only play second fiddle in the Francophone-dominated unitary state, and simultaneously to attract new members of the Anglophone elite into the hegemonic alliance.

²² This is a Pidgin-English expression meaning 'politics is like a rotating credit association'.

²³ More and more Anglophone CPDM members are making similar confessions nowadays. See *The Post*, 7 February 2000, p. 3.

of the New Deal. In their view, the latter only displayed 'rigour in corruption', perceiving the state as a source of spoils to be plundered without remorse.

Moreover, a considerable number of PRESBY members were disappointed when they discovered that the number and range of prebends offered by the organization were limited. This largely explains the fluid nature of the organization's membership, the continuous struggles for power among its leadership, and the emergence of new youth groups – with objectives similar to those of PRESBY – eager to gain access to state resources by any means possible.

Although the PRESBY leadership often created the illusion that all the members would be rewarded for their services, the reality was, to paraphrase the Bible, that, in the end, many were called but few were chosen. This situation had an ambivalent effect on the organization's membership: on the one hand, a number of the existing membership decided to resign from the organization, their hopes never having been fulfilled, but on the other, the relatively few success stories attracted new members.

Unsurprisingly, access to the state was guaranteed mostly to the group's leadership. Due to PRESBY's strategic position as a militia in the patron-client networks in Cameroon, its leaders tend to be regarded as power brokers who can hold people to ransom and are feared even by provincial governors. Leadership positions are highly contested as was demonstrated by the power struggles in the South West Province in 2000. The Regional Secretary, Enow Charles Esemé, accused the Regional Coordinator, Mayengi Thomas Kendi, of being involved in criminal activities. He alleged that Kendi was in the habit of extorting money from young people who wanted to migrate to Europe and the United States in search of greener pastures, promising them that he would use his influence to obtain visas for them. Eventually, Esemé was able to replace him at the helm of the organization, but once in power he embarked on similar activities. Exploiting his supposed connections with the regime, he extorted money from the various parastatals in the South West Province as well as from state employees by either threatening them with punitive transfers or by promising them promotions. In 2000, the North West chapter of PRESBY spent the entire year fighting over leadership positions, which eventually resulted in the resignation of its president (Jua forthcoming).

Similarly, a group of leaders who had been working closely with the National President of PRESBY blamed him for 'eating' alone and decided to form an organization of their own, the so-called Youths for the Support of Those in Power (YOSUPO). The objective of this new group, they claimed, was to extend youth support from President Paul Biya to the entire leadership of the ruling regime. The initiative was followed by the creation of other youth groups such as *L'Association des Camerounais Biyaristes* (ACB), the Movement for

Youths of the Presidential Majority (MYPM) and the *Jeunesse Active pour Chantal Biya* (JACHABI) (Fokwang 2002).²⁴ Against this background, one can begin to understand the lack of cooperation between these organizations in spite of their similar objectives. Evidently, cooperation would reduce the political space of these organizations and the leverage of their leaders.

Since its foundation, PRESBY has been used by the Francophone-dominated state to counteract the activities of Anglophone movements and parties such as the SDF, the SCNC and particularly the SCYL. It has been regularly engaged in using violence to disrupt their meetings, rallies and demonstrations and to terrorize their individual members. Like the former Committee for Self-Defence, PRESBY members are armed and receive active and open support from the security forces. One of their actions in early January 2001 received a lot of publicity, occurring as it did just a few days before the Franco-African Summit in Yaoundé. On that occasion, PRESBY members disturbed a peaceful SDF rally and attacked participants in the presence of security forces.²⁵ Since the declaration of Southern Cameroons' independence by Justice Frederick Ebong on 30 December 1999 and the subsequent revival of SCNC and SCYL activities, PRESBY members have been openly requested by CPDM and government officials to clamp down on Anglophone secessionists – a request they have promised to carry out religiously.

Conclusion

The importance of student politics in Africa during economic and political liberalization cannot be underestimated. The present generation of African students is not only being confronted with growing marginalization during economic liberalization but has also acquired more space during political liberalization to articulate its grievances and to organize in defence of its interests against the ruling political elite whom it holds responsible for its predicament.

My case study of Anglophone students, however, cautions against treating students as a homogeneous category. Although the Anglophone students of today feel even more marginalized because of their Anglophone identity than their Francophone counterparts, they have actually displayed a rather ambivalent attitude towards the Francophone-dominated state. On the one hand, there are students who are seen as rebels by the regime and as heroes by the

Anglophone population. They first played a vanguard role in Anglophone protests and later, during the political liberalization era, joined the Anglophone struggle for an independent Anglophone state, which they saw as a precondition for a better future for themselves and the Anglophone community as a whole. Having learnt during the heyday of 'Parliament' at the University of Yaoundé that violence is a more effective weapon than dialogue to press home demands with the autocratic state, the leaders of the most militant Anglophone organization, the SCYL, soon opted for armed struggle to achieve the desired independence. This caused a generational conflict within the Anglophone movement itself, the Anglophone elite clinging to a strategy of achieving independence through dialogue with the regime in spite of the Biya government's persistent refusal to enter into any meaningful negotiation with the Anglophone movements.

On the other hand, there are students who are seen by the Anglophone population as both predators and victims of the regime. They are prepared to support and defend the Francophone-dominated unitary state in exchange for a share in the ever-diminishing state resources. The regime, in turn, expects them to join the newly created militia organizations such as the Committee for Self-Defence and PRESBY, with a view to challenging the Anglophone associations and parties.

Studies of student politics in other African countries such as Ethiopia (Tirunch 1990), Nigeria (Lebeau & Ogunsanya 2000), South Africa (Seekings 1993) and Senegal and Mali (Wigram 1993) provide evidence that the ambiguity of student politics is not restricted to Cameroon alone.

While PRESBY has greatly expanded its membership among the educated Anglophone youth in recent years, the role of the SCYL instead appears to have been drastically reduced. Following the government's brutal repression of the SCYL's ill-planned 1997 revolt, most of its leaders have either been imprisoned or have fled the country. Of course, this does not mean that the government has finally defeated the SCYL. It is still operating underground and is engaged in a variety of Internet and boycott activities. One of its actions was the spectacular liberation in 1993 of its chairman, Mr Ebenezer Akwanga, from the Kondengui maximum security prison in Yaoundé where he was serving a 20-year jail sentence for secessionist activities. Nevertheless, severe government repression of SCYL activities has discouraged the educated Anglophone youth from joining the organization. The SCYL will, therefore, inevitably continue to occupy a minority position within the Anglophone movements that are predominantly trying to solve the 'Anglophone problem' through peaceful negotiations.

²⁴ Chantal Biya is the president's wife.

²⁵ See *The Post*, 15 January 2001, p. 3; and *Le Messenger*, 15 January 2001, p. 5

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Past the Kalashnikov: Youth, politics and the state in Eritrea

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Since 1991, Eritrea has faced certain specific challenges in the process of nation-building: how to transform a war-stricken economy and how to relate the former liberation movement to the citizens of the new state. This chapter examines the ways in which the youth of the independent state have become central to conceptions of Eritrean statehood and nationalism. The chapter proposes that since independence the relationship between youth and the state has been typified by mobilization and limited pluralism. The liberation war that brought independence also incurred obligations to the older generations of fighters, which the youth have to 'pay back'. Education and employment opportunities are administered and allocated in a top-down fashion. In return, youth are expected to follow the paths set out for them, contribute to development and serve in the military. Especially since 2001 however, Eritrean youth have questioned and rejected these expectations and obligations – challenging the conditions under which students provide voluntary work, and fleeing national service. In doing so, the youth fundamentally challenge the nature of the post-liberation state, its definitions of citizenship, and the post-1991 regime itself.

The spirit of youth is just incredible ... almost every *tegadelai* [fighter] accepts martyrdom as an inevitable outcome of his or her love and loyalty to country and cause. But, our youth go far beyond that ... especially now that they are about to go to the place of their dreams, the frontline

... kids in their late teens and early twenties have turned courage into a norm. Death is being defied as it is just a hurdle to jump over, as if it is not the end of a person's journey ... they have this unflinching conviction that they will live on in their