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***FORMER SOUTHERN CAMEROONS: BETWEEN NATIONALISM
AND SECESSIONISM (1959-2012)***

- Abstract -

The birth of new African countries like Eritrea and Southern Sudan is a challenge in respect of the territorial integrity of the African countries, which is the foundation of the charter of the African Union. This challenge calls for reflection on how to prevent such happenings in the future.

Cameroon is faced with such a situation with the former Southern Cameroons which has manifested some secessionist tendencies. In order to seek good solutions to this problem in Cameroon, history should be questioned. Why Southern Cameroons that decided to get independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroon, can, several years after, change its mind by claiming secession? This paper questions the process that led to reunification, the economic and social management in force in the country since reunification and shows that the terms of the February 1961 plebiscite did not take into consideration the aspirations expressed by the main political actors of the era. Furthermore, the "unfair" management of former Southern Cameroons' natural resources gave the opportunity to some more or less frustrated political actors to initiate secessionist moves.

Keywords: Cameroon, Southern Cameroons, secession, nationalism, reunification.

***FOSTUL CAMERUN DE SUD: ÎNTRE NAȚIONALISM ȘI SECESIONISM
(1959-2012)***

- Rezumat -

Apariția noilor țări africane, cum ar fi Eritreea sau Sudanul de Sud reprezintă o provocare pentru integritatea teritorială a țărilor africane, principiu care reprezintă fundamentul statutului Uniunii Africane. Această

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provocare îndeamnă la reflecție, cu privire la modul în care, pe viitor, astfel de lucruri ar putea fi prevenite.

Camerunul este confruntat cu o astfel de situație în ceea ce privește fostul Camerun de Sud, care a tot manifestat tendințe secesioniste. Pentru a găsi soluții la această problemă cu care se confruntă Camerunul, trebuie analizată istoria sa. Cum se face că, după ce a decis în favoarea independenței și s-a unit cu republica independentă Camerun, câțiva ani mai târziu, Camerunul de Sud și-a schimbat opțiunea și a încercat secesiunea? Această lucrare pune în discuție procesul care a condus la unificare, managementul economic și social aplicat în țară după momentul unificării și arată cum condițiile plebiscitului din februarie 1961 nu au luat în considerare aspirațiile exprimate de principalii actori politici ai epocii. În plus, managementul „ne-onest” al resurselor naturale ale fostului Camerun de Sud a dat, anumitor personalități politice mai mult sau mai puțin frustrate, ocazia de a iniția mișcări secesioniste.

Keywords: Camerun, Camerunul de Sud, secesiune, naționalism, reunificare.

Introduction

In some of its regions, contemporary Africa faces situations which challenge the territorial integrity of some African countries and shake the foundation of the African Union Charter as defined by the founding fathers of its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The birth of new African countries like Eritrea and Southern Sudan has given stuff for thought to African rulers who are looking for ways to prevent such happenings in the future. Cameroonian leaders are faced with such a situation with former Southern Cameroons which has manifested some secessionist moves. It is certainly because of these moves that the fiftieth anniversary of reunification, normally scheduled to take place in 2011, is still expected. In order to seek solutions to these secessionist moves in Cameroon, history should be questioned. Why Southern Cameroons that voted massively in favor of getting independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroon can, several years after, seek secession from the entity formed through that reunification?

This paper is not the first one to question Cameroon's past as secessionist tendencies are concerned. In 1998, Nicodemus Fru Awasom¹ went into Cameroon's colonial backgrounds to find some roots "to the development of autonomist tendencies in Anglophone Cameroon". In another article², the same author, analysing the reunification process, tried to clarify the issue since some people, either inadvertently or deliberately, distorted or omitted some facts, leading to a sort of confusion. He denied the opinion whereby reunification was an Anglophone affair. He argued that from its inception it was a Francophone affair that was imposed finally on the Anglophones by the United Nations Organization. Anglophones were reluctant to it. On the Anglophone problem in Cameroon, Piet Konings wrote an article³ which presented the various aspects of the issue and the claims of Cameroonian Anglophones. In 1961, Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon agreed to join and form a Federal Republic which was later suppressed. This suppression led to the colonization of former Southern Cameroons. The Anglophone claimed the restoration of the Federal Republic. The author gave the government's reaction to the claims. It tried to divide the Anglophone elite, bribe some of them not to identify themselves with such claims. It also rewarded some Anglophones with prestige position such as Prime Minister. The government also resorted to repression in order to silence Anglophones. Tackling the same issue of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon, Walter Gam Nkwi⁴ retraces the origins of the problem and ends with some suggestions. In his PhD thesis⁵, Michel Olinga addressed the Anglophone problem in Cameroon since reunification. He presented the grievances expressed by Anglophones. These grievances, which are social, cultural and political, are the ones behind the desire of Cameroonian Anglophones for secession. Those are the main authors that have discussed the Anglophone problem that include some aspects related to the secessionist tendencies of Anglophones in Cameroon. None of these studies has

¹Fru Awasom Nicodemus. *Colonial Background to the Development of Autonomist Tendencies in Anglophone Cameroon, 1946-1961*, "Journal of Third World Studies", vol. 15, no 1, 1998, pp.163-183.

²Fru Awasom Nicodemus, *The Reunification Question in Cameroon History: Was the Bride an Enthusiastic or a Reluctant one?*, "Africa Today", vol. 47, no 2, 2000, pp. 90-119. www.peuplesawa.com/downloads/48.doc, accessed 02 August, 2011.

³Konings Piet, *Le 'problème anglophone' au Cameroun dans les années 1990*, "Politique africaine", No 51, 1996, pp. 25-34.

⁴Gam Nkwi Walters, *The Anglophone Problem* in J.V. Ngoh (ed.), *Cameroon from Federal to a Unitary State. A Critical Study*, Limbe, Design House, 2004, pp.185-209.

⁵ Olinga Michel, "Aspects de la construction nationale après les indépendances camerounaises: le désir de sécession (1960 – 2009)", thèse de Doctorat en études anglophones, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2011.

tried to scrutinize the importance of natural resources to the understanding of this issue. That will be the main focus of this paper that will first trace the road that led to reunification, present Anglophone secessionist tendencies and analyse the part played by natural resources. At the end of the study, the paper will attempt to know if these natural resources constitute the real problem and if by granting them it will be possible to solve the secession problem.

Cameroon: from German annexation to reunification

In 1884, Germany signed a protectorate treaty with some coastal chiefs of what was to become Cameroon. By the terms of the treaty, Germany annexed the territory and expanded it towards the hinterland according to what was agreed upon in the Berlin Act that was signed at the end of the Berlin West Africa conference that was held from 15 November 1884 to 26 February 1885. What happened in the meantime for the territory to seek reunification? This section of the paper focuses on the answer to that question.

From annexation to partition

The description of the setting in which what became Cameroon was annexed by Germany is necessary for the better understanding of the event itself and for the understanding of the later partition of the territory. In the coastal area of Cameroon, there were nationals of several European countries who were trading companies' agents, traders, explorers and missionaries. Amongst them were the British, the Germans, the Dutch, the Spanish, the French and the Germans. Trade was the main activity that was carried out in that coastal area with the British dominating it. The British had a great influence in the area. This influence can be illustrated with the Court of equity they set up in Victoria in order to settle differences amongst the various actors who were present. British laws were in force in some parts of the coastal area of the gulf of Guinea like Calabar. The British seemed to have good relationships with coastal peoples of Cameroon. They even requested Great Britain to annex their territories⁶. For several reasons, Great Britain was not favourable to annex these territories. The British could not hasten because they were so certain of their influence in the area that they could annex the territories at the time wished. By so thinking, they were not aware of the fact that, German ruler, Otto von Bismarck, had changed his mind on the colonization issue. He had succumbed to pressure mounted by German lobbies which were favourable to colonization⁷. Bismarck could not afford to lose a part of the precious electorate he needed for upcoming legislative elections in his country. He had to take some

⁶Ngoh Victor Julius, *History of Cameroon since 1800*, Limbe, Presbook, 1996, pp. 51-56.

⁷Owona Adalbert, *La naissance du Cameroun 1884-1914*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1996, pp. 24-26.

measures to secure the annexation of territories in Africa. It is in this perspective that the German annexation of Cameroon was carried out to the detriment of Great Britain, which stood in a favourite position to do that. From the coastal area, the Germans expanded inland in Cameroon so much so that, on the eve of World War I, they were in control of the whole Cameroon which then covered a surface of 750 000 km², the *Neu Kamerun*.

When WWI broke out in Europe, Britain and France held a series of talks. They finally resolved for an attack on Cameroon. France that had troops in French Equatorial Africa started the attack on Cameroon so as first of all to take back territories ceded reluctantly to Germany in the North Southern corners of German Cameroon. British troops started their attacks on German Cameroon from the Nigerian border. The joint military actions of the British and the French led them inland and German troops were defeated when German Captain Von Raben surrendered in the fort of Mora. After the victory of these allied forces on German Cameroon, the territory was partitioned between France and Great Britain. The latter got 1/5 of the territory and France received 4/5 of former German Cameroon⁸. This partition was done in 1916 due to the failure of the condominium put in place immediately after the conquest of the territory from Germany. The League of Nations, set up after WWI, endorsed the partition in 1922. France and Great Britain administered it on behalf of the League that had been given the mandate on former German colonies according to the Versailles peace Treaty. After the demise of the League of Nations, the United Nations Organization was put in place with its trusteeship system. Former mandate territories became trust territories of the U.N. Cameroon was still ruled by France and Great Britain on behalf of the U.N.

From Partition to reunification

The partition of former German Cameroon between France and Great Britain had several implications which impacted the political evolution of the whole territory. A particular attention will be given to the section that came under British administration.

Consequences of the partition

The partition of Cameroon was done without the consent of local populations who belonged, most of the time, to the same ethnic groups. The frontier line split these ethnic groups and even families into two, one being under the British and the other being under the French. This fact can be illustrated with some examples.

⁸Ngoh, *op. cit.*, p.126.

The first one is the Mbo ethnic group that was split. The Mbo chiefdoms of Santchou, Njijam, Singam, Mama, Menkoue, Mbo-Kambo located in the Nkam plain found themselves under the French rule whereas chiefdoms of Fonwem, Fonjoungo, Fotabong, Elumba, Tango, Kamalempe, Nsoa and Finape came under British rule⁹. The case of the Mbo clan of Mangem was worse since villages belonging to the clan were separated by the new border. The village hosting the head of the clan went under the French rule whereas the other villages went under British rule.

The second example concerns the cultural zone of some people. The Bamileke, for example, had their cultural zone which extended from the Bamileke plateau to the locality called Bangwa. The partition disrupted this cultural zone which was divided between two new Western cultural influences¹⁰. The boundary imposed was a hindrance to the social activities of the ethnic groups that were divided even though they used to violate border restrictions. The border also hindered the flow of trade that existed in the unique space called German Cameroon.

The British section of Cameroon was divided into two sub-sections: the Northern Cameroons and the Southern Cameroons. They were all administered as integral parts of Nigeria. The administration of Southern Cameroons as an integral part of the eastern region of Nigeria had several consequences on the culture of the peoples of that area. They could no more effectively refer to their kin left in the French section of Cameroon. Those frustrations were to be the source of the development of national sentiments expressed through several means.

Nationalism through the search for reunification

The various difficulties related to the new border carved out after the partition of Cameroon pushed Cameroonians on both sides to think of coming together. In 1916, the Balongs, divided by the new border, the Mungos, the Bamilekes of Bangwa and Babadjou requested that territories should be put together under one single rule or administration¹¹. These requests received no positive answer from the colonial rulers who only had the interest of their countries at heart. The situation stood still till 1947 when political parties started functioning, especially in French Cameroons. In this section of the territory, a political party called the Rassemblement Camerounais (RACAM) considered reunification in its

⁹Fanso V.G, , "Trans-frontier Relations and Resistance to Cameroon-Nigeria Colonial Boundaries 1916-1945", PhD thesis in History, University of Yaoundé, 1982, p. 54.

¹⁰Johnson W.R., 1970, *The Cameroon Federation, Political Integration in a Fragmentary Society*, Princeton/New Jersey, Princeton University Press, p. 42-43.

¹¹Fanso, *op. cit.*, 1982, pp. 195-197.

agenda. That was not surprising since one of its first leaders, Paul Soppo Priso, was the first intellectual to raise his voice for reunification. The RACAM was later transformed into the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) which stood as the flag bearer of reunification. The UPC was the political party that really shaped the reunification ideology for nationalist purpose before the U.N. As a matter of fact, the Ewe issue in former German Togoland was given serious attention in the U.N. as compared to the Cameroon issue. So by shaping the reunification ideology, its authors wanted to undermine France's plan to integrate French Cameroon into the French colonial Empire with the creation of the French Union¹². The reunification idea took roots even in British Southern Cameroons. This was made possible by the administrative status of the territory within Nigeria.

Southern Cameroons was administratively integrated into Nigeria. It was a part of the Eastern region of Nigeria. Southern Cameroonians had to send their representatives to the Eastern House of Assembly in Enugu. The civil service of Southern Cameroons was dominated by Nigerians. This section of Cameroon was administered according to Nigerian colonial laws. The markets of Southern Cameroons were dominated by Nigerian traders, notably the Ibos who had very old trading traditions. This situation made Southern Cameroonians to think that they were losing their own identity. The territory was like the colony of the colony. Southern Cameroonians, most of whom had schooled in Nigeria since education structures were poor in Southern Cameroons, thought it was good to fight and keep a Southern Cameroonian identity. They started political movements that were later transformed into political parties. One of these movements had a name that was already a clear agenda. It is the Kamerun United National Congress (KUNC). This movement resulted from the merger of two previous movements, one being the French Cameroons welfare Union created to defend the interest of French Cameroonians living in the Southern Cameroons and the other, the Cameroons National Federation (CNF). In 1949, the CNF let its voice heard in favour of reunification when it submitted a petition to the UN Visiting Mission¹³. The petition clearly asked for the reunification of the two sections of Cameroon. So the KUNC continued fighting for that goal. In 1951, it held its first convention in Kumba with a delegation of the UPC. A strong commitment came out for the fight for the reunification of Cameroon. After years and political development, French Cameroon and Nigeria got their independence in 1960. The fate of British Southern Cameroons was still not known. After struggle and intense negotiations the fate was to be decided through a U.N. sponsored plebiscite that took place on 11 February 1961.

¹²Awasom, *The Reunification Question in Cameroon History...*

¹³Ebune J.B, *The Growth of Political Parties in Southern Cameroons 1916-1960*, Yaoundé, CEPER, 1992, p. 169.

The plebiscite was based on two questions. That is why they are commonly known with the phrase the two alternatives: “Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Federation of Nigeria or Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroons”¹⁴? In British Southern Cameroons the people voted in favour of the union with the Republic of Cameroon by 233 571 votes against 97 741 votes for the union with the Federation of Nigeria. It was an overwhelming victory that opened the way for reunification that took place on 01 October 1961. This massive vote of Southern Cameroonians in favour of achieving independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroon contrasts secession tendencies expressed by some Cameroonians hailing from that same former Southern Cameroons. What happened and what may be the way out?

From nationalism to secessionism in Former Southern Cameroons

In 1961, a new political entity was born. That was the Federal Republic of Cameroon. It was born out of the constitution that was drafted during the Fouban conference held on 17-21 July 1961.

Reunification and its aftermaths

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon provided for two federated states and four assemblies: one for west Cameroon, one for East Cameroon and a federal assembly. The fourth one was the House of chiefs. It also provided for a federal government and two federated governments. In practice, the institutions provided for by the constitution did not function accordingly. The federal President, Ahmadou Ahidjo, had a different idea of the notion of federation. For him, it was no to be a loose federation as John Ngu Foncha had dreamt. So, immediately after reunification, Ahmadou Ahidjo issued decree no 61-DF-15 of 20 October 1961 which specified that the federation should be divided into administrative regions with a federal inspector in each administrative region accountable to the federal President¹⁵. The federal inspectors were to represent the federal government in all acts of civil life and judicial matters. They had to supervise the enforcement of federal laws and regulations, to maintain order according to the laws and regulations in force, having at their disposal the police force and gendarmerie and federal services. The administrative system put in place by Ahmadou Ahidjo ignored the federal nature of the country as West Cameroon was considered as an administrative region only. That was the beginning of the

¹⁴Ngoh, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

¹⁵Ebune J.B., *The Making of the Federal System*, in V.J. Ngoh(ed.), “Cameroon From a Federal to a Unitary State 1961-1972. A Critical Study”, Limbe, Design House, 2004, p.74.

dismantling of the federal system. Some political actors cried out but Ahmadou Ahidjo did not listen to them. A great step in the dismantling of the federal system in Cameroon was in 1972 with the referendum organized for the unitary state.

According to Ahmadou Ahidjo the Cameroon federation was too expensive for Cameroon. Cameroonians, in his views, had to bear the burden of financing four assemblies and three governments. The corollary was the expensive duplication of services. The functioning of the federal system cost billions of CFA francs which could be more properly used for the economic, cultural and social development of the entire country¹⁶. In his strategy of having a strong central government and power, Ahmadou Ahidjo had taken earlier measures that led to the unification of political parties in Cameroon with the birth of the Cameroon National Union (CNU). On 6 May 1972, Ahmadou Ahidjo, after having received the approval the political Bureau of his CNU on his intention to organize a referendum, informed the National Assembly on his aim to consult the Cameroonian people on the question of instituting a unitary state. The National Assembly approved the request and the referendum was organized on 20 May 1972. The result of the referendum was an outstanding one with 99,99% of voters choosing the change from a federal state to a unitary state¹⁷. It put an end to the federal republic. A new constitution was adopted. Beyond the political dismantling of the federation was the cultural and economic dismantling.

During the colonial period, Southern Cameroons had only a police force and an army. With reunification, the gendarmerie, a force that was specific with the French system, was introduced in the former Southern Cameroons. Moreover, the British currency the pound was removed in 1962 and replaced with the CFA franc of East Cameroon¹⁸. Likewise, in 1964, the West Cameroon imperial system of weights and measures was replaced with the one of East Cameroon. In Southern Cameroons, traffic was on the left as is the case till nowadays in the UK. With reunification, it was decided that vehicles should be driven on the right for sake of traffic harmonization that was done at the detriment of the system that was in force in Southern Cameroons. That was a subjugation of the English culture to the French culture. This move was not a surprise. As a matter of fact, the federal

¹⁶Ngoh, Victor Julius, *Dismantling the Federal System*, in Ngoh Victor Julius (ed.), "Cameroon From a Federal to a Unitary State 1961-1972. A Critical Study", Limbe, Design House, p. 144-145.

¹⁷Takougang Joseph and Krieger Milton, "African State and Society in the 1990s Cameroon's Political Crossroads", Boulder, Westview Press, 1998, p. 50.

¹⁸Bongfem Chem-Langhëë, 1997, *Anglophone-Francophone Divide and Political Integration in Cameroon: a Psychohistorical Perspective*, in Nkwi Paul.Nchoji. and Nyamjoh B. Francis. (eds), "Regional Balance and national Integration in Cameroon. Lessons Learned and the Uncertain Future", Yaoundé/Leiden, ICCASST, p. 91.

constitution of 1961 set the tune as English came second to French according to Article 59 which stated that “The present provisions, by which the constitution of the Republic adopted on 21st of February 1960 by the Cameroonian people is revised, shall enter into force on 1st of October 1961. The revised constitution shall be published in French and English, the French text being authentic.¹⁹” The process of dismantling the English culture could also be witnessed in 1983 with the reorganization of the GCE syllabuses.

On 27 September 1983, the Minister of national education signed a decision reorganizing the GCE programs²⁰. The new programs resembled francophone programs. Many Anglophones saw in it the hand of evil, fraught with diabolical plans for their culture and identity. The feeling ran like wildfire that their cultural heritage and identity was in jeopardy. They saw in the move a full-scale attack on their educational system, the very base of the colonial culture they inherited and wished to preserve. In their view, the move was another attempt by Francophones to eliminate all Anglo-Saxon traces and their local accretions from Cameroon and thus destroy Anglophone identity. In the light of this perceptions, Anglophone students at the University of Yaounde, in collaboration with Anglophone secondary school children and Anglophone parents organized demonstrations against the move in some towns in the two Anglophone provinces of Cameroon and in Yaounde. These demonstrations killed the new programs. But the impression remained that francophone leaders were determined to destroy Anglophone identity in Cameroon.

The economic dismantling of the Southern Cameroons heritage was also carried out at the detriment of this part of Cameroon. During British colonial rule in Southern Cameroons, electricity was supplied by the Yoke power plant belonging to the company POWERCAM. After reunification, this plant was abandoned to let former Southern Cameroons depend on electricity supplied by former French Cameroon. In an interview granted us by C.P.N. Vewesse²¹, this trade union leader said that this decision was taken in order to assimilate former Southern Cameroons to former French Cameroon. As a matter of fact, POWERCAM disappeared through its merger with the *Electricité du Cameroun*, the electricity company of East Cameroon. The merger led to the creation of SONEL that became AES-SONEL with the privatization of some public companies. According to the provisions of the merger, the new company had to exploit the Yoke plant that was abandoned. Consequently, former Southern Cameroons was supplied from the plants based in former East Cameroon.

¹⁹Gam Nkwi, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

²⁰Bongfem Chem-Langhëë, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

²¹Interview with Vewessee C.P.N, Limbe, 10 August 2000.

Anglophones, especially the elite, were angry with what was happening in Cameroon as far as its former English-speaking part was concerned. Unfortunately, they were not courageous enough so as to express their anger. Their attitude was due to the fact that Cameroon was under an authoritarian regime which did not allow freedom of expression. Only a few of them drew the attention of the President of the Republic on the dangers of what was going on. Bernard Fonlon was one of them. This is what he wrote in 1964:

“In three years of Unification, sundry uses and institutions, thanks to articles five and six of the federal constitution have now come from the East to the West. Furthermore, in West Cameroon, they now drive on the right, the franc has replaced sterling as legal tender, the school year has now been streamlined to fit that of the East and the Metric system has now replaced the unwieldy British measures. By the very nature of things and by the force of circumstances, therefore, the tide is running hard against Anglo-Saxon influence in the Federal Republic of Cameroon...with African values moribund with John Bullism weak and in danger of being smothered, we will all be French²²”.

In early 1990s, what Samuel Huntington called “Democracy’s third wave” swept Africa. In Cameroon, it gave the opportunity to Anglophones to express their grievances thanks to the freedom of speech that burst out. It is then that their secessionist tendencies appear openly.

Secessionist moves from former Southern Cameroons

They started even before the 1990s. They came most of the time as results to actions of the central government in Yaounde. They gathered momentum in 1993 and 1994. These secessionist moves raised some issues on their actual reasons and their roots in the Anglophone population of Cameroon. Are they due to what is purported by those considered as the leaders?

In February 1984, President Biya, without warning or consultation, changed the official name of the country from the United Republic of Cameroon to simply the Republic of Cameroon, despite vehement Anglophone protests that this was the name of independent Francophone Cameroon prior to reunification²³. The new name appeared to deny that the Cameroonian state was composed of two distinct entities. Biya argued that the name change was not only a demonstration of

²²Fonlon, Bernard, 1964, *Will we Make or Mar?*, “Abbia”, no. 5, pp.11-12.

²³Konings Piet and Nyamnjoh B. Francis, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity. A Study of the Politics of recognition and representation in Cameroon*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2003, pp. 72-73.

the political maturity of the Cameroonians after almost twenty-five years of independence but also a sign that they had finally overcome divisions caused by European colonisation. According to some Anglophones, former East Cameroun had unilaterally seceded from the union and thus lacked a constitutional base from which to continue ruling the former Southern Cameroons. This view was first expressed by the eminent Anglophone lawyer and first president of the Cameroon Bar Association, Fon Gorji Dinka. On 20 March 1985, Dinka addressed a memorandum to Paul Biya entitled "The New Social Order". In it, he declared the Biya government unconstitutional and called for the former Southern Cameroons to become independent and to be baptised as the Republic of Ambazonia. Dinka was arrested and imprisoned without trial until January 1986.

In 1990, demonstrations were held in major cities of Cameroon to call for the convening of a sovereign national conference. The government was reluctant to such a forum. Put under pressure, it finally convened but a tripartite conference regrouping representatives of the government, of political parties and of what was called the civil society. This tripartite meeting took place from 30 October to 15 November 1991²⁴. Its main goal was to set up the committee in charge of preparing drafts for an electoral code and for the access of the political parties to public media. Opposition political parties came out of this meeting divided. A package deal was agreed upon for the preparation of a constitutional reform. Accordingly, a technical committee was to be set to debate constitutional issues. It was also agreed upon that a new tripartite meeting would take place to adopt the proposals made by the technical committee. The members of this technical committee were appointed, but the committee did not really work as elections took place in 1992.

On 23 March 1993 the great debate on constitutional reform started in Cameroon. This led to the appearance, on 17 May 1993, of a preliminary draft constitution. This draft was identified with the president of the technical committee Joseph Owona. Three members of the committee, all Anglophones were the brains behind the organization of Anglophone secessionist moves. The three members were Sam Ekontang Elad, Simon Munzu, and Carlson Anyangwe. On 3-4 April 1993, they organized the All Anglophone Conference I (AAC) in Buea, "for the purpose of adopting a common Anglophone stand on constitutional reform and of examining several other matters relating to the welfare of ourselves, our posterity, our territory and the entire Cameroon nation". The AAC turned out to be a landmark in the history of Anglophone Cameroon. It brought together over 5,000 members of the Anglophone elite and all the Anglophone associations and organisations were represented. The Cameroon Anglophone movement (CAM) in

²⁴Ngniman Zacharie, *Cameroun la démocratie emballée*, Yaoundé, CLE, 1993, pp. 185-198.

particular played a leading role in the organisation of this conference. After two days of deliberations, the conference issued the Buea Declaration which stated that:

“__the imposition of the unitary state in Southern Cameroons 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 was a return to the original form of government of the reunified Cameroon;
__to this end, all Cameroonians of Anglophone heritage were committed to working for the restoration of a federal constitution and of a federal form of government which takes cognisance of the bicultural nature of Cameroon and under which citizens will be protected against such violations as have here above been enumerated; and
__the survival of Cameroon in peace and harmony depended upon the attainment of this objective towards which all patriotic Cameroonians, Francophones as well as Anglophones, should relentlessly work²⁵”.

The AAC became the main Anglophone organisation and mouthpiece, responsible for the defence and representation of general Anglophone interests. All the existing and newly emerging Anglophone associations became auxiliary organisations of the AAC. Under the AAC umbrella they continued to carry out their own specific responsibilities²⁶. They were represented in the 65-member Anglophone Standing Committee created by the AAC. Being the most important auxiliary association, CAM was well represented in the Anglophone Standing Committee, thus exerting an enormous influence on AAC policies. The three convenors of the AAC occupied leading positions in the Anglophone Standing Committee: Elad was its chairman, Anyangwe its secretary-general, and Munzu was its spokesman. One of the major tasks assigned to the Anglophone Standing Committee by the AAC was the drafting of a federal constitution as the Anglophone contribution to the national forum on constitutional reform to be organised by the government. The draft constitution eventually produced by the Anglophone Standing Committee proposed a loose form of federation that was clearly inspired by the recommendation of the 1961 Bamenda Conference. On 26 May 1993, the Anglophone Standing Committee submitted the federal draft constitution to the technical committee. The

²⁵Konings and Nyamnjoh, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

²⁶I am indebted to Konings and Nyamnjoh, pp.84-104, for most of the material used in this section of the paper.

president of the committee, Joseph Owona, refused to examine it and Ekontang Elad, Anyangwe and Munzu suspended their participation to that committee.

The Anglophone Standing Committee then decided to publish the draft in English and French so as to inform the general public about the Anglophone problem and federalism. Confronted with the government's persistent refusal to discuss the AAC constitutional proposals, CAM, the most important and influential Anglophone association affiliated to the AAC, increasingly adopted to a more radical position. Having once been a major champion of a return to the federal state, it was becoming more and more inclined to advocate secession. CAM, supported by other Anglophone associations with a secessionist agenda such as the Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM), then tried to convince the Anglophone Standing Committee to take a secessionist stand as well. This gave rise to regular conflicts within the Anglophone Standing Committee between moderates who continued to adhere to a federalist programme and strategy in spite of the government's apparent unwillingness to enter into any meaningful negotiations on the one hand, and radicals who were striving for a secessionist programme and strategy, on the other. The moderates proved capable of controlling the Anglophone Standing Committee's activities for some time. Given this situation, CAM officially declared itself in favour of "zero option", that is, total independence for the Southern Cameroons. However, it stressed its pursuit of Southern Cameroons' independence through peaceful negotiation rather than through armed struggle. It thus remained faithful to the motto of the AAC: "the force of argument and not the argument of force". On 9 February 1994, CAM's National Executive unanimously agreed upon the Buea Peace Initiative (BPI), a blueprint for the peaceful and negotiated separation between the territory of former West Cameroon and that of former East. Interestingly, the BPI was inspired by the Czechoslovak experience: Czechoslovak leaders agreed on 20 June 1992 to amicably dissolve their federation into two separate and independent states and to engage in negotiations about any possible future cooperation. It means that the BPI set the door open to secession though on negotiation grounds. Still secession was envisaged and that was not good for the country.

The BPI presented the following proposals amongst other which confirmed the prospect for secession:

- “__ that the Southern Cameroons and La République du Cameroun should agree to a formal separation into two independent states;
- __ that the territory of Southern Cameroons should reactivate its independence in the same way as La République du Cameroun had done in 1984, and sever all political and constitutional links with La République du Cameroun²⁷”.

²⁷*Ibidem*, p.89.

The Second All Anglophone Conference (AAC II) held in Bamenda from 29 April to 2 May 1994. The conference reviewed all the futile attempts of the Anglophone Standing Committee to enter into negotiations with the Biya regime about a return to the federal state. It then decided to dissolve the Anglophone Standing Committee and replace it with an Anglophone Council. The tasks and strategy assigned to the new Anglophone Council were outlined in the so-called Bamenda Proclamation adopted by the conference and reflecting the compromise reached between moderates and radicals. The Bamenda Proclamation insisted that the Anglophone Council should first seek and secure constitutional talks between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon on the basis of the federal draft constitution which was submitted by the Anglophone Standing Committee in May 1993. It cautioned the Anglophone Council against accepting any arrangement that did not envisage the restoration of an Anglophone federated state within a Federal Republic of Cameroon. But should the government either persist in its refusal to engage in meaningful constitutional talks or fail to engage in such talks “*within a reasonable time*”, the Anglophone Council should “proclaim the revival of the independence and sovereignty of the Anglophone territory and take all measures necessary to secure, defend and preserve the independence, sovereignty and integrity of the said territory”²⁸. The Bamenda Proclamation added that, upon the 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 Southern Cameroons”. Subsequently, the independent Southern Cameroons should enter into negotiations with La République du Cameroun about “their peaceful separation on the basis of the Buea Peace Initiative and on such other terms as shall be mutually beneficial”.

On 6 August 1994, shortly after the Bamenda conference, the Anglophone Council decided to change the names of the AAC, the Anglophone Council and the newly created Anglophone Advisory Committee composed of traditional rulers, elder statesmen, senior citizens, leading politicians and religious authorities. The AAC was renamed Southern Cameroons People’s Conference (SCPC), the Anglophone Council was renamed Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), and the Anglophone Advisory Committee was renamed the Southern Cameroons Advisory Council (SCAC). According to an SCNC press release, “the change of name makes it clear that the struggle led by the former AAC is neither of an essentially linguistic character nor in defence of an alien colonial culture, as has often been alleged, in bad faith, by some misguided critics of the AAC”. It stressed

²⁸Olinga, *op. cit.*, pp. 427-428.

that the adoption of the name Southern Cameroons showed that the aim of the struggle had always been and remained “to restore, within a newly restructured Federal Republic of Cameroon, the autonomy of a territory – Southern Cameroons – and of a people – Southern Cameroonians – and to put an end to their annexation by the former East Cameroon.”

On 7 October 1995, the SCNC executive unanimously adopted the Independence Programme for the Southern Cameroons drawn up by CAM a week earlier. This programme scheduled the following main activities:

“September-October 1995: signature referendum in the Southern Cameroons on independence. The target was 1.35 million signatures by Southern Cameroonian citizens;

November 1995: creation of a Constituent Assembly charged with the drafting of a constitution for the Southern Cameroons;

February-March 1996: mission to the United Nations to file an application for independence and UN membership; and

June-July 1996: negotiations with La République du Cameroun on the basis of the Buea Peace Initiative in the presence of representatives of the United Nations and the United Kingdom”.

From menace to thread, this program was finally enforced in 1999. On 30 December 1999 Justice Frederick Alobwede Ebong, an SCNC activist, took over the Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) station in Buea, proclaiming the restoration of the independence of the Federal Republic of Southern Cameroons (FRSC). It had no actual effect. But it showed the determination of those who were for secession. That could have been a landmark in the secession history of Cameroon, had some countries found their interests in that struggle and had therefore supported the seceding territory as Michel Olinga concluded after observing some cases in the world²⁹. That has not been possible, but the Cameroonian government has been on a watch on the eve of October 1st each year. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of reunification is nearly two years late. It is probably due to the fear of any action from staunch partisans of secession.

Secession moves and natural resources in Cameroon

The AAC I that held in Buea in 1993 gave the opportunity to Anglophones’ delegates to address their problem in Cameroon after reunification. Their grievances are found in the Buea Declaration. An analysis of that catalogue will let us know if they were the actual reasons of their moves towards secession. It is first of all necessary to try to assess how deep the desire was rooted in the population claiming Anglophone origin.

²⁹*Ibidem*, p. 407.

How representative of Anglophones was the AAC?

Most census estimates say that Anglophone Cameroonians represents between 20 and 30% of the total population of Cameroon. The last census that was carried out in November 2005 indicated that the total population of Cameroon was 17,463,836 inhabitants with a growth rate of 2.8 % per year. These figures, when considered, indicate that Cameroon had 12,573,962 inhabitants in 1995. This is the year during which the SCNC executive unanimously adopted the Independence Programme for the Southern Cameroons drawn up by CAM³⁰. This program comprised a signature referendum in the Southern Cameroons on independence in September –October 1995. The target was 1.35 million signatures by Southern Cameroonian citizens out of the roughly 3,772,189 Anglophones representing the highest proportion of estimates, that is, 30% of the total population of Cameroon. In April 1996, the SCNC released the results of the signature referendum. In all, 315,000 signatures were collected. That was a poor result as compared to the total estimate of Anglophones. The SCNC was aware of that. It is why this figure was compared to that of those who actually took part in the January 1996 municipal elections in the territory corresponding to the former Southern Cameroons, 472,316 voters. The SCNC said the voters participation in this signature referendum was 75% out of which 99.97% voted in favour of independence. This was a deceitful way of convincing people. Actually, the participation was very low. It could be interpreted that the SCNC was not so representative of the Anglophone population of Cameroon. A good representation should come from elections. That was not the case. The criteria upon which the delegates of the two All Anglophone Conferences were chosen are not known for them to represent all the Anglophones of Cameroon. In Buea, as it was said, the over 5,000 delegates were elites, and representatives of all the Anglophone organizations and associations. When talking of these organizations they alluded to CAM and Free West Cameroon Movement, amongst others, which were elitist and artificial organizations and associations that were not present at the grassroots level. From many points of view, this struggle was masterminded by the elites that used manipulation to reach their goals. That being the case, it is good to question the actual motivations behind secessionist moves.

The place of natural resources in the Anglophone grievances

The Buea Declaration gave a list of grievances that Anglophone in Cameroon had against the rulers and especially the Francophones. Most of them were related to the dismantling of the Anglophone heritage that was most of the time cultural. One could ask that how can people whose traditional culture was in jeopardy due to colonization be so attached to defend some cultural values related

³⁰Konings and Nyamnjoh, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

to that colonization? Animators of secessionist moves could reply by asking how could some Cameroonians do the same by privileging the Francophone culture against the Anglophone culture not caring about national cultures? This reply could not be helpful. Members of the All Anglophone Conferences knew that claims based on these aspects of things could not really stand. That is why, on 6 August 1994, the Anglophone Council decided to change the names of the AAC, the Anglophone Council and the newly created Anglophone Advisory Committee composed of traditional rulers, elder statesmen, senior citizens, leading politicians and religious authorities³¹. The AAC was renamed Southern Cameroons People's Conference. (SCPC), the Anglophone Council was renamed Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), and the Anglophone Advisory Committee was renamed the Southern Cameroons Advisory Council (SCAC). Most of the grievances, besides cultural ones, were of political nature. Those related to economy are to be considered closely.

The Buea Declaration referred to the pillage of the economy of former Southern Cameroons³². This economic aspect is important since it had to influence a lot the fate of former Southern Cameroons. During the British colonial era, the territory suffered a lot from British neglect. The British development policy in the Southern Cameroon led this territory in backwardness in many fields. The British did very little to improve on what the Germans had left behind. This was due to the disinterest the British showed in the territory. They did not want to put money in a territory which would not yield any benefit to them³³. The British thought that Southern Cameroons was not viable economically. That is why, they did not even envisage it to get independence and stand on its own as a country. Southern Cameroons was therefore to gain independence by joining either Nigeria or the Republic of Cameroon. The British had erred. They did not know that the territory had a lot of riches. Besides plantation products, Southern Cameroons had mineral resources, especially oil that was discovered later on, after independence and even after the referendum that put an end to the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The negative perception of the economy of former Southern Cameroons by the British influenced the electoral process for the 1961 plebiscite since no third alternative was presented to the voters. That third option was independence of Southern Cameroons standing on its own as a country. The British and the United Nations have been blamed even cursed for not considering that option.

³¹*Ibidem*, pp. 90-91.

³²Toulabor C. M., *Déclaration de Buea*, "Politique Africaine", no. 51, 1993, p. 143.

³³Bong Amazee Victor, *The Underdevelopment of the British Southern Cameroon, 1916-1961*, "Afrika Zamani", new series, no. 4, 1996, pp. 63-64.

Cameroon as a whole joined the circle of oil countries in 1955 when Serepeca discovered gas fields in Souellaba and Logbaba³⁴. According to the same author, in 1963, the offshore exploration of oil started. It is only in 1972, that offshore oil was discovered with the Betika oil field. The offshore exploitation of oil began in 1977, most of this exploitation coming from the fields of Kole, Betika, South Ekoundu and Kombo centre. All these fields are located in the territorial sea of the former Southern Cameroons. This area, still concentrates the main production of Cameroonian oil with the Rio del Rey basin. These data show that, it is after independence of the former Southern Cameroons that its great wealth was discovered. That great wealth is oil. In contemporary world, oil is synonymous with opulence and so natives of the area expected to witness a development of their zone. This development did not come. They could not claim it loudly due to the oppressive nature of the regime in place till the beginning of the 1990s when started the process of democratization of Cameroon with the freedom of speech being enjoyed by Cameroonians.

Once it was possible to speak freely and to claim, people started criticizing the system. It is in this framework that some Anglophones denounced the management of resources of the former Southern Cameroons. In their documents, they talked of pillage of these resources that did not serve the interests of the area. In the Buea Declaration of AAC I, the authors of the document could not understand that a region blessed by God with so many riches could be so underdeveloped without good roads and social facilities for development. They say that the Francophones were responsible of the situation since they had dismantled the Federation that was supposed to give the opportunity to each federated state to develop itself with the resources that it had. The former Southern Cameroon, that was the West Cameroon in the Federal Republic of Cameroon, could not benefit from its wealth that was managed from the centre to the profit of the Francophones. Although the AAC did not represent all the Anglophones, some claims they put forward were the worries of some inhabitants of former Southern Cameroons. This can be corroborated with the example of the Oroko chiefs inhabiting the Bakassi peninsula. This claim was voiced in 2006 after the signature of the Greentree agreement on the termination of the Bakassi Peninsula crisis between Cameroon and Nigeria. Concluding a letter sent to the President of Cameroon, the Oroko chiefs said that they were maltreated and poor in spite of the abundant resources

³⁴Ngii Nag Paul., "Le gaz naturel en Afrique, potentialités et problèmes", in Lapointe A. et Zaccour G. (eds), *Ajustements structurels et gestion du secteur énergétique en Afrique*, Paris, Editions Technip, 1993, p. 27.

that surrounded them. They called on the Head of state to closely examine the case of the Ndian populations that were the victims of marginalization³⁵.

The reaction of the Oroko chiefs and that of the animators of the secession moves in Cameroon are no surprise. They follow the resource/conflict theory. The oil potential of the territory that was formerly the Southern Cameroons has brought about the desire to manage this resource and to make profit out of it. The Anglophone elite thought that the Francophones, that have been managing oil revenues, have alone used these revenues for their own francophone interests only. They thought that by securing this management they would take all the advantages related to it. It is in the same framework that the Bakassi conflict is explained by some authors. According to Ruben de Koning and Jean Mbaga³⁶ Cameroon and Nigeria took arms because of the perspective oil from that region could give. The Bioko Island which is next to Bakassi had revealed its enormous oil resources. Bakassi, not being far, was supposed to get the same oil resource. Its exploitation by Nigeria was to boost its oil production. The Cameroonian oil production was going down and could be revamped with oil from the Bakassi peninsula. Some people have even said that the Greentree agreement was consequently negotiated. The two years given before Cameroon should have the full control of the zone were meant for Nigeria to exploit oil offshore of the area before Cameroon should continue the exploitation.

Natural resources have always played a role in conflicts. Their abundance is no more considered as a factor of development. According to the "rent seeking thesis" developed by Anne Kruger of the International Monetary Fund and that of "war economies" by Paul Collier, conflicts recorded in Cameroon on the Anglophone problem are related to the plunder of resources and personal profits³⁷. This plunder characterized the whole economy in its management as illustrated by the case of oil.

Oil rents management is characterized by embezzlement carried out by holders of political positions. They operate in such a way that their misdemeanours cannot be uncovered. That management is not transparent. In Cameroon, oil revenues were managed in an account out of the budget and that favoured

³⁵de Koning R. et Mbaga J., *Conflits sur les ressources naturelles de la péninsule de Bakassi: du global au local*, "Ecologie & politique", no. 34, 2007, p.99.

³⁶*Ibidem*, p. 97.

³⁷Lickert V., "Les ressources minières au Cameroun: gouvernance, prise de décision et contre-expertise. Les acteurs privés et publics de la gouvernance minière au Cameroun", mémoire de Master 2, Université de Paris 1, 2011, pp. 24-25.

embezzlement as the managers have no account to give to populations³⁸ Moreover, the management of oil is a private affair between the President of the Republic and the company that is in charge of oil. The revenues got from oil have always been profitable to a handful of individuals hailing from the public service, which are involved in the oil industry. In Cameroon, although the law provides that there should be total transparency in the contract for oil exploration and exploitation, these contracts and licences still have confidential provisions that are aimed at dissuading the private companies from publishing the figures they have for oil transactions. Those agitating for former Southern Cameroons could really engaged in the “zero option” as they promised, “zero option” being the independence of former Southern Cameroons by breaking away from present Cameroon. But that could only be for the management of natural resources for their own benefit and not for the benefit of the people. Secession would not be a solution but the beginning of another problem in a different context.

Conclusion

All in all, the main concern of this paper was to understand how former Southern Cameroons that voted to join the republic of Cameroon happened to seek secession after several decades of unity. It has been understood that Southern Cameroons, by seeking reunification that came about after the 1961 plebiscite sponsored by the United Nations, wanted to get rid of the domination of Nigerians that made the populations of this area lose their identity. This was because Southern Cameroons was ruled as a part of Nigeria. That was made possible after the partition of the former German colony between Great Britain and France. So Southern Cameroons, by voting for reunification with the Republic of Cameroon was fighting for freedom and that was nationalism.

The reunification of the two Cameroon gave birth to the Federal Republic of Cameroon that lasted for only eleven years. In 1972, through a referendum, the United Republic of Cameroon came into being. This transformation seemed to have been wrong. Very few people could dare criticize the new system since there was no way for that. As a matter of fact, that era was lived with difficulties as there was a no freedom of speech and there was an ordinance on subversive activities. When the eastern wind blew in African, some Cameroonians started crying out. Some natives of the former Southern Cameroons engaged in secession moves. They proclaim that they were fighting for the whole former Southern Cameroons, which was not true. They did not represent all the peoples they pretended to help.

³⁸Bikidik G., *Quand pétrole et misère font bon ménage : sous le voile de la gestion des revenus de l'or noir au Cameroun*, “Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights”, vol. 2, no. 1, 2008, p. 55.

In fact it was the elite that was not even united for that action. They were looking for their personal interests. That was an illustration of the thesis whereby natural resources bring about problems in society. They blamed the Francophones for being responsible of the development delay much talked about in this paper. It should even be recalled that most leaders of the AAC participated in the system they were combating. Apparently they did have the shares they thought they deserved. They wanted to manage oil resources alone and make much profit out of it through the embezzlement and mismanagement mechanisms described above. When things are seen from that angle, the lesson to be drawn is that secession is far from resolving social, political and economic problems. With good governance, especially in the field of oil resources, this wealth can be profitable to the majority and not to the handful of persons. So this poor management, added to some other factors, gave birth to secessionist moves in Cameroon.