



The 1961 United Nations Plebiscite in British Southern Cameroons: Conduct, Results, Post-Plebiscite Challenges and Conflicts

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ABSTRACT

The British Southern Cameroons with plethora of post-plebiscite challenges, was a mandate of the League of Nations (1922 - 1945) and later, a trusteeship territory of the United Nations (1945-1961) handed to Britain to administer after Germany was defeated by the allied forces in the First and the Second World Wars. The paper argues that, the political future of the British Southern Cameroons was not decided until the plebiscite of 1961 that was supervised and conducted under the supervision of the United Nations. The October 1961 reunification with French Cameroun and the challenges associated with United Nations post-plebiscite in British Southern Cameroons were responsible for some of the ethnic tensions, conflicts and dilemmas faced by post-independence Cameroon. The study argues that, these challenges which include the return to federation, the nature of the state, the desire to force Britain and United Nations to address the challenges face by British Southern Cameroons, quest for independence by Southern Cameroonians, solve the Anglophone Crisis, tackle the problem of secession, the mismanagement of West Cameroon's patrimony and Constitutional issues must be addressed for peace to return in Cameroon. Using primary and secondary sources and based on the recommendations advanced, the paper concludes that except these problems are addressed, political conflicts and ethnic tensions will continue to characterize ethnic relations in Cameroon.

KEYWORDS: British Southern Cameroons, United Nation, Plebiscite, Post-Plebiscite Challenges, Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

Nationwide votes on a specific issue are an accepted way of resolving political issues in many countries around the world. In late 1959, the United Nations invited the Northern and Southern Cameroonians to choose between Nigeria and French Cameroun, that is, between Integration and Reunification, in plebiscites which it proposed and eventually supervised. In February the majority of the Northern Cameroonians opted for Nigeria, while the majority of the Southern Cameroonians voted in favour of French Cameroun. Northern Cameroons became the Sardauna Province of Northern Nigeria while Southern Cameroons became the State of West Cameroon, and Cameroun became the State of East Cameroon. In October 1961, the West and East Cameroon States federated to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon (Chem-Langhëë, 2003).

Since the 11 February 1961 United Nations organized plebiscite in Northern and Southern Cameroons, a growing body of literature has sought to analyze the resurgence of post-plebiscite challenges, negotiation of an Anglophone identity, and the re-emergence of Anglophone activism for democracy, as well as demands for the reconfiguration

of state power in Cameroon (Konings & Nyamnjuh, 2003). Lenshie and Gambo (2014) argue that the plebiscite impacted on the cooperate existence of the various ethnic groups, who on equal bases voted to join Nigeria or French Cameroun, by creating identity question that have become a post-colonial dilemma in the area. They further explain that Plebiscite, worldwide, is known to be a critical issue, because of its centrality in determining the decisions of indigenous people over certain issues that are contestably critical. To Sobseh (2022), plebiscites are conducted, especially when it involves the issues of self-determination. In the past, it was the exclusive preserve of the United Nations, to grant the opportunity for the people of Southern and Northern Cameroons to decide their choice of belonging. In most parts of Africa, plebiscites were administered in cases of self-determination.

Ngoh and Anye (2021) argue that a number of songs composed by the Subaltern women of the Southern Cameroons on the eve of the 11 February 1961 plebiscite made reunification with the Republic of Cameroon option popular and contributed to the victory of this option in the territory. Drawing from the scholarship on negotiation failures with Saunders (1991), Mitchell (1998), Mnookin



(2003), Kriesberg (2007), Glozman (2014) and Achankeng (2015) make the claim that the outcome of the 1961 plebiscite and Fouban Talks (Ngoh, 1999) were as a result of failed and false negotiations, the role of the United Nations, the different visions of the politicians, and the divergent influences of the Independent French-speaking *République du Cameroun* and British Southern Cameroons. To Chem-Langhëë (2004) these experiences in contemporary time have created the impression that the decision of Southern Cameroons to join French Cameroun and that of Northern Cameroons to join the Federal Republic of Nigeria was a 'paradox of self-determination' (Chem-Langhëë, 2004).

This paper therefore focuses on the historical background and context of the United Nations organized plebiscite in British Southern Cameroons, treats the conduct of the Plebiscite in Southern Cameroons as well as its results, highlights the outcome of the 1961 plebiscite, and post-plebiscite and independence challenges and conflicts associated with United Nations post-plebiscite in British Southern Cameroons, as well as recommendations to address the post-independence dilemmas faced by Cameroon.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE 1961 PLEBISCITE IN BRITISH SOUTHERN CAMEROONS

British Southern Cameroons was the southern part of the British Mandate territory of British Cameroons in West Africa. When historically contextualized, with the North and South West Regions simply reduced to two of the ten Regions (former Provinces) that constitute the Republic of Cameroon, the product is something of a freak, a contradiction in terms. Following the defeat of the Germans in Kamerun in 1916, the territory came under the direct tutelage of the League of Nations. The Germans surrendered its control to Britain and France as Mandatory Powers (Ngam and Budi, 2020). These powers experimented with a shared-dominion arrangement called the Condominium. Following its ultimate failure, Britain and France decided to partition the territory. In the course of the partition, Britain and France acquired 1/5 (20 %) and 4/5 (80 %) of the territory respectively (Ndi, 2013). The territory taken by Britain was not only small in terms of surface area but was also narrow (elongated), non-contiguous (separated) and marred by transportation and communication difficulties that made its effective administration as a separate entity from Nigeria nightmarish (Ngoh, 2001: 3). It is important to state that, Britain informally administered Southern Cameroons as an integral part of its Nigerian colony right from the aborted Condominium in 1916 through the Treaty of Versailles till when it had the process confirmed by the newly created League of Nations in 1922. It was administered as a British Mandate of the League of Nations and as an integral part of Southern Nigeria from 1922 to 1946, and later as a British Trust Territory of the United Nations from 1946 to 1961 (Ndi, 2016: 77).

Prior to reunification in 1961, Southern Cameroons had already attained and enjoyed all the attributes and privileges

of statehood stretching as far back as 26 October 1954, when as a State it was adequately defined with a specific geographical circumscription, a permanent demographic population with its own legislative Assembly, independent judiciary and an executive; paraphernalia which qualified it for self-government. However, in matters of defence and international relations it depended on Great Britain, the administering authority (Ndi, 2013). Following the independence of French Cameroon on January 1, 1960 and plans by Britain to grant independence to British Nigeria on October 1, 1960, the question as to the political future of the sandwich territory that lay between them became topical. This ignited a period of hectic political maneuvers in Southern Cameroons particularly in the 1950s (Ngam and Budi, 2020).

By 1955, the nationalists in Southern Cameroons disagreed on the political future of their territory. They were divided into three major camps with conflicting and divergent views on the nature of Southern Cameroons independence (Sobseh, 2022: 17). This caught the attention of the United Nations, to intervene and decide on the future of Southern Cameroons through a plebiscite. Besides the most popular camp, which sought an independent Southern Cameroons state but was constantly suppressed by the British, there were two others: J. N. Foncha and the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) stood for secession from Nigeria and ultimate reunification with French Cameroon. The political refugees from French Cameroon who arrived in the Southern Cameroons in 1955 also advocated reunification with French Cameroon. The final camp was dominated by Dr. E. M. L. Endeley and N. N. Mbile, leaders of the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) and Kamerun Peoples' Party (KPP) respectively. They argued that the best option for the Southern Cameroons was to gain independence as an autonomous state within Nigeria. With this division, and after the failure of several attempts to reconcile the protagonists, the British, who favoured independence with Nigeria, manoeuvred the United Nations to organise a plebiscite in the Southern Cameroons in 1961 (Nfi, 2011: 53-66).

When the United Nations reviewed the complicated situation in early 1959, its Trusteeship Council further complicated matters because of differences within it. The Assembly then asked the Southern Cameroons political leaders, who had come to the United Nations with conflicting demands and recommendations, to return home and resolve their differences. Once back home, all private attempts by some of the leaders to resolve their differences failed, partly because their differences were deep, due to mutual distrust, and surely because most of them had substantial support from some part of the region (Chem-Langhëë, 1976: 344). When these private attempts had failed, they held a Plebiscite Conference at Mamfe in August 1959. At Mamfe, the political leaders concentrated less on attempting to reach agreement and more on wooing the a-Fon, who, in any event, did not budge from their secessionist position. The nationalist

leaders had to admit to the United Nations that they were too divided, and too interested to provide an agreed solution (Ibid).

As such, the United Nations then concentrated its efforts, not at finding out what arrangements would be most widely acceptable in Southern Cameroons, but on working out an agreement acceptable to the two most important nationalist leaders, Endeley and Foncha. The net effect of this approach was that the United Nations ignored the hints, which nearly all the Southern Cameroons political leaders threw out occasionally, which indicated what alternative would be the more popular among the electorate. By ignoring or failing to catch these hints, and by accepting a compromise reached between Endeley and Foncha in private talks, the United Nations opted for a set of plebiscite questions which prevented the majority of Southern Cameroonians from registering their preference for secession. The United Nations was thus less than helpful in implementing one of its most important objectives. It denied the majority of the Southern Cameroonians the right of self-determination (Chem-Langhëë, 1976: 343).

CONDUCT AND RESULTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS PLEBISCITE

Between 1956 and 1958 the gap between the political programmes advocated by the integrationists, secessionists and reunificationists widened. The idea of consulting the people to determine the future political status became obvious. It gained impetus from the British suggestion to the United Nations in 1958 that the plebiscite be held in their sphere of Cameroon.

Meanwhile, the conduct of the first plebiscite in Northern Cameroon was underway. The supporters of the alternative which postponed a decision suspected and accused, sometimes justifiably and sometimes not, the local authorities of malpractices. These authorities sometimes abused their power and attempted to hinder campaigners who held opposing views. Nonetheless, the plebiscite appeared to reveal a large majority of the people polled were in favour of postponing a decision on their political future. More significantly, the votes showed widespread dissatisfaction with the existing administrative arrangements.

The next plebiscite was arranged by the United Nations to follow within a short time. During the interval, the British made the region a province of Northern Nigeria, and reformed its local administration. These reforms, which removed a number of unpopular authorities and introduced more local representation in government, were well received. At the same time, many Northern Cameroonians did not realize that links with Northern Nigeria had been retained at the provincial level. Northern Cameroons political leaders, aware of this confusion, tried to have the plebiscite postponed. They failed and it was conducted when the majority of Northern Cameroonians still thought the local administrative reforms meant separation from Nigeria and Northern Nigeria.

The second Northern Cameroons plebiscite was conducted at the same time as that of Southern Cameroons. In both regions, distrust, allegation, and the abuse of power were features of the plebiscite campaign. But, their scope and frequency differed. They were more extensive and common in Southern Cameroons. However, while in Northern Cameroons the abuse of authority was limited to local government officials, and the distrust and allegations confined to the proponents of the Cameroun proposition; in Southern Cameroons all three elements were evident in the behaviour of parties both in and out of office (Chem-Langhëë, 1976: 344).

Furthermore, in the case of Southern Cameroons, the conduct of the plebiscite was divisive. The trust system ended with the rest of Southern Cameroons, except perhaps Mamfe, blaming Bamenda. The Grasslands and the forest zone stood at a distance from each other, pointing accusing fingers, and threatening each other. The Concert of the Crowned Princes, the symbol of Southern Cameroons unity, which emerged during the trust period, was inflicted with a malaise between May 1958 and January 1959, broke-down in October 1959, and by the middle of 1960, it had disappeared.

In line with these developments, the 13th Session of the United Nations General Assembly as a first step settled on a plebiscite, but the questions were still not agreed upon. J. N. Foncha suggested it should be separation from Nigeria or Association with Nigeria; Reunification, he maintained could not be part of it because logically it could only come after separation from Nigeria must have been effected. Dr. E. M. L. Endeley rejected this proposal and suggested that it should be reunification either with an independent French Cameroon or association with an independent Nigeria. To further expatiate and drive home the point, J. N. Foncha thought that it was “nothing short of treason that anyone for selfish motives should want his country to be engulfed by another” (Press release, 1959). On the other hand, Endeley in his turn:

Explained that he did not want Foncha and the KNDP, ‘to take the territory and its people on a joy ride to an unknown destination’ and because of that he ‘insisted on the second question ... to indicate somehow that reunification is the ultimate policy towards which ... Foncha’s government shall work after separation (Dispatch No. 5, 1960).

After this, Endeley proposed the plebiscite questions to be:

1. Do you wish to continue as an autonomous or self-governing Region in an independent federation of Nigeria?
2. Do you wish to secede from Nigeria to effect reunification with the Cameroons republic (formerly under French administration)? ((Ndi, 2013).

Ironically, neither of the political leaders was ready to give in to the other. With the assistance of Angie Brooks, the Liberian ambassador to the United Nations, working with the African delegations, Foncha and Endeley, a resolution

of the General Assembly was finally reached at the United Nations Trusteeship Council in October 1959 (Fanso, 1989). The plebiscite was to hold not later than March 1961, while preparations were to begin on 30 September 1960. Following further arm-twisting and cajoling and pressure from the African delegations at the United Nations together with Mexico and the United Arab Republic it was agreed that the plebiscite questions should be:

1. Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent federation of Nigeria?
2. Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Republic of the Cameroons? (NAB,1962)

It is important to note that, the questions actually approximated Endeley's version and dealt a devastating blow to Foncha, who had left Cameroons with the KNDP mandate for secession from Nigeria but not "reunification with French Cameroon" as the second option. A total number of 349 650 people registered to vote in the plebiscite in Southern Cameroons. Of these 331 312 people or 94 per cent cast valid votes. In all, 97 741 voted for integration with Nigeria and 233571 voted for reunification with the Cameroon Republic(Fanso, 1989).

According to Chem-Langhëë (1976) what the United Nations offered the Southern Cameroonians in the two questions was a choice between Nigerian citizenship and Cameroonian citizenship. The United Nations attached no conditions to the two kinds of citizenship it offered the Southern Cameroonians.

That meant, for example, once Nigerians, the Southern Cameroonians would have to accept anything Nigeria, as an independent country, decided. Or, if Cameroonians the Southern Cameroonians would have to accept anything Cameroon, as an independent country, decided.

Generally, and in the main, the Southern Cameroonians did not interpret the questions this way. Generally, they attached conditions of their own to the questions. In the case of Nigeria, the conditions were, to name only a few: Nigeria must be a member of the Commonwealth; it must retain and maintain the British tradition and systems; it must be a Federation; Southern Cameroonians particularism must be retained and maintained in the Nigerian Federal universalism via association; and, Nigeria must never go Communist or Socialist. In the case of Cameroon, the main conditions were: Cameroon must get out of the French Community; the new state must be independent of any foreign influences, specifically of France and Britain; it must not go Communist or Socialist; it would have to be a Federation; and the Anglo-Saxon tradition and systems must co-exist with the Gallic tradition and systems within the Cameroonians particularism in a Federation. The Southern Cameroonians had thus asked and answered their own questions, interpreting the questions the United Nations asked to suit their local conditions and circumstances.

As seen from the tables below, the results of the plebiscite in the Southern Cameroons solved all the doubts about reunification and independence.

Plebiscite Results by Number of Votes in the Southern Cameroons

Administrative Divisions and Plebiscite Districts	Number of Votes for Nigeria	Number of Votes for Cameroun
Nkambe Division		
Nkambe North	5,962	1,917
Nkambe East	3,845	5,896
Nkambe Central	5,095	4,288
Nkambe South	7,051	2,921
Total	21,917	15,022
Wum Division		
Wum North	1,485	7,322
Wum Central	3,644	3,211
Wum East	1,518	13,133
Wum West	2,137	3,449
Total	8,784	27,115
Bamenda Division		
Bamenda North (Nso)	8,073	18,839
Bamenda East (Ndop)	1,822	17,856
Bamenda Central West (Bafut)	1,230	18,027
Bamenda Central East (Ngemba)	529	18,193
Bamenda West (Menemo, Ngie, Ngwaw)	467	16,142
Bamenda South (Bali Nyonga, Moghamo)	220	19,426
Total	12,341	108,485

Mamfe Division		
Mamfe West	2,039	8,505
Mamfe North	5,432	6,410
Mamfe South	685	8,175
Mamfe East	1,894	10,177
Total	10,070	33,267
Kumba Division		
Kumba North - East	9,466	11,991
Kumba North - West	14,738	555
Kumba South - East	6,105	12,827
Kumba South - West	2,424	2,227
Total	32,733	27,600
Victoria Division		
Victoria South-West	2,552	3,756
Victoria South-East	1,329	4,870
Victoria North-West	4,744	4,205
Victoria North-East	3,291	9,251
Total	11,916	22,082
Grand Total Southern Cameroon	97,741	233,571

Source: Chem-Langhëë(1976).

11-12 February 1961 Plebiscite Results in Northern and Southern Cameroons

Northern Cameroons

Registered Voters	292,985
Total Voters (Voter Turnout)	Not Available (N/A)
Invalid/Blank Votes	Not Available
Total Valid Votes	243,955

Southern Cameroons

Registered Voters	349,652
Total Voters (Voter Turnout)	Not Available (N/A)
Invalid/Blank Votes	Not Available
Total Valid Votes	331,312

Results	Northern Cameroons		Southern Cameroons	
	Number of Votes	% of Votes	Number of Votes	% of Votes
Union with the Federation of Nigeria	146,296	59,97%	97,741%	29,50%
Union with the Republic of Cameroon	97,659	40,03%	233,571%	70,50%

Source: African Elections Database (2011).

After the February Plebiscite, and following discussions in April 1961, a Constitutional Conference was held at Foumban from 17 to 21 July 1961 between representatives of the Southern Cameroons to resolve the differences between the Ahidjo and Foncha conceptions of the nature of the forthcoming federation. This conference was followed by another meeting in August in Yaounde. The outcome was a draft Federal Constitution. It was soon approved by the legislatures in both territories, and 1 October 1961 saw the end of the Southern Cameroons trusteeship and the birth

of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Former Southern Cameroons became the State of West Cameroon and the former Republic of Cameroon became the State of East Cameroon.

Writing about the 1961 plebiscite vote, Nfor (2015) has observed the UN Resolution 1608 XV of April 21, 1961 was adopted by the UN General Assembly as a follow up of the successful conduct of the UN-sponsored plebiscite in British Southern Cameroons. It was in recognition and defense of

the distinctive identity of this UN Trust territory under international law. As a follow up of the UN-organized plebiscite it was part and parcel of the UN-conducted plebiscite. It was a legal instrument by the World Body meant to complete the exercise of bringing two distinct UN trust territories into a federation of equal status. Above everything else, this UN General Assembly Resolution testifies to the irrefutable fact about the plebiscite and its shortcoming of limiting the people only to two choices notwithstanding, was inconclusive. It offered the British Southern Cameroons people only an opportunity to indicate their choice between Nigeria, and *la République du Cameroun*. Nfor (2015) added, "The plebiscite vote was only a promise to be translated into a concrete act through mutual agreements based on fair negotiations". Today the people of Southern Cameroons desire to "restore independence and sovereignty" (Ebong, 1999) because they consider they were betrayed into what they describe as annexation, colonial occupation, and exploitation by the other party to the Fouban Talks, République du Cameroun (Aka, 2000; Fanso, 2014; Mukong, 1990).

POST-PLEBISCITE CHALLENGES AND CONFLICTS

After the 11 February Plebiscite in Southern Cameroons, a series of constitutional conferences and talks were held between Southern Cameroonians and the Republic of Cameroon in Yaounde, Bamenda and Fouban that ended with the independence of Southern Cameroons and reunification with the Republic of Cameroon to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon on 10 October 1961. Following these developments, former British Southern Cameroons became West Cameroon, while the Republic of Cameroon became East Cameroon. A general feeling of disgust and malaise gripped majority of inhabitants of former Southern Cameroons - present North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. This challenge, has become a chronic, deepening culture of disregard, bad faith and absence of political will by the ruling Francophone elites leading to the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon. The following challenges are faced by former Southern Cameroonians and post-independence government in Cameroon.

The first major post-plebiscite challenge faced by Southern Cameroonians emanated from constitutional talks with the Republic of Cameroon after Southern Cameroonians voted to join the Republic of Cameroon. The United Nations Resolution A/C.4/L685 of 18 April 1961 geared towards terminating British Trusteeship over the British Southern Cameroons invited the Administering Authority (UK), the governments of the Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon, to initiate urgent discussions with a view to finalizing, before 1 October 1961 the arrangements by which the agreed and decided policies of the parties for a union of the Southern Cameroons with *the République du Cameroun*, in a federal united Cameroon Republic will be implemented. As such, the Bamenda All Party Conference of June 26-28, 1961, the Fouban Constitutional Conference of July 17-21, 1961 and the Yaounde Tripartite Conference

of August 2-7, 1961 set the foundation for future grievances. The United Nations Resolution A/C.4/L685 of 18 April 1961 appointed a commission of three constitutional and administrative experts to assist in the discussions and do the constitutional drafting. Instead of the three parties initiating the discussions, Ahmadou Ahidjo alone summoned the Fouban Conference for July 17-21, 1961 (Tatah-Mentan, 2014). Tatah-Mentan considers this development as Ahmadou Ahidjo's, own distorted interpretation of the UN Resolution to which Britain, the government of the Southern Cameroons and the three-man commission of experts replied by boycotting the conference. The Resolution also appointed the United Kingdom to represent UN interests at all discussions. Therefore, the United Kingdom's boycott also meant the United Nations boycott (Tatah-Mentan, 2014). Further, any conference, the holding of which was directed by the United Nations, but which was later boycotted by the very United Nations, should never have taken place. This was almost like a case of the complicity of the United Nations and the British Trusteeship Authority, especially as it ended up creating more problems for Southern Cameroonians.

Since independence and reunification, the return to federation and the nature of the state have been contested by former Southern Cameroonians and this has posed a major challenge to post-independence governments in Cameroon. After 1961, unification and centralisation have been the political dogmas of the Ahidjo (1960-1982) and Biya (1982-) regimes. After reunification on 1 October 1961, Cameroon became a federal republic, but in practice inherited a shaky federalism with an unequal distribution of power between the two federated states in the federal assembly and in the government. Unsurprisingly, the federation was short-lived, and by May 20, 1972, the Cameroon Francophone leadership had successfully transformed the federal state into a unitary state, to the dismay of the Anglophone minority (Stark, 1976). The inauguration of the unitary state opened the door for a systematic marginalization of Anglophones. The government must tackle the problem posed by the call for the return of federalism as was the case in 1961. In fact, a federation which recognises and preserves the region's peculiarity, as did the 1961 Federal Constitution. Cameroon is described as a decentralised unitary state. Unitarists believe that everything must be done to avoid federalism or secession. However, even the decentralisation announced by the 1996 Constitution has not been implemented, and government and administration have been highly centralised.

Another major post-plebiscite challenge by former Southern Cameroonians is to force Britain and United Nations to address the challenges face by British Southern Cameroons. It would easily be recalled that for fifty-six years, 1922-1961, Britain officially and stubbornly administered Southern Cameroons as an integral part of Nigerian Colony against all counsel at both the League of Nations and the United Nations. As independence approached, Britain and Nigeria did everything to frustrate Southern Cameroons attaining independence as

a state and imposed premature reunification with Republic of Cameroon on its citizens at the plebiscite on 11 February 1961. British Northern Cameroons, which, unfortunately fell prey to the Anglo-Nigerian ploys and became Saruna's Province and later, Gonola State suffered massive socio-cultural, economic and political marginalization and neglect. Because of this backwardness, it easily fell prey to the agents of Islamic Fundamentalism and became the hot bed of Boko Haram (Ibid). As such, post-independence Cameroon has been negatively affected by the challenges posed by this extremist Islamic sect, and is determined to forced Britain and United Nations to facilitate the process of its separation from French Cameroon or return to the 1961 Federation. With this, they would be able to advance the most popular conflicting view, on separate independence of Southern Cameroons, which the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1352 (xiv) on the British Cameroons' Plebiscite of 1961, clearly ruled out (BAPEC/PRES, 2016).

There is also the challenge posed by inequality, exclusion and marginalization of former Southern Cameroonians in post-independence Cameroon. Walter Rodney as far back as 1975 stated, "when two societies of unequal level of socio-political and economic development interact with each other at any level, the more advanced one would exert total influence on the less advanced one" (Rodney, 1975). It was therefore evident that French East Cameroon would dominate the British Southern Cameroons resulting in exclusion/marginalization. That is why hitherto, the increasing consciousness of Anglophone exclusion and marginalization within the context of forceful assimilation of the Anglophone population into a Francophone-dominated state in terms of language and population has resulted in a bloody civil war (Lazar, 2019: 1-2). In addition, the complexity of Anglophone exclusion, marginalization and forced assimilation into a Francophone dominated state are not some stand-alone facts. The duality of Cameroon history has severe impact in the way issues of national "belonging" one negotiated in Cameroon. This also heightens and presents an interesting feature of how language attitudes in such a complex sociolinguistic landscape like Cameroon can shape or deny one's being to belong to a particular space of belonging. Post-1984 the name changes in 1984 by President Paul Biya, Anglophone Cameroonians do not feel they belong to Cameroon. The primary way belonging is expressed in Cameroon through language/language attitudes. Hence, it is important to revisit the role of language in the war in Cameroon (Atabongwong, 2020).

Another major post-plebiscite challenge concerns the mismanagement of West Cameroon's patrimony. Apart from neglect of infrastructure in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon and the mismanagement and ruin of buoyant companies like Cameroon Bank, West Cameroon Marketing Board, Wum Area Development Authority (WADA) and West Cameroon Cooperative Movement. Oil revenues are alleged to be used by those in power to feed 'the bellies'

of their allies, and to stimulate the economy in other regions. In addition, there is also great anxiety in Anglophone Cameroon that its major agro-industrial enterprises, especially the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) and *Plantations Pamol du Cameroun Ltd* (Pamol), are sold or their headquarters moved elsewhere.

The Anglophone Crisis has posed a serious challenge to post-independence government. The Anglophone problem that was dormant in the first two decades after independence and reunification, is dominating the current political landscape of the country. The Anglophone problem poses insurmountable challenges to the various attempts that postcolonial Cameroon has made in order to forge national unity and integration (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1997: 207). The root cause of the problem that led to the civil war in 2016 dates back to the political history of Cameroon. When it was time to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon, there was no precise indication as to the actual nature and involvement of the "would-be federation." The federal republic did not provide effective institutions that could guarantee and preserve the equal partnership of the two previous colonies as envisaged in the first federal constitution of 1961 (Kale: 1967: 70). As a consequence, it was obvious that the would-be federation would not be able to guarantee the preservation of the dual colonial systems that was passed down. Notwithstanding, another contention was the huge imbalance in terms of socioeconomic and political development between East and West Cameroon as a result of the different socioeconomic and political policies that were inherited and adopted between 1961 and 1966. The policies gravely undermined the socioeconomic progress of West Cameroon (Ardener, 1967: 309-335). And therefore, the British West/Southern Cameroons became dependent financially on the federal subsidies, largely generated from the more advanced economy of East Cameroon after the reunification (Ibid). This dependency therefore added complexity to the nature of the republic of Cameroon. However, in a reversal of the Fomuban agreement which made Cameroon a federation of two states, West Cameroon lost its autonomous status and became the North West and South West Regions of the Republic of Cameroon. The country's post-colonial and independence arrangements, therefore, help in understanding the depth of Anglophones' grievances (Institute for Peace and Security Studies, 2020). However, longstanding grievances of Anglophones in the North West and South West Regions against the Francophone dominated government escalated since October 2016 into what is known as the "Anglophone Crisis" (Ibid.).

Furthermore, the government has failed to address issues related to the different constitutions Cameroon had had since independence and reunification. The government must address the Anglophone problem which originates from issues related to the failure of successive governments of Cameroon, since 1961, to respect and implement the articles of the Constitution that uphold and safeguard what British

Southern Cameroons brought along to the Union in 1961. The flagrant disregard for the Constitution, demonstrated by the dissolution of political parties and the formation of one political party in 1966, the sacking of Jua and the appointment of Muna in 1968 as the Prime Minister of West Cameroon, and other such acts were judged by West Cameroonians to be unconstitutional and undemocratic. Also, the cavalier management of the 1972 Referendum which took out the foundational element (Federalism) of the 1961 Constitution; the 1984 Law amending the Constitution, which gave the country the original East Cameroon name (The Republic of Cameroon) and thereby erased the identity of the West Cameroonians from the original union. West Cameroon, which had entered the union as an equal partner, effectively ceased to exist; and the deliberate and systematic erosion of the West Cameroon cultural identity which the 1961 Constitution sought to preserve and protect by providing for a bi-cultural federation. It was an amended version of the 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon with adaptations to accommodate the Federation. The domination of West Cameroon was evident in article 59 which provided that “the revised Constitution shall be published in French and English, the French text being authentic” (Enonchong, 2021). Following a unilateral Referendum on 20 May 1972, a new Constitution was adopted which replaced the Federal State with a Unitary State. The country was renamed the United Republic of Cameroon and afterwards, the Republic of Cameroon through another revised Constitution in 1984. Finally, the 1996 Constitution, has not been able to address the challenges posed by previous constitutions in Cameroon.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As seen above, the post 1961 plebiscite challenges observed were many, manifesting in different ways. Despite the main challenges like the return to federation, the nature of the state, quest for independence by Southern Cameroonians, solve the Anglophone Crisis, tackle the problem of secession, and Constitutional issues, the paper has advanced certain strong recommendations to address posed plebiscite challenges and conflicts in post-independence Cameroon.

The strongest recommendation in ending the war is that Cameroon must return to its 1961 Federal constitution and must continue to exist in a two-state federation. This must not be replaced by any other form of the state. It must never become a ten-state federation or a new decentralized state. The later would not keep Southern Cameroonians at peace owing to the new face that French Cameroon has shown them. Alternatively, there should be a referendum for self-determination of Southern Cameroons (Atabongwong, 2020).

Southern Cameroonians must continue to pressurize and forced Britain and United Nations to address the challenges faced by former Southern Cameroons. The war in Cameroon has significantly increased various political movements

within the Anglophone collective. There are those in support of outright decentralization of power (two-state federalism). And those in support of outright independence (self-determination). The latter constitute amongst them those who have taken up arms as a reaction to the massacre of innocent Anglophone Cameroonians. Therefore, because the war has colonial implications in terms of the failed process of “decolonization” of British Southern Cameroons, it is required that the British government should take the lead in seeking solution to the current conflict. In the same light, the United Nations, must revisit the issues surrounding the conduct of the plebiscite and pos-plebiscite challenges to address the ongoing Anglophone Crisis.

Former Southern Cameroonians should be given the opportunity to decide on their fate through a plebiscite or referendum, whether to return to the Federal System, Unitary System or completely separate from French Cameroon and become a separate State.

The government and the people of French Cameroon must gaze their eyes beyond the conflict and must return to the original rules of the game – “the drawing board of the 1961 federal constitution”. The international community can also facilitate the return of the two-state federation. This is because the state of the nation building post reunification is abysmal.

English and French languages must have equal status as enshrined in the Constitution. This is not the case. French and English exert a stronger influence on Cameroonians who are originally Francophone or Anglophone. Such influence created language attitudes which shape the way Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians express their belonging. The politics in Cameroon has also compelled French to dominate English which in return is influencing the behaviour of Anglophone Cameroons to an extent (Abongdia, 2009). Fonlon had argued against the dominance of French by stating much earlier in 1969 that “the dominance of French in Cameroon is due to the attitude of the government to elevate French to dominate the entire socio-political and economic landscape” (Fonlon, 1969: 43).

The government and senior administration should be re-organised to better reflect the demographic, political and historical importance of the Anglophones, and to include younger and more legitimate members of the Anglophones community.

The government should desist from criminalising the political debate on Anglophone Cameroon, including on federalism, in particular by ceasing to use the anti-terrorism law for political ends and by considering recourse to a third party (the church or international partner) as a mediator between the government and Anglophone organisations (International Crisis Group, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that, the United Nations organized plebiscites have had serious implications for the borderland

settlements across Africa, and particularly those ethnic groups of former Southern Cameroons that voted in a plebiscite on 11 February 1961 to join the independent Republic of Cameroon. In addition, the October 1961 reunification with French Cameroon and the challenges associated with United Nations post-plebiscite in British Southern Cameroons were responsible for some of the ethnic tensions, conflicts and dilemmas faced by post-independence Cameroon. To ensure cordial intergroup relations and peaceful coexistence, the Government of Cameroon must take a proactive step by inserting the necessary clause(s) in the Constitution of Cameroon and other statutory documents to recognise the historical and political trajectories associated with the people in the former Southern Cameroons, who within the democratic procedures individually voted in a plebiscite to join the Republic of Cameroon in 1961. The study has argued that, post-plebiscite challenges such as the return to the 1961 Federal System or the 1972 Unitary System, the debate surrounding the nature of the state, address the Anglophone Crisis, the problem of mismanagement and corruption, Constitutional issues, the circulation of small arms and secessionist tendencies. These problems that have created contested and elusive atmosphere in Cameroon, were further complicated by the historical and constitutional gaps, which finds expression in the expanse of time from 1961 to date in Cameroon.

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