

# ANGLOPHONE SECESSIONIST MOVEMENTS IN CAMEROON

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## Introduction

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

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

This chapter tries to fill the lacuna. It will be argued that the deep roots of current Anglophone secessionist claims can be found in what has come to be called the 'Anglophone Problem', which is posing a major challenge to the post-colonial state's efforts to forge national unity and integration. There is a widespread feeling in Anglophone Cameroon that reunification with Francophone Cameroon in 1961 has led to a growing marginalisation of the Anglophone minority in the post-colonial nation-state project that is controlled by the Francophone political elite and endangers Anglophone cultural heritage and identity. Although Anglophone resistance has been a permanent feature of Cameroon's post-colonial biography (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003), it was not until political liberalisation in the early 1990s that the Anglophone elite began to mobilise the regional population against the allegedly subordinated position of Anglophones. Claims were made for self-determination and autonomy, first in the form of a return to a federal state and later, after persistent refusals by the

Biya regime to discuss the federal option, for outright secession. It is important to mention that the Anglophone secessionist movement differs from most other secessionist movements in Africa in that it wants to achieve an independent Anglophone state through peaceful negotiations rather than force.

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

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

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

campaign. And finally, the fifth section explores the future prospects for Anglophone secessionist claims.

## The Anglophone Problem

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

The partitioning of the territory into British and French spheres had important consequences for political developments, laying the historical and spatial foundations for the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities in the territory. The populations in each region came to see themselves as distinct communities defined by differences in language and inherited colonial traditions of education, law, public administration and world-view. Second, while French Cameroon was incorporated into the French colonial empire as a distinct administrative unit separate from neighbouring French Equatorial Africa, the British Cameroons was administered as an integral part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, which led to the neglect of its socio-economic development and the increasing migration of Nigerians, notably the Igbo, to Southern Cameroons, where they came to dominate the regional economy (Konings 2005a). There was every indication, particularly in the period preceding reunification, that Britain intended to integrate Southern Cameroons into Nigeria, in spite of its distinct status as a trust territory (Awasom 1998). The dominant position of the Igbo in the regional economy and administration was deeply resented by the local population and resulted in an explosive situation after the Second World War when

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<sup>1</sup> For the history of Northern Cameroons, see Le Vine (1964) and Welch (1966). Northern Cameroons voted in the 1961 plebiscite for integration into the Federation of Nigeria.

regional politicians started exploiting the 'Igbo scare' in nationalist struggles (Amazee 1990). It was not therefore surprising that the nationalist struggles in Southern Cameroons had more of an anti-Nigerian than an anti-colonial character.

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

Interestingly, from the late 1940s onwards, the question of reunification had cropped up in the programmes of various Southern Cameroonian pressure groups and newly created parties, raising the possibility of an alternative political option for Southern Cameroons to escape from its subordinate position in the colonial system and Igbo domination. A number of factors underpinned their reunification campaign. There was the emergence of the 'Kamerun idea' among some members of the Southern Cameroonian elite and the belief that the period of German rule had created a Cameroon identity or nation (Welch 1966: 158-88; Johnson 1970: 42). It has been pointed out that such irredentist feelings of one Cameroon under German administration hardly corresponded with reality since German colonial rule had simply been too short to create a Cameroonian identity among the territory's multiplicity of ethnic groups (Ardener 1967; Chem-Langhëë & Njeuma 1980; Eban 2009). However Kofele-Kale (1980) argued that it was not the reality of the German experience but memories and myths (factual or otherwise) that inspired the Southern Cameroonian elite to start advocating reunification. To strengthen their arguments, the elite referred to the close relationship between ethnic groups on both sides of the

British-French Cameroon border. This boundary, they stressed, was regarded as an unnecessary inconvenience by the people in the area because it restricted the free movement of people belonging to the same ethnic group.

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

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

state was politically undesirable (and likely to contribute to a further 'Balkanisation' of Africa) and economically unviable.<sup>2</sup>

Deprived of their preferred option, Southern Cameroonians were given what amounted to Hobson's choice, i.e. a choice they had to accept whether they liked it or not. In this case it was independence by joining Nigeria or reunification with Francophone Cameroon, which had become independent in 1960 under the new name of the Republic of Cameroon. Three smaller Southern Cameroonian parties – the Kamerun United Party (KUP) led by Paul Kale, the Cameroons Commoners' Congress (CCC) led by Chief Stephen Nyenti, and the Cameroons Indigenes Party (CIP) under Jesco Manga Williams – immediately contested the UN limitation of plebiscite options, insisting on the inclusion of an independent Southern Cameroons state as a third option. They sent several petitions to the UN, threatening to boycott the plebiscite if their wish was not honoured. Their protest actions did not, however, bear fruit (Ngoh 1990: 179-80). In the end, the majority of Southern Cameroonians voted for what they considered the lesser of two evils. Their vote in favour of reunification appeared to be more a rejection of continuous ties with Nigeria, which had proved detrimental to Southern Cameroonian development, than a vote for union with Francophone Cameroon, a territory with a different cultural heritage and one that was then involved in a violent civil war (Joseph 1977). As Susungi (1991) aptly observed, reunification was far from being the reunion of two prodigal sons who had been unjustly separated at birth, but was more like a loveless UN-arranged marriage between two people who hardly knew each other.<sup>3</sup>

By reuniting with the former French Cameroon, the Anglophone elite had hoped to enter a loose federal union as a way of protecting their territory's minority status and cultural heritage (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). Instead, it became evident that the Francophone elite wanted to have a highly centralised, unitary state to promote national unity and economic development. Obviously, the bargaining position of the

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<sup>2</sup> The British had informed the United Nations that the Southern Cameroons would not be economically viable as an independent state. This was based on the Phillipson Report (1959) commissioned by the Foncha government in 1959 to investigate the financial, economic and administrative situation in Southern Cameroons. Its findings, however, could be disputed as an economic survey done in the same year by Dr K.E. Berrill (1960) came to a different conclusion. Hesitant about investing heavily in a region that was supposedly unattractive economically, the British were also opposed to extended trusteeship. The British Secretary of State for the Colonies once warned Southern Cameroons leaders that the golden key to the Bank of England would not be handed over to Southern Cameroons in the case of an extended trusteeship period.

<sup>3</sup> For similar ideas, see Epie Ngame's excellent novel entitled *What God Has Put Asunder* (1992).

Francophone elite was far greater than that of the Anglophones. The former French Trust Territory of Cameroon, now renamed the Republic of Cameroon, was already a much larger independent state. Moreover, the Francophone elite received strong support from the French during constitutional negotiations, while the Anglophone elite were virtually abandoned by the British, who deeply resented the Southern Cameroons option for reunification with Francophone Cameroon (Awasom 2000). As a result, a rumour quickly spread that Charles de Gaulle saw Southern Cameroons as 'a small gift from the Queen of England to France' (Milne 1999: 432-148; Gaillard 1994).

During the constitutional talks at Foumban in July 1961, the Francophone elite were only prepared to accept a highly centralised federation, which was regarded merely as a transitional phase towards the formation of a unitary state. Such a federation demanded relatively few amendments to the 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon. Interestingly, Pierre Messmer (1998: 134-35), one of the last French high commissioners in Cameroon and a close advisor to President Ahmadou Ahidjo, pointed out that he and others knew at the time that the so-called federal constitution provided merely a 'sham federation', which was 'safe for appearances, an annexation of West Cameroon' (the new name of the former Southern Cameroons) (Anyangwe 2009). The final version of the constitution was only approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Cameroon on 1 September 1961, just one month prior to reunification. For this reason, the present Anglophone movements declared in 1993 that 'the union between the Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon had proceeded without any constitutional basis' (All Anglophone Conference 1993: 12).

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

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

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

To reduce the danger of any united Anglophone action against the Francophone-dominated state, Ahidjo decided after the 'revolution' of 20 May 1972 to divide the Anglophone territory into two provinces, South West and North West Provinces. When making this decision, he was well aware of the internal contradictions within the Anglophone community between the coastal-forest people in the South West Province and the Grassfields people in the North West Province. One of the major reasons for these internal conflicts was the transfer of political power from the South West to the North West elite at the end of the 1950s. Following this, the North West elite began to assert its newly acquired position of power, something that soon became ubiquitous in higher levels of government and in senior non-governmental positions. In pre-empting for itself the top jobs as well as the best lands in the South West, it provoked strong resentment of North West domination among South Westerners (Kofele-Kale 1981). South West sentiments were intensified by the fact that the entrepreneurial North Westerners were gradually succeeding in dominating most sectors of the South West economy, particularly trade, transport and housing (Rowlands 1993). Another reason for the South West-North West divide was the 1961 UN plebiscite when the South West showed considerable sympathy for alignment with Nigeria, but the choice for Cameroon prevailed, mainly on the strength of the North West votes. A final source of tension was the massive labour migration from the North West to southwestern plantations and the subsequent settlement of northwestern workers in the South West (Konings 2001).

Lack of unity and severe repression precluded the Anglophone elite from openly expressing its grievances about Francophone domination until 1982 when Paul Biya took power. Following the limited degree of liberalisation introduced by the new president (Takougang & Krieger 1998), the Anglophone elite began to voice their long-standing grievances (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). There was vehement Anglophone protest when the new president changed the country's official name from the 'United Republic of Cameroon' to simply the 'Republic of Cameroon' in February 1984. The new name was not only similar to that of independent Francophone Cameroon prior to reunification but also appeared to ignore the fact that the Cameroonian state was composed of two distinct entities. In Anglophone circles, Biya's unilateral name change seems to have given rise to two different interpretations. Some Anglophones considered this action as the boldest step yet taken towards their assimilation and disappearance as a distinct founding community. For

them, the new name was clear evidence that, as far as Biya was concerned, the Anglophone territory and its people had lost their identity and become an indistinguishable part of the former Republic of Cameroon, thus allowing Ahidjo's designs for absorbing and assimilating the Anglophone minority into the Francophone-dominated state to be fulfilled (Biya 1987).

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

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

## Political Liberalisation and the Anglophone Movements' Struggle for Secession

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

Given Anglophone frustration with the Francophone-dominated state, it is not surprising that the country's first opposition party emerged in Anglophone Cameroon in 1990. Capitalising on Anglophone disenchantment with the regime, the Social

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<sup>4</sup> Reference to the incumbent regime as the government of *La République du Cameroun*, the name adopted by Francophone Cameroon at independence, has become a key signifier in the replotting of the nation's constitutional history as a progressive consolidation of the recolonisation of Anglophone Cameroon by the post-colonial Francophone-dominated state. See Eyoh (1998: 264).

<sup>5</sup> 'The New Social Order' by Fon Gorji Dinka, 20 March 1985, reproduced in Mukong (1990: 98-99).

<sup>6</sup> The name is derived from Ambaz Bay at the foot of Mount Cameroon, which was the area of permanent British settlement in the present-day Anglophone region. In 1858, the British Baptist missionary, Alfred Saker, purchased land from the King of Bimbia and became the *de facto* governor of the small colony of Victoria that was named after the British Queen. See Ardener (1968).

Democratic Front (SDF) was formed in Bamenda, the capital of North West Province, and demanded the liberalisation of political space. Its chairman was John Fru Ndi who was to enjoy widespread popularity among the urban masses because of his courage and populist style of leadership (Krieger 2008). After a massive rally to launch the SDF on 26 May 1990 ended in the deaths of six young Anglophones, the state-controlled media tried to deny government responsibility for this bloody event and to distort the true facts (Nyamnjoh 2005). Anglophone students at the University of Yaoundé who demonstrated in support of the SDF and political liberalisation on the same day were falsely accused by the regime of having marched in favour of the re-integration of Anglophone Cameroon into Nigeria and of singing the Nigerian national anthem and raising the Nigerian flag (Konings 2002). Leading members of the ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), strongly condemned Anglophones for such treacherous actions and called on the government to mete out exemplary sanctions. Anglophones were openly provoked by being called 'Biafrans', meaning secessionists, were referred to as 'enemies in the house', and were requested by then Minister of Territorial Administration, Ibrahim Mbombo Njoya, 'to go elsewhere'. Indignant at his own party's behaviour, John Ngu Foncha, the principal Anglophone architect of the federal state, resigned as the CPDM's first vice-president in June 1990. He lamented the fact that the constitutional provisions that had protected Anglophones in the 1961 federal constitution had been discarded and their voices drowned out, while the rule of the gun had replaced the dialogue that Anglophones so cherished (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 77-78).

Under considerable internal and external pressure, the Biya government eventually introduced a measure of political liberalisation. In December 1990 it declared multipartyism as well as a degree of freedom in mass communication, association and the holding of public meetings and demonstrations. As a result, several political parties, associations, pressure groups and private newspapers were established in Anglophone Cameroon and they began to express and represent Anglophone interests. SDF influence spread from North West Province to South West Province, soon becoming the major opposition party in Anglophone Cameroon. Informed by not-so-distant experience of perceived domination by North Westerners, the South West elite nevertheless continued to be suspicious of the aspirations of SDF leaders, fearing renewed North West domination.

The leaders of the SDF helped turn the Anglophone region into a veritable hotbed of rebellion, leading to several fierce confrontations with the regime in power, especially during the 1991-1992 'ghost-town' campaign, which was essentially a prolonged demonstration of civil disobedience organised by the SDF and the allied opposition parties to force the Biya government to hold a sovereign national conference (Mbu 1993). Evidently, Biya's declared victory in the October 1992 presidential elections was a traumatic experience in Anglophone Cameroon, with violent protests being held against his 'theft of Fru Ndi's victory' throughout North West Province.

Paradoxically and despite its contribution to Anglophone consciousness and action, the party began presenting itself as a national rather than as an Anglophone party, as was evidenced by its growing Francophone membership of mostly Bamileke living in the Francophone part of the Grassfields and who are ethnically related to groups in North West Province. Since the SDF adopted a half-hearted stand towards the Anglophone problem (Konings 2004), Anglophone interests came to be first and foremost represented by associations and pressure groups created and reactivated by the Anglophone elite with the introduction of political liberalisation in 1990. Some of them, such as the Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM) and the Ambazonian Movement of Fon Gorji Dinka, advocated outright secession. Most, however, initially championed a return to the federal state, especially the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM). This was the only Anglophone association operating legally in the country and was the most important Anglophone pressure group for some time.

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

Anglophones in their ten-year struggle against determined government efforts to abolish GCE exams (Nyamnjoh & Akum 2008).

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

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

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

From then onwards, the AAC became the main Anglophone association and its mouthpiece, and was responsible for the representation of Anglophone interests in general. All existing and newly emerging Anglophone associations became auxiliary organisations of the AAC and under its umbrella they continued to carry out their own specific responsibilities. They were represented in the 65-member Anglophone Standing Committee created by the AAC, which submitted a draft federal constitution to the Biya government on 27 May 1993 (Konings 1999). It was simply ignored by

the regime and, in a series of interviews in Cameroon and France, Biya stated that federalism was inappropriate for a country like Cameroon.

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

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

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

After embracing a secessionist stand, the SCNC adopted the following motto: 'The force of argument, and not the argument of force'. This demonstrated that it was pursuing independence for Southern Cameroons through peaceful negotiation and not through armed struggle. Given the Francophone-dominated state's unitary approach to the post-colonial nation-state project and its condemnation of any secessionist claims,

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<sup>7</sup> See SCNC press release reprinted in *Cameroon Post*, 16-23 August 1994, p. 3. See also Anyangwe (2008).

<sup>8</sup> *Cameroon Post*, 8-14 October 1996 and *The Witness*, 12-18 November 1996.

the SCNC leadership developed two strategies for the peaceful establishment of Southern Cameroons: (i) to seek international recognition, and (ii) to sensitise and mobilise the Anglophone population.

### The SCNC Leadership's Pursuit of International Recognition for its Secessionist Claims

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

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

The various missions by Anglophone leaders to the UN undoubtedly contributed to a growing awareness of the Anglophone problem in UN circles. There is sufficient

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<sup>9</sup> See SCNC, Petition against the Annexation of the Southern Cameroons, Buea, May 1995 (mimeo).

<sup>10</sup> SCNC, The London Communiqué, London, 22 June 1995 (mimeo).

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

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

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

SCNC leaders also engaged in intensive lobbying to forestall the Republic of Cameroon’s admission to the Commonwealth and to instead file an application for Commonwealth membership for Southern Cameroons. However the Biya government duly applied for Commonwealth membership in 1989 and, to the consternation of Anglophone leaders, it was announced on 16 October 1995 that the Republic of Cameroon had been admitted into the Commonwealth. In reaction, the SCNC strongly condemned the Commonwealth for Cameroon’s admission, accusing it of a blatant lack of sensitivity in a complex and explosive situation and of frustrating the political aspirations of Southern Cameroonian people. Britain in particular was blamed for its ‘second treachery’ towards the Southern Cameroons cause, the first having been in the

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<sup>11</sup> See ‘Annan Ends African Tour, Seeks Cameroon Dialogue’ on scncforum website, 4 May 2000.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.unpo.org>.

pre-reunification period. The SCNC then pleaded for a Quebec-style referendum on independence for Southern Cameroons and for separate Commonwealth membership (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003: 96-99).

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

In 2001, a new Anglophone body was formed under the banner of the SCNC, the so-called Southern Cameroons People's Organisation (SCAPO) with the specific goal of pursuing legal avenues to address 'the claims of the peoples of Southern Cameroons to self-determination and independence from *La République du Cameroun*'. It soon filed a lawsuit against the Nigerian government in the Federal High Court in Abuja for its continuing disregard of the statehood and sovereignty of Southern Cameroons (Jua & Konings 2004: 624). SCAPO had several reasons for taking Nigeria to court in its battle for recognition of an independent Southern Cameroons state. First, the legal representation of the Southern Cameroons case could not be taken up in Cameroon itself. Second, like the Cameroonian government, the Nigerian government failed to recognise the statehood of Southern Cameroons and its ownership of the Bakassi peninsula. Third, the Trust Territory of Southern Cameroons had been administered by Britain as an integral part of Nigeria. SCAPO was thus inclined to regard Nigeria as a co-conspirator with Britain in the process that had led to the annexation of Southern Cameroons by *La République du Cameroun*. And finally, Nigeria had ratified the AU's Banjul Charter of Human Rights that lays down in Article 20 the right of all colonised or oppressed people to free themselves from the bonds of domination by resorting to any means recognised by the international community.

In March 2002, SCAPO scored a landmark victory when the Nigerian Federal High Court ruled that 'the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be compelled to place before the ICJ and the UN General Assembly and ensure diligent persecution to the conclusion the claims of the people of Southern Cameroons to self-determination and their declaration of independence'. It also placed a permanent injunction restraining 'the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from treating the Southern

Cameroons and all the people of the territory as an integral part of *La République du Cameroun*' (Jua & Konings 2004: 624-25).

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

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

In its 2009 ruling, the ACHPR affirmed Anglophone grievances against the Biya government and recognised Southern Cameroons as a distinct 'people', but it did not support Southern Cameroons secessionist claims. It was evidently bound by Article 4(b) of the AU's Constitutive Act that calls for respect of existing borders at the time of independence. Consequently, it recommended 'comprehensive national dialogue' (Eban 2009). The Biya government has not yet, however, shown any willingness to honour this recommendation.

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

and its stake in the oil industry in Anglophone Cameroon. With France's support, the Biya government is unlikely to concede any ground to the Anglophones.

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

### The Anglophone Leadership's Sensitisation and Mobilisation Campaign

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

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

The Anglophone leadership's sensitisation campaign was quite successful between 1992 and 1995 and a sense of euphoria spread through Anglophone Cameroon when the SCNC delegation returned from its mission to the UN in 1995. At

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<sup>13</sup> See *Star Headlines*, 19 March 2006, 'The British Government Condemns Anglophone Secession'.

rallies attended by large crowds in various Anglophone towns, the delegation displayed a huge UN flag, claiming it had received it from the UN itself to show that Southern Cameroons was still a UN trust territory and that independence was only a matter of time (Jua & Konings 2004).

Since 1996, however, the Anglophone leadership's sensitisation campaign has come to a virtual standstill as a result of a general loss of momentum. Following the resignation of the founding fathers among the SCNC leadership, the new leadership, under the chairmanship of Ambassador (retired) Henry Fossung, has appeared incapable of devising a strategy to counteract the government's increasingly divisive and repressive tactics. Given this leadership problem and the government's persistent reluctance to enter into negotiations, a conflict developed within the Anglophone movements between the doves – those who continued to adhere to a negotiated separation from *La République du Cameroun* – and the hawks – those who had concluded that the independence of Southern Cameroons could only be achieved through armed struggle. The Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) in particular opted for the latter strategy, as is manifest in its motto: 'The argument of force'.

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

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

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

And last but not least, one should not overlook the indispensable role Anglophone Cameroonians in the diaspora are playing in the SCNC sensitisation and mobilisation campaign. They have not only contributed immensely by supporting the Anglophone movements' activities financially, but have also underscored the importance of the Internet, especially at times when Anglophone voices critical of the government have been largely silenced in Cameroon (Jua & Konings 2004; Nyamnjoh 2005; Anyefru

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<sup>14</sup> *The Post*, 13 November 2000, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> SCARM was the successor of the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM), which was originally the most important Anglophone movement.

<sup>16</sup> See British Southern Cameroons Summit, Resolutions, Washington, 17 June 2001 (mimeo); and Washington Proclamation of the Statehood of Ex-British Southern Cameroons, Washington, 17 June 2001 (mimeo).

2008). They are maintaining a plethora of websites such as the homepages of the SCNC, the SCYL, the AM and the FRSC. Their online activities clearly demonstrate the considerable differences in their political agendas and ideologies and this has, unfortunately, resulted in minimal cooperation between the various cyber communities.

### Prospects for Anglophone Secessionist Claims

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

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

Anglophone divide (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000; Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003). In addition to its divisive strategies, the government has enhanced its repressive tactics after the SCNC's adoption of a secessionist programme.

Significantly, the Anglophone secessionist stand is not only strongly opposed by the Biya regime but also faces a great deal of resistance in the Anglophone community itself. While most Anglophones tend to support the Anglophone movements' grievances about Francophone domination, they are deeply divided over which path to take to resolve the problem. Besides the leadership of the Anglophone movements that advocate peaceful secession with an agreement about the sharing of assets belonging to each side, there are a considerable number in the Anglophone elite who favour federalism, albeit differing on the number of states. Since the 1996 Constitution, the Cameroonian government seems to be willing to concede to a certain degree of decentralisation. As a consequence, the pro-government Anglophone elite are strongly in favour of decentralisation based on the country's ten existing provinces.

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

There has also been a lot of in-fighting over the control of the SCNC's relatively scarce financial resources. Apart from the traditional financial contributions from the diaspora, the SCNC leadership has devised an ingenious source of income-generating activities. They offer Cameroonian migrants, regardless of whether they have actually participated in the Anglophone struggles, certificates claiming they are SCNC

activists in order to make them eligible for political asylum in the host countries. Nfor Ngala Nfor and one of his lieutenants, Prince Mbinglo Hitler, have regularly been accused by other SCNC leaders of having appropriated part of the organisation's income for personal use (Owono 2010).

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

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

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

formation of alliances with Francophone groups that sympathise with the Anglophone cause.

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

## Conclusion

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

Anglophone movements renewed this call during political liberalisation in the early 1990s but unlike the pre-reunification period, the renewed pursuit of an independent state was initially a minority option, with most Anglophone movements striving for the return to a federal state. It was not until the Biya government refused to discuss the federal option that the leadership of the Anglophone movements started championing the separation of Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon into two sovereign states along the lines of what happened in Czechoslovakia in 1992. It was envisaged that this kind of peaceful separation could be accompanied by an equitable sharing of assets and liabilities, and be supported by the establishment of other cross-border confidence-building institutions. Most of the leaders of the Anglophone movements now agree that this solution holds the best chance for peace in the long run because any attempts to engage belatedly in democratic and institutional reforms just to placate Anglophones and preserve international appearances will only postpone the day of reckoning and prolong the misery. An increasing number of scholars (Ghai 1998; Sandbrook 2000) also regard secession as the best solution in cases where there are no prospects for peaceful co-existence of territorial units within dysfunctional and

deeply divided nation-states. Eritrea's peaceful separation from Ethiopia in 1994 following a referendum in the previous year reassured those who feared that the secession of an African country would automatically open a Pandora's box of violence and fragmentation.

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

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

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

Although the struggle for an independent Southern Cameroons state remains alive, especially as a result of the financial contributions and Internet activities of Anglophones in the diaspora, the prospects of success, if measured in terms of achieving a sovereign state, remain remote and Anglophone nationalists need to rethink their political objectives as well as their strategies. Given the Francophone-dominated state and the AU's steadfast refusal to consider Anglophone secessionist

claims, more Anglophone nationalists are now proposing embracing armed struggle on the grounds that freedom is never freely given.

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