

CONSTRUCTION AND DECONSTRUCTION: ANGLOPHONES OR AUTOCHTONES?

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ABSTRACT

While the politics of belonging has a strong tradition in the post-colonial state in Cameroon, the current wave of democratisation in the 1990s has compelled the Biya regime to re-conceptualise "belonging". Finding it hard to win free and fair elections in the new multiparty system, the Biya government has tried to perpetuate itself in power by encouraging the resurgence of local identities which were likely to support the regime, notwithstanding the fact that this strategy obviously undermined its professed policy of national integration. It has also stretched the conventional idea of minorities to such ambiguous proportions that historical minorities like the Anglophones have seen themselves denied the status of minority in the 1996 constitution, while every small ethnic grouping which appears to distance itself from the opposition has met with government support. This paper examines the systematic efforts of the government to deconstruct the Anglophone identity - an identity which has its historical foundation in the British colonisation of the ex-Southern Cameroons and has been reactivated during the current democratisation process, posing serious problems to the Francophone-dominated state. One major government strategy has been to fuel the existing tensions between South Westerners and North Westerners in the Anglophone territory, tensions largely based in large-scale north-western settlement in the coastal plantation area and in the perceived domination of the South West by the North West economically and politically since the end of the 1950s, and to stimulate new alignments like SAVA. The paper argues that the national government has been quite successful in this endeavour, evidenced by the decline or inertia of initially powerful political opposition movements based on Anglophone alliances.

ANGLOPHONES AND THE POLITICS OF BELONGING

When in May 1990 the Anglophones dared to challenge and embarrass the one-party state by launching the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in Bamenda, they were, perhaps without knowing, providing the Biya regime with a more compelling reason than ever not only to consider Anglophones as "les ennemis dans la maison", but also and more importantly to intensify strategies for neutralising Anglophone identity. The fact that the SDF rapidly rose to prominence and credibility as an opposition party in Anglophone Cameroon, coupled with the fact that its slogans and the charisma of its

leader John Fru Ndi commanded nation-wide appeal, heightened the panic in government circles and hardened attitudes towards Anglophones and Anglophone identity. At first, the government did not quite know how to react nor whom to scapegoat. A study of pro-establishment anonymous tracts, pamphlets and declarations in the media between 1990 and 1992 shows that initial government attempts to contain the spread of the SDF and opposition politics in general, were not well thought out.

While the first government strategy was to lump all Anglophones together, and to play up the idea of Anglophone ingratitude to all the state had done for them and their region, subsequent reactions sought to apply a divide-and-rule strategy by making a distinction between the supposedly conciliatory coastals of the South West Province and the unpatriotic, ungrateful, power-monger grassfielders of the North West Province whom the state identified with their equally troublesome cultural kin - the Bamileke of the Francophone Western Province. Thus, the official rhetoric shifted from the collective condemnation of "les Anglo-Bami" to simply condemning "les Bamendo-Bami". Subsequent developments would show that the government found it increasingly rewarding and politically expedient to tempt the South West elite away from Anglophone solidarity with strategic appointments and the idea that their real enemy was the North West elite and not the state or the central administration. Infiltrating and hijacking the South West Elite Association (SWELA), then subsequently encouraging a merger with the elite association of the native Douala to form the Grand SAWA movement, was part of government's strategy to weaken Anglophone solidarity through divide and rule championed by elite associations (Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998) and the politics of the belly (Bayart 1993).

All of this contributed to the promulgation of the January 1996 constitution¹, which promised protection for minorities at the same time that the state was clamping down on the activities of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), mouthpiece of the critical wing of the Anglophone minority. Such double standards would leave few in doubt as to why the new constitution was deliberately vague on the notion of "minority", or the fact that the notion has since been manipulated to discourage solidarity on the basis of shared interests and predicaments. In his analysis of similar constitutions elsewhere in colonial and contemporary Africa, Mamdani (1996) has noted that such constitutions limit the population not to a civic but to an ethnic space. They also define identity for

¹ For a discussion of the various factors contributing to the promulgation of the 1996 constitution, see Melone et al. 1996.

the populations concerned not by where individuals are born or live, but by their ethnic ancestral area. Such constitutions thus oblige everyone to follow the customs of their ethnic group and to emphasise culture, not rights. Also, by recognising "social identity exclusively through the line of the father", states with such constitutions, ensure that no degree of inter-marriage or integration could ever put together ethnic groups that the state is determined to have asunder (Mamdani 1998). The Cameroonian state insists on patriarchal identification by ethnic area, district and province of origin in national identity cards, birth, marriage and other civic certificates. Its constitution, like the others, enables ethnic areas to make the distinction between what Mamdani has termed "ethnic citizens and ethnic strangers". A point with which Mono Ndjana, one of the most faithful ideologues of the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), agrees when he defines "l'autochtone" as "un citoyen ethnique de l'ethnie locale" and "l'allogène" as "un citoyen ethnique de l'ethnie d'ailleurs", stressing that in every African country "chacun est à la fois autochtone et allogène, selon sa position dans l'espace" (Mono Ndjana 1997b: 102-103).

The 18 January 1996 constitution (preamble and article 57, paragraph 3) states unequivocally that:

The State shall ensure the protection of minorities and shall preserve the rights of indigenous populations in accordance with the law.

The Regional Council shall be headed by an indigene of the Region elected from among its members for the life of the Council The Regional Bureau shall reflect the sociological components of the Region.

Its timing and release were hardly an accident. The ruling Beti being a minority ethnic group under threat of losing power in a genuine democracy, the Anglophones and Bamileke having proved themselves the most threatening opposition in the first five years of multipartyism, and the regime having rejected a "one man one vote" democracy (Mono Ndjana 1997b: 102-103) through repeated riggings, the 1996 constitution was a foregone conclusion. It would serve the government perfectly in neutralising both the Anglophone and Bamileke opposition, while at the same time diverting attention from failed economic and social policies by scapegoating grassfielders as ruthless land-grabbing, tax-evading settlers, who were making it impossible for government to deliver. Its promulgation preceded the municipal elections that the opposition SDF party won in some key urban constituencies, including Douala. The fact that it immediately

occasioned government-condoned demonstrations by the native Douala, the SAWA, was even more telling. The protests led to the creation of the SAWA² movement of the coastal peoples, presenting themselves as an "autochthonous" minority that had suffered political and economic marginalization from dominant and hegemonic "settlers" or "allogènes" from the Grassfields (Tatah Mentan 1996; Wang Sonnè 1997; Zognong 1997; Jua 1997; Yenshu 1998; Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998); yet also playing into the hands of political opportunists keen to stretch their movement to include groupings as remote from the coast as the Bayang of Manyu Division. Their aim was to fight exploitation by "unscrupulous" and "ungrateful" grassfields settlers, and to play up the idea that as minorities, they needed peace, protection, social order and development. The SAWA demonstrated against the Bamileke in particular, who alone accounted for 70 per cent of the Douala population, and who had provided for only one indigenous mayor out of the five councils in which the SDF had won the municipal elections. This was seen as evidence that the Bamileke were ready to use their numbers to exclude the indigenous minorities in a multiparty context (Wang Sonnè 1997)³.

In the South West Province, the pro-CPDM governor Oben Peter Ashu blamed the settler population, which outnumbered the indigenes in most urban areas of the province, for the poor performance of the CPDM in some key municipalities, and intensified his crackdown on the SCNC and any event organised to celebrate Anglophone identity by scholars and activists. A scheduled launching of Francis Nyamnjoh's *The Cameroon GCE Crisis: A Test of Anglophone Solidarity* was banned at the last minute, and the author, Asong Wara (organiser) and Christian Cardinal Tumi (chief launcher) threatened with detention, for 15 days renewable, should they proceed despite the ban. Subsequent bannings were brought to bear on the launching of Charles Taku's *For Dame Lynda Chalker & Other Anglophone Cameroonian Notes*, and of Christopher Nsalai's *Look*

² "The term Sawa ... is generally employed by the Douala to refer to themselves as coastal peoples. It has also been extended to embrace related peoples such as the Bakweri, the Pongo, Malimba, Dibombari, the Bodiman, the Ewudi (all closely related to the former). Other distant peoples in the Littoral Province and the South West Province (e.g. the Mbo of the Mungo Division, the Bakossi, the Bassa of Douala city, the Yabassi, the Bakundu, Balondo, Balong, Mbonge and Bafaw) have also come to identify themselves with this appellation" (Yenshu 1998).

³ It should be noted that anti-Bamileke sentiments have a long history in the Cameroonian post-colonial state. Such anti-Bamileke feelings were even expressed within the Catholic Church. For example, in 1987, Douala priests strongly protested against the appointment of a Bamileke auxiliary bishop in the Douala Archdiocese. See Collectif Changer le Cameroun (C3) 1992. The political liberalisation in the early 1990s and the 1996 constitution only helped to exacerbate these sentiments.

Up to the Mountain Top: Beyond Party Politics. Grassfielders in the South West Province were likened to scabies, a stubborn skin affliction commonly referred to in Pidgin-English as "Cam-no-go" [meaning an illness that wouldn't be cured or a visitor that wouldn't leave]. In Kumba for example, Chief Mukete organised thugs of Bafaw youths to defend the regime against the "settler vote" in an election the SDF opposition was set to win. His action would be hailed subsequently by Nerius Nemaso Mbile, an old and experienced politician, at a joint conference of South West chiefs and elites in July 1999, and other traditional leaders urged to emulate him⁴.

Although its preamble still pays respect to the age-old ideology of nation-building, the constitution appears to place more premium on ethnic identities and to allow for an interpretation by government that promises reward to all elite ready to sacrifice the quest for national citizenship or power in favour of ethnic citizenship and power. Indeed, from the way politics has been practised since the promulgation of the constitution, it would appear that civic identity and inter-ethnic or national constituency, are limited to the CPDM president, the only person with a *meaningful* right to seek power at a central or national level. Challengers who are not discouraged by an unfavourable electoral code (Tolen 1997) and the invidious manipulation of electoral rolls, are eventually vanquished by a post-election rigging machinery perfected over the years, since 1992. This, in part, explains how from a modest score of 39.976 % in the first multiparty presidential elections in 1992, Paul Biya would in the 1997 election score 92.57%, reminding one strongly of the one-party era when elections were a mere formality for the incumbent and such scores as 99.99% commonplace. Also, by opting for ten regions along the lines of existing provinces, the constitution proved the Biya government's committed disregard for federalism and its determination to keep Anglophones divided (1996 Constitution, Article 61, paragraph 3), in addition, of course, to living up to the French-inspired aversion for decentralised government among Francophone Cameroonians.

Unsurprisingly, the constitution has been much criticised, especially by radical Anglophones and the Bamileke. Both the constitution and the advantage taken by the SAWA of it, have been interpreted differently by various groups, using media that were either for or against (Tatah Mentan 1996). While the SAWA and the Beti, supported by *Cameroon Tribune*, *Le Patriote* and *L'Anecdote*, hailed it as a necessary and timely step to protect minority groups from the asphyxiating grip of expansionist and dominant

⁴ See *The Herald*, 21 July 1999, pp.1, and 3-4, for a detailed report on the conference which was held at the University of Buca on 17 July 1999.

migrants such as the Bamileke and groups from the Bamenda Grassfields, others, articulating their case through the critical anti-government press of mainly Bamileke and Anglophone origin, saw it as a recipe for national disintegration (Tatah Mentan 1996; Nkwi and Nyamnjoh 1997; Zognong 1997; Jua 1997). Indeed, since 1996, various groups have taken advantage of its ambiguous promise of protection for minorities to fan the flames of division and differences with others as a pretext for access to power and resources at national and regional levels (Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997; Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998; Eyoh 1998a and b; Nyamnjoh 1999; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh forthcoming). And critical Anglophones have seen in this outcome a trivialization of the notion of "a minority", and blamed the CPDM government for championing the politics of divide-and-rule to the detriment of the Anglophone cause and nationhood. Some have interpreted the new constitution as a conspiracy by the state to marginalize the Anglophones even further (Tatah Mentan 1996: 186-194; Jua, 1997), a concern which John Ngu Foncha had already voiced in his letter of resignation from the CPDM in 1990, when he wrote: "The Anglophone Cameroonians whom I brought into the union have been ridiculed and referred to as "les Biafrais", "les ennemies dans la maison", "les traîtres", etc., and the constitutional provisions which protected this Anglophone minority have been suppressed, their voice drowned ..."⁵.

The 1996 constitution thus denies the Anglophone claim to minority status by stressing ethnic purity and indigenous cultural traditions, while downplaying the community's colonial heritage. It re-discovers the colonial practice of seeing ethnic communities as "permanent crystalline structures" (Ardener 1967: 297-299), and thus can afford to question the idea of an Anglophone identity that unites people beyond so-called tribal boundaries. The constitution has also often been used by the regime and its allies to endorse the idea of democracy as an ethnic or group right rather than as an empowerment of the individual (and the guaranteeing of his/her civic rights regardless of ethnic origin) as stipulated in its preamble. For, as Mono Ndjana, the CPDM ideologue argues, every ethnic group is entitled to "sa place au soleil, sans chercher à ôter les autres du même soleil" (Mono Ndjana 1997b: 103). This view effectively denies the idea of a *Cameroonian* citizenship, since even metropolitan areas like Douala and Yaounde, created by colonialists and cosmopolitan from the outset, have under the new constitution been claimed by this or that autochthonous group to a degree quite unprecedented. Little wonder therefore, that the

⁵ Dr J.N. Foncha's Letter of Resignation from the C.P.D.M., reproduced in Mukong 1990: 155.

appointment of André Wouking, a Bamileke, as Archbishop of Yaounde in July 1999 (to succeed Jean Zoa, a Beti, who died in 1998), should be greeted with indignation by Beti elite, clergy and christians, at the same time that it was hailed by the Bamileke press as a good lesson in national integration by the Pope to President Biya, champion of the rhetoric of national integration⁶.

To those who sought protection as minorities, the price to pay would increasingly be stated in no uncertain terms: *Vote the CPDM*, the only party, according to Mono Ndjana (1997b: 96), with "une assise assez importante ou un pouvoir d'attraction suffisant". Which is exactly what the Prime Minister, Peter Mafany Musonge, himself a SAWA, told SAWA chiefs at a meeting in Kumba on 8 March 1997. In fact, since his appointment in September 1996, Musonge and the pro-CPDM SWELA and SAWA elite have constantly admonished the coastal people to throw their weight behind President Biya and the CPDM. As Musonge put it during a reception in Buea following his appointment, "President Biya has scratched our back, and we shall certainly scratch the Head of State's back thoroughly when time comes", meaning that the SAWA should, together with him, resolve to manifest their total support and allegiance to the President who appointed him⁷. A promise they were shown to have kept at the 1997 presidential elections, after which Biya would again reward him with a re-appointment as PM. The fact that political parties created by SAWA indigenes at the beginning of the 1990s had all failed to take root by 1996⁸, meant that SAWA opposition politicians who had failed to make it at a national level through party politics found in the SAWA movement a singular opportunity to stage a political comeback. In his paper on this movement, Wang Sonnè (1997: 187-195) draws attention to the example

⁶ See *Cameroon Tribune*, 19 July 1999, pp.8-9, for reactions to the appointment titled: "Yaoundé: l'archevêque qu'on n'attendait pas"; and *La Nouvelle Expression*, 21 July 1999, p.6, for the article "Archidiocèse de Yaoundé: déjà des cloches dissonnantes". In an interview with the Editor-in-Chief of *Cameroon Tribune*, Paul C. Ndembiyembe (a Beti), André Wouking expressed shock and indignation over the behaviour of a Beti priest who refused to say mass at the Yaounde Cathedral, on 18 July 1999. "to mark his disapproval" of the appointment of a Bamileke as archbishop of a "Beti" diocese. See *Cameroon Tribune*, 23 July 1999, pp.8-10.

⁷ See *Cameroon Post*, 12-18 November 1996, pp.1 and 3; *The Herald*, 11-12 November 1996, pp.1 and 3; *The Star Headlines*, 20 November 1996, pp.1-7. For a critical commentary on the "politics of back-scratching" which former PM Simon Achidi Achu and his successor PM Peter Mafany Musonge sought to promote in their regions and elsewhere in appreciation of appointments by Biya, see Rotcod Gobata in *Cameroon Post*, 26 November - 2 December 1996, p.7.

⁸ Examples include Yondo Black's Mouvement Social pour la Nouvelle Démocratie (MSND), Jean-Jacques Ekindi's Mouvement Progressiste (MP), Mola Njoh Litumbe's Liberal Democratic Alliance (LDA) and Samuel Eboua's Mouvement pour la Démocratie Populaire (MDP).

of Jean-Jacques Ekindi of the Mouvement Progressiste (MP), who, after 4 years in political wilderness, enthusiastically accepted to coordinate the SAWA movement, supported by the very CPDM from which he had resigned in 1991 and the leader of which he had challenged resolutely at the October 1992 presidential elections. This perspective by no means denies the SAWA movement a cultural content or legitimacy, but it draws attention to how a political elite could seek to manipulate a cultural movement for political ends. For more on elite associations and politics in Cameroon, see Nyamnjoh and Rowlands (1998).

CONTAINING ANGLOPHONE IDENTITY IN CAMEROON

The 1996 constitution and the politics of belonging in the 1990s might have institutionalised and intensified the sense of divisions among Anglophones, but this by no means implies that the Machiavellian designs of the Francophone-dominated state for asphyxiating Anglophone identity started then. Indeed, the manipulation of ethnic and regional rivalries to divide and rule the Anglophones, among others, is a long-standing strategy in national politics (Bayart 1979). As we have argued elsewhere (Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997), contrary to Anglophone expectations upon reunification, federalism, far from providing for equal partnership between Anglophones and Francophones and guaranteeing cultural continuity for the former, turned out to be nothing more than a comma in a long sentence of assimilation of the Anglophone minority (see also Benjamin 1972). Gradually, the poignant sense of cultural erosion and devaluation of most things Anglophone this brought about, resulted in an Anglophone consciousness with every potential for crystallising into a grand Anglophone *ethnie*. The feeling of being "marginalised", "exploited", and "assimilated" by the Francophone-dominated state and even by the Francophone population as a whole, has inspired novelists, playwrights, poets, musicians, journalists, academics, the clergy and the entire Anglophone community (Nyamnjoh 1996a; Lyonga et al. 1993). Most Anglophones, like their outspoken Archbishop Paul Verdzevov of Bamenda, are acutely aware of the active pursuit by the state, of "an unwritten policy of absorption and assimilation" of Anglophones. They have a deep feeling that their only chance of being accepted as *bona fide* Cameroonians seems to rest with their total Frenchification or francophonisation⁹. A feeling which is lent added credence by arrogant declarations now and again by Francophones in high office. In one such

⁹ See Paul Verdzevov, Archbishop of Bamenda, *A Talk at the Presentation of a Book Entitled: The Cameroon GCE Crisis: A Test of Anglophone Solidarity*, Monday, 1 July 1996.

declaration, the former Vice-Prime Minister in-charge of Housing and Town Planning, Hamadou Mustapha, said: "A un moment donné effectivement, on a commencé à oublier que les Anglophones étaient là; on a eu l'impression que les Anglophones s'étaient déjà francophonisés"¹⁰. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the government, in its interpretation of a constitution purportedly protective of minorities, should not provide for an Anglophone minority.

In an earlier article on the Anglophone problem (Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997), we discussed at length some of the strategies employed by successive Francophone-dominated governments since independence to marginalise Anglophones and weaken or deny them a sense of identity. From the outset, Ahidjo, Cameroon's first president, was never enthusiastic about federalism as a lasting solution to the bi-cultural colonial heritage of the country. He saw federalism merely as an unavoidable transit on a journey to the total assimilation of the Anglophone minority into a strongly centralised state *à la française*. To achieve this objective, he employed several tactics which included: playing Anglophone political factions off against each other and eventually uniting them into a single party, the Cameroon National Union (CNU) created in September 1966; disappointing from positions of responsibility key Anglophones committed to federalism in favour of those amenable to the unitary state; creating "clients" through granting top posts in the federal institutions and in the single party to representatives of significant ethnic and regional groups in the Anglophone region; and resorting to overt repression of dissent. Through these and other tactics he succeeded in abolishing the federation in favour of the unitary state, which he achieved through his "glorious revolution of 20 May 1972". To reduce further the danger of any united Anglophone action against the unitary state, Ahidjo decided to divide the erstwhile Federated State of West Cameroon into the South West and North West Provinces. This decision, masterfully informed by the internal contradictions within the Anglophone community between the coastal/forest people (the South West Province) and the grassfields people (the North West Province), would exacerbate those divisions which in future would serve as the Achilles' heel of most attempts at Anglophone solidarity.

Upon succeeding Ahidjo, Biya proved he was just as keen in obliterating Anglophone identity and in zombifying the Anglophone elite, as the former was. His government has thus employed similar strategies (perfecting some and adding new ones) in containing the Anglophones and their identity. The so-called Bamenda Proclamation, adopted by the

¹⁰ See *Jeune Afrique Economie*, No.207, 20 November 1995, p.63.

Second All Anglophone Conference (AACII) held at Bamenda from 29 April to 1 May 1994, mentions some of the most important strategies used. It says that "rather than address the issue", the Biya government has preferred "to feign ignorance of the Anglophone problem... to seek by diverse manoeuvres to create division within the Anglophone nation with the aim of giving the false impression that there is no general consensus within it on constitutional reform... and to accuse the All Anglophone Conference and its affiliated organisations unjustly and falsely of having adopted a secession of Anglophone Cameroon as their goal".

The Biya government has often tried to trivialise the Anglophone-Francophone divide, preferring to stress a common colonial identity under Germany, and the idea of national integration which the 1972 revolution invented. Meaningful though this argument would be to any country with a clear sense of vision, it fails, in the Cameroonian context, to convince the Anglophone minority, by coming short, in practice, of institutionalising mechanisms for weakening the strong grip on the state by Francophones and their French colonial heritage. At present, Cameroon claims to be a bilingual and multi-cultural state, which is said to be a safe guarantee for the preservation of the differential linguistic and cultural heritage of the post-German colonial era. In practice, the experiences of ordinary Anglophones belie such claims, especially as little is done to disguise the superiority accorded the French language and Francophone cultural values over everything Anglophone or English.

In reply to the Anglophone demand for a return to the federal state as the best guarantee of their identity, the Biya government has often stressed that the unitary state was the result of a massive vote of the Cameroonian people voluntarily expressed during the 1972 referendum. Like Ahidjo, Biya has tabled arguments in favour of the present dispensation, and has rejected federalism as costly, weakening to state power, and divisive; even if his politics of belonging does not appear to be any less divisive or costly. Declining to discuss a possible return to federalism which he sees as a ploy by radical Anglophones to obtain secession for their area, Biya (with the support of most Francophone elite and media, regardless of political persuasion) has conceded to a certain degree of decentralisation within the unitary state, the so-called ten-region option based on the present ten provinces in Cameroon (1996 constitution, article 61, paragraph 1)¹¹.

¹¹ In an interview granted to *Jeune Afrique Economie* in 1999, Biya indicated his willingness to organise a referendum on the Anglophone problem "if the need is there", stressing that only a small minority of the Anglophones were clamoring for secession. For a summary of this interview, see

Like his predecessor, Biya has attempted, with significant success, to divide the Anglophones, often capitalising on existing contradictions between the North West and South West elite. One of his divisive tactics has been to appoint South Westerners to key positions in the South West, in response to South Westerners' complaints about North West domination over their province (Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997; Eyoh 1998a and b). Biya has also sought to use his Anglophone allies for the defence of the unitary state in exchange for rewards in the form of appointments, sinecures and a blind eye to corruption and/or embezzlement by those in high office. And in turn, the allies have tended to blame the leaders of various Anglophone movements for their "demagogic and irresponsible" calls for federalism or secession, and to dispute their claims of being "spokesmen" of the Anglophone community, blaming them, as did Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge in November 1996, for leading "hostile campaigns at home and abroad to foster division and hatred" among Cameroonians¹². They equally challenge claims of Anglophone marginalisation, preferring to talk instead of "self-marginalisation", and to invite Anglophones to consider themselves as fully fledged Cameroonians with the same rights and responsibilities as Francophones (Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998: 335). This has often led to severe confrontations between the two camps and to mutual accusations of betrayal. But to most ordinary Anglophones, it is simply hard to fathom how, just for a few appointments and sinecures, their elite are all too eager to serve as gatekeepers and scavengers for a government that denies them an identity and disrecognises their predicaments as a community (Nyamnjoh 1999). More and more the youths are quite critical of those elite who spend their active years in the service of fear and repression, just to turn around upon retirement to seek fame through "dubious" identification with the Anglophone cause.

Isaha'a Boh Cameroon -Bulletin No.417. Contrary to Biya's view, we showed in an earlier article (Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997) that the Anglophone problem can no longer be perceived as an elitist problem. This can be substantiated by the widespread support for a number of actions organised against the Francophone-dominated state by the various Anglophone movements. This was particularly manifest during the "sensitisation tour" organised by the SCNC throughout the Anglophone territory in July-August 1995 following the return of its delegation to the United Nations. Large crowds attended the SCNC rallies, praising the delegation for its historic mission to the United Nations and pledging their support for the SCNC's new strive for total independence of the Southern Cameroons. When security forces tried to prevent the SCNC delegation from entering Kumba in the South West Province, thousands of people chased them away, thus securing a triumphant entry of the delegation into the town. For these SCNC rallies, see "SCNC Hits Kumba: 75000 jam town green", in *The Herald*, 3-6 August 1994, p.1, and "As Elites Condemn Military Operation: SCNC plans operation storm Mamfe", in *Cameroon Post*, 14-21 August 1995.

¹² See *The Herald*, 2-3 December 1996, p.1.

Following the organisation of the All Anglophone Conference (AAC) on 2-3 April 1993, there were attempts by certain representatives of the South West Chiefs Conference and of the South West Elite Association (SWELA), who were known to be closely allied with the regime in power, to dissociate the South West Province from deliberations and resolutions of the AAC and from the Buea Declaration. There was also a meeting of a previously little-known North West Cultural and Development Association (NOCUDA) at Bamenda on 14 May 1993 to dissociate the North West Province from the AAC, branding it a South West affair. This meeting seems to have been organised by North Western members of the CPDM, who again, in 1994, would actively work against the holding of AACII in Bamenda, in a bid "to kill the Anglophone dream"¹³.

On 23 September 1993, nine representatives of the South West Chiefs Conference undertook a mission to Yaounde to pledge their unalloyed allegiance to President Biya. They told him that "they were alarmed at the numerous demonstrations, blackmail, civil disobedience, rebellious attitudes and recurrent activities designed to destabilise the state and the government". They strongly condemned any attempts at partitioning Cameroon on the basis of Anglophone and Francophone cultures. They asked the Head of State to transform the present ten provinces into ten autonomous regions. At the end of the meeting, they drew his attention to the fact that the South West Province had been discriminated against after reunification in the distribution of "strategic posts".¹⁴

Following the military brutalities in the South West during the 1993 government anti-smuggling campaign, a split occurred in the South West Elite Association (SWELA) founded in 1991 to promote the socio-economic and cultural development of the South West Province and combat North West domination over the South West. The split gave birth to a pro-CPDM faction keen on maintaining close links with the Biya regime and on showing strong anti-North West sentiments. The group was composed of older and younger CPDM barons, and opposed to a return to the federal state. Like the CPDM government, it championed the ten-state option, which would retain the present separation between the South West and North West Provinces and thus safeguard South West autonomy. Another

¹³ See *Cameroon Post*, 20-27 April 1994, pp. 2-3; *Cameroon Post* (Special), 29 April - 1 May 1994, pp. 1-12; *Cameroon Post*, 29 June - 6 July 1994, pp.6-7; *The Herald*, 29 April - 1 May 1994, pp.1-2; *Cameroon Post*, 29 June - 6 July 1994, pp.6-7; *The Messenger*, 2 May 1994, pp.1 and 2.

¹⁴ *The Herald*, 3-10 November 1993, p.6.

faction of SWELA, with Martin Nkemngu of Lebialem Division as Secretary General, was more critical of government policies and often allied to opposition parties, principally the SDF, an "active member" of which Martin Nkemngu declared he was¹⁵. It advocated closer co-operation between the South West and North West elite as a necessary precondition for an effective representation of Anglophone interests. It strongly supported the Anglophone demand for a return to the federal state - a stance heavily criticised by the pro-CPDM faction which saw Nkemngu and the entire Lebialem Division as grassfielders and therefore North Westerners in disguise. But to show how powerful the pro-CPDM SWELA was, its Secretary-General, Caven Nnoko Mbele, was appointed Government Delegate for the Kumba Urban Council following the January 1996 municipal elections, while Martin Nkemngu, Secretary-General of the pro-SCNC SWELA, was transferred from Buea where he was provincial chief for CAMNEWS, to Yaounde as an ordinary staff of the official publisher, SOPECAM.

Since 1994, a number of southwestern and northwestern chiefs and members of the CPDM have repeatedly condemned the call for an independent Southern Cameroons state, appealing to the Head of State to employ every available means to defend the unitary state (Konings 1999b). Current obsession with autochtony as well as the acute sense of differences between the two provinces since the appointment of Musonge as PM, have pushed North West Fons to create associations of their own to lobby for power and resources for their province¹⁶. Similarly, in May 1999, Peter Abety, Minister for Special Duties at the Presidency, launched, almost single-handedly, a North West Development Association (NOWEDA) which is yet to prove itself in any way.

Paradoxically, the "Anglophone problem" has enhanced the chances of the Biya loyalists among the Anglophone elite to be appointed to government posts which used to be reserved for Francophones only.

¹⁵. See *Cameroon Post*, 29 October - 4 November 1996, pp.1 and 9.

¹⁶. Quite typical of the politics of division particularly characteristic of the 1990s in Cameroon, there are two factions of the Fons' conference: The North West Fons' Union (NOWEFU) led by Fon Abumbi II of Bafut, and the North West Fons' Conference (NOWEFCO) led by Fon Doh Gah Gwanyin of Balikumbat, the lone CPDM parliamentarian of the province. The latter is said to have manipulated members of government and the Governor into thinking that his faction was more popular, thus straining relations between Governor Kouambo Adrien and NOWEFU. However, President Biya and Prime Minister Musonge apparently endorsed NOWEFU when they both sent representatives with messages of encouragement to the NOWEFU general assembly that met on 5 June 1999 in Bamenda. A development which Fon Doh did not appreciate. See *The Herald*, 16 May 1999, pp. 1-2; 7 June 1999, pp.1-2; and 11 June 1999, p.2.

Obviously, Biya's decision to enhance the position of Anglophones in the state apparatus, is a strategy to belie Anglophone charges that Anglophones only play second-fiddle in the Francophone-dominated unitary state and, simultaneously, to attract new members of the Anglophone elite into the "hegemonic alliance" (Bayart 1979). In 1992 the North Westerner, Simon Achidi Achu, and the South Westerner, Ephraim Inoni were appointed respectively Prime Minister and Deputy-Secretary General at the Presidency of the Republic. They, and other highly placed Anglophones, tend to be members of the Anglophone delegations which are regularly sent by Biya from Yaounde to the Anglophone provinces to contest the claims of the leadership of the Anglophone movements and to defend the unitary state. It should, however, be noted that Biya's new policy of allocating prestigious positions within the state apparatus to his Anglophone allies, has also encouraged internal competition among these privileged allies, particularly between South Westerners and North Westerners (Nyamnjoh 1999). Compared to the North Westerners, South Westerners have felt under-represented in the highest government offices and have always maintained that South Westerners replace North Westerners in the choicest jobs¹⁷. So when Peter Mafany Musonge was appointed in September 1996 to take over from Simon Achidi Achu as PM and more South Westerners maintained in key cabinet positions than North Westerners, "the South West people ... went wild with excitement and jubilation and loudly praised the Head of State", for having at last listened to the cry of despair of South Westerners, who for over thirty-six years, were "confined to the periphery of national politics and socio-economic development"¹⁸. In the words of Musonge himself, this being "the first time in our history as a united nation that a South Westerner has been appointed prime minister", South Westerners had to "come together to galvanise the second political awakening in the South West Province", and

¹⁷ For example, following the January 1996 municipal elections which, according to official results, Prime Minister Achidi Achu (North Westerner) lost at his home constituency of Santa, while Minister of Higher Education Peter Agbor Tabi (South Westerner) won in Mamfe, the latter did not conceal his ambition to take over from Achidi Achu as Prime Minister. See *The Herald*, 1-3 April 1996, pp.1 and 3; and 11-14 April 1996, pp.1 and 2; *Weekly Post*, 5-11 June 1996, pp.1 and 4. In March 1996, the southwestern political analyst and journalist, Churchill Ewumbue-Monono, not only predicted that the next Prime Minister would be Anglophone and South Westerner, but even had the prescience to name Peter Mafany Musonge as the most likely successor: "like Achidi Achu who left Bamenda to become Prime Minister, Musonge could also leave Limbe to the Star House". See *Cameroon Post*, 24-30 September 1996, pp.1 and 3.

¹⁸ See "Significance of P.M. Musonge's Appointment" by a South West elite, Kome Epule, in *The Star Headlines*, 20 November 1996, p.5.

to "strengthen our position and bargaining power". At his CPDM congress in December 1996, Paul Biya further strengthened the position of the South Westerners when he admitted more of them into the Central Committee of the party than he did North Westerners; and the 22-member Political Bureau formed after the congress included two South Westerners (John Ebong Ngolle and Dr Mrs Dorothy Njeuma) and one North Westerner only (Tamfu Samuel Ngeh). These developments were interpreted by North West CDPM barons as an indictment of them by the head of state, for failing to contain the SDF and radical Anglophones amongst them. The subsequent creation of a North West Development Association (NOWEDA) by Peter Abety and of the North West Fons' Union (NOWEFU) and North West Fons' Conference (NOWEFCO), would be interpreted as an attempt by these barons to get their act together, and begin retrieving lost advantages.

Pro-CPDM South West elite have exploited the massive labour migration from the North West to their province where a plantation economy was established during the German colonial era (Konings 1993; 1998), to amplify the differences between the two provinces. Increasingly, they have tended to accuse the large-scale "settler population" of North West origin, of exploitation, land-grabbing and ingratitude to welcoming indigenes. They have not hesitated using the settler presence to explain all political disturbances in the South West Province, even going as far as insinuating that poor performance at elections by the ruling CPDM and secessionist tendencies among Anglophones could be attributed wholly to the "settler" opposition and dissidents. Hence, Fon Njifua of Fontem's declaration at the joint conference of South West Chiefs and Elites in Buea, July 1999, that no true South Westerner "sympathises" with the SCNC, even though Ndoki Mukete, a South Westerner and SCNC chairman, was in the hall¹⁹.

The Biya government, like Ahidjo's, has also relied on a strategy of repression. Lack of unity and severe repression precluded the Anglophone elite from openly expressing its grievances about Francophone domination until 1982, when Biya took power. In the wake of his introduction of a limited degree of liberalisation, the Anglophone elite began voicing its long-standing grievances. In 1983, the Biya government issued an Order modifying the Anglophone General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination by making it a group certificate similar to the Baccalauréat, instead of the single-subject examination that it was. The publication of this Order sparked off an Anglophone students' boycott of classes and

¹⁹ cf. *The Herald*, 21 July 1999, p.3.

demonstrations brutally repressed by the police at Yaounde University and in the urban centres in Anglophone Cameroon (Nyamnjoh 1996a), informed or not by student protests elsewhere on the continent. In February 1984, the Biya government changed the official name of the country from the "United Republic of Cameroon" to simply the "Republic of Cameroon" - despite vehement Anglophone protests that this was the name of independent Francophone Cameroon prior to reunification. The new name appeared to deny that the Cameroon state was composed of two distinct identities. Biya argued that the name change was not only a demonstration of the political maturity of the Cameroonian people after almost twenty-five years of independence, but also a sign that the people had finally overcome divisions caused by seventy years of European colonisation (Biya 1987: 6). In Anglophone circles, however, Biya's unilateral name change seems to have given rise to two different interpretations. Some Anglophones consider this action as the boldest step yet taken toward 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 people had lost their identity and had become an indistinguishable part of the former Republic of Cameroon, thus carrying out to its intended conclusion Ahidjo's designs to absorb and assimilate the Anglophone minority into the Francophone-dominated state. Other Anglophones argued that by this action *La République du Cameroun*²⁰ had unilaterally seceded from the union and thus lacks a constitutional base to continue ruling the former Southern Cameroons. They are often inclined to appeal to the United Nations to assist its former Trust Territory in peacefully separating from *La République*. This view was first expressed by the eminent Anglophone lawyer and first president of the Cameroon Bar Association, Fon Gorji Dinka. On 20 March 1985, Dinka addressed a memorandum to Paul Biya entitled "The New Social Order". In this memorandum, he declared the Biya government to be unconstitutional and called for the Southern Cameroons to become independent and to be rebaptized as the Republic of Ambazonia. Dinka was arrested and imprisoned without trial until January 1986, which transformed him into an Anglophone martyr²¹. In the same year at the same time (i.e. during the

²⁰ 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 1998b: 264.

²¹ See Fon Gorji Dinka's *The New Social Order*, dated 20 March 1985, addressed to H.E. Comrade P. Biya at the Bamenda CNU party congress (mimeo).

Bamenda Congress of the single party), two memoranda were submitted to the participants by members of the North West and South West elite resident in Douala. These documents drew the attention of the participants to the Anglophone plight and highlighted that the Anglophone elite felt sidelined from political power²².

In 1993, the Biya government, through the Vice Chancellor of the University of Buea, Dr Mrs Dorothy Njeuma, did not allow the convenors to hold the AACI on the premises of the University of Buea. In 1994, it attempted to obstruct the organisation of AACII, using the idea that Anglophones had come "together in Bamenda to declare secession" as an excuse for repression. Leaders of the Anglophone movements tend to be harassed by security forces, threatened with arrest, and subjected to travelling restrictions, although such state repression is not always effective thanks to sabotage and tip-offs by some servants of the regime sympathetic to the Anglophone cause. In general, repression has increased with mounting threats of the proclamation of an independent Southern Cameroons state. SCNC rallies and demonstrations are officially banned in the Anglophone provinces. Repression was particularly severe in the aftermath of an attack of the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) on some military and civil establishments in the Bui and Mezam Divisions of the North West Province on 27-28 March 1997.

The SCYL emerged in the mid-1990s as one of the many Anglophone associations that operated under the umbrella of the SCNC. Being composed of "young people who do not see any future for themselves and who would prefer to die fighting than continue to submit to the fate imposed on Southern Cameroons by *La République*"²³, the SCYL aimed at becoming the militant wing of the SCNC. Its original leadership was largely made up of Anglophone members of the former University of Yaoundé students' union, the so-called 'Parlement', which was engaged in several violent confrontations with the university authorities and the Biya government during the period 1990-1996²⁴. The SCYL became soon dissatisfied with the SCNC whose leadership continued to adhere to a strategy of peaceful dialogue with the Francophone-dominated state for either a return to a federal state or outright secession, manifest in its motto:

²² These documents can be found in Mukong 1990.

²³ See Mr Fidelis Chiabi, chairman of the former Anglophone Youth Council, in *Cameroon Post*, 1-2 February 1994, p.7.

²⁴ For the "parlement" at the University of Yaounde, see, for instance, A.D. Lisinge, *The Philosophy behind University Crisis* (no date and publisher indicated).

"the force of argument" - notwithstanding the Biya government's persistent refusal to enter into negotiations with the SCNC and its vehement repression of SCNC activities. The SCYL leadership cut its relationship with the SCNC in November 1996 and placed itself under the umbrella of a newly established Southern Cameroons Independence Restoration Council (SCIRC). It now aimed at creating an independent Southern Cameroons state through armed rebellion, manifest in its motto: "the argument of force". Still in the process of preparing for action in both Anglophone provinces, it was unexpectedly faced with the detention of its chairman, Mr Akwanga Ebenezer Mbongo, following his attempted theft of explosives from the Razel Company at Jakiri in the night of 23-24 March 1997. It immediately reacted by attacking some military and civil establishments in the North West Province on 27-28 March 1997. According to official reports, three gendarmes and seven unidentified assailants were killed in these operations. Government repression of this ill-planned revolt was out of proportion. It ruthlessly killed, tortured, raped and arrested several local men and women, forcing even more of them to go into exile. Above all, it seized the opportunity to clamp down on the SDF and SCNC, accusing both organisations of being responsible for the uprising²⁵. A considerable number of SCNC members were arrested and imprisoned in Yaoundé. Since the uprising, the government has regularly accused the SCNC of importing weapons and inciting the Anglophone population to armed rebellion. On 29 December 1999, Southern Cameroons "independence fighters" captured the radio station at Buea and broadcast a recorded message, read by Justice Fred Ebong, who has been closely connected with the SCYL, proclaiming the independence of the Southern Cameroons. On 7 January 2000, they hoisted the United Nations and Federation flags in Victoria (Limbe). Justice Ebong and other "suspects" were subsequently detained and political activities were proscribed in the South West Province²⁶. In March 2000, Justice Ebong, still in prison, was elected chairman of the SCNC.

²⁵ In a report that was full of factual errors and based on spurious evidence, *Jeune Afrique Economie* supported the Biya government's allegation that the SCNC was responsible for the revolt. See *Jeune Afrique Economie*, No.239, 14 April 1997, p.8. The journal's support of the Biya government's allegation is not altogether surprising. Titus Edzoa, a former Secretary-General at the Presidency, once revealed that the journal was used for public relations purposes by the regime. To this end, the regime had funded the journal to the tune of FCFA 1.5 billion (or US \$ 3 million).

²⁶ This account is based on various SCYL reports and our interviews with some SCYL leaders.

MASS MEDIA AND ANGLOPHONE DISEMPOWERMENT

One of the instruments which the Francophone-dominated state has relied on to implement their various strategies for disempowering Anglophones in Cameroon, has been the media. By seeking total ownership and control of the broadcast media while using draconian laws to stifle the private press, the state has, over the years, stunted Anglophone freedom, weakened solidarity among Anglophones, and dealt their sense of identity a crippling blow. Government media policies and practices and how they affected the Anglophones prior to 1990 have been well documented (cf. Nyamnjoh 1989; and 1990); so also has the particularly difficult legal environment wherein the private press has operated since 1990 (cf. Nyamnjoh 1996b and c). In this section therefore, we focus on how the government has employed the state media - broadcasting especially, to deny Anglophone identity and solidarity, while tacitly encouraging the rise and proliferation of ethnic and regional print media.

CAMEROON RADIO AND TELEVISION (CRTV) AND ANGLOPHONE IDENTITY

With the launching of the SDF in 1990, the Anglophone journalists in the official media, in general, tended to distance themselves from the sort of pro-establishment journalism defined by government and largely taken for granted by their Francophone colleagues. The history of turbulence in the official media was principally the history of government's attempt to streamline the Anglophone journalists. The launching of the SDF led to much witch-hunting against the Anglophone journalists in CRTV, whom management identified with the new ("illegal") party. The witch-hunt was quite understandable, for while Zacharie Ngniman, Antoine-Marie Ngonu and other Francophone journalists presented the unsigned and undated communiqué from Minister Henri Bandolo as if this were verified information, Julius Wamey, on his part, insisted that his broadcast was the government's version of events in Bamenda. Relations between CRTV authorities and critical Anglophone journalists only grew worse following the institutionalization of multipartyism, leading to claims in the private press of an "anti-Anglophone campaign" mounted by government and CRTV management. Much of this has been well documented (cf. Nyamnjoh 1996b), but here are a few examples.

*Cameroon Post*²⁷ reports on a meeting the Minister of Information and Culture held, the first week of June 1991, with CRTV journalists, during which the minister "implicitly" accused English language programmes of

²⁷ *Cameroon Post*, 6-13 June 1991, p.1

being sympathetic to the opposition. Specifically cited were "Luncheon Date" - later on modified drastically by order of the minister, "News Focus" the 7.30 p.m. news and "Cameroon Calling" from which Anembom Munjo Wain Paul Ngam, Asonglefac Nkemeleke and Julius Wamey were subsequently suspended. The minister also attacked TV News Editor-in-Chief Eric Chinje "for reporting the resignation of CPDM Wouri Section President Jean Jacques Ekindi without announcing the non-resignation of Mifi Section President Joseph K. Tanyi". The minister implied that this was part of the Anglophone journalists' attempts to sabotage the CPDM government. The suspensions were interpreted by the journalists as "part of a campaign launched by the Information and Culture Minister and CRTV General Manager Mendo Ze to stop the tide of Anglophone journalists' objectivity on CRTV". The minister insisted on the necessity of CRTV journalists to respect the corporation's editorial policy, a euphemism for asking all journalists to see things the government's way. Julius Wamey was accused of having "falsely" claimed during a CRTV news flash that the South West Chiefs meeting in Kumba had called for a national conference and that students marching in Bamenda had done same. The governor of the North West Province, in a telex to MINAT, was reported to have wondered "why government media organs are being used by journalists who are partisan to the SDF".

In a "confidential" letter to the General Manager of CRTV, Prime Minister Sadou Hayatou was said²⁸ to have called for severe sanctions against Anglophone journalists who were using the official media to "try government". The Prime Minister was reported to have accused, among others, "Cameroon Calling" and the English news of having "more and more exhibited reckless abandon ... in their analysis which have of late seemed like an arraignment of government action". In his letter he complained that "newscasters on radio and television have tended to express their personal standpoints as if they were those of government". He concluded by instructing the General Manager to "verify this situation and where necessary address a severe warning to such personnel who should not turn a public service into a private media with a tendency to teleguide government action".

While some Anglophone journalists in the public media, their disillusionment notwithstanding, identified with the PR role expected of them by government, others opted either to leave the system entirely (e.g. Boh Herbert, Charlie Ndichia, Eric Chinje, Victor Epie Ngome, Orlando Bama, Larry Eyong-Echaw, Ben Bongang and Julius Wamey), or to

²⁸. See *Cameroon Post*, 30 July - 6 August 1991, p.3.

distance themselves from official rhetoric whenever they could (e.g. Ebssiy Ngum, Wain Paul Ngam and Asonglefac Nkemleke). According to *The Diasporan*²⁹, of the nearly 50 reporters and announcers who started or joined television in its first three years of existence, 27 (of whom 21 Anglophones) had, by April 1994, "departed in bitterness and disillusionment to seek better climes". Those who opted for government PR journalism, claimed that all the government and its acolytes did was well and in the best interest of Anglophones and Cameroon in general, and that the radical opposition, the All Anglophone Conference (AAC) and the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM) were void of true patriots and motivated only by selfish, regional, or tribal self-interests. These, CRTV management would encourage with appointments to key positions, and eventually, the impression would be created that the critical journalists were from the North West Province while their pro-establishment counterparts were from the South West Province. Selective appointment of South West journalists to strategic positions would further drive this message home.

However, the critical journalists were convinced that the radical opposition and extremist pressure groups they supported stood for "the truth" and the best interest of Anglophones and of Cameroon, and that the government and its acolytes were dissemblers motivated by selfish ambitions, the greed for power and other selfish pursuits. Many Anglophone journalists in CRTV who rapidly distanced themselves from their role as government spokesmen or mouthpieces following the launching of the SDF, thus rechanneled their energies in the service of the marginalized Anglophone community. But using the official media to articulate societal problems and aspirations met with stiff resistance from the authorities (Nyamnjoh 1996b).

In general, Anglophones feel CRTV does not cater for their interests. According to Philip Ndi³⁰, this is because "there is nobody who actually represents the Anglophones at CRTV", and "decisions are taken arbitrarily and nobody raises an eyebrow". He argues that "many decisions are taken not only to frustrate Anglophone journalists but to minimise and discredit their efforts".

As an institution, CRTV has seldom been comfortable reporting the truth about any Anglophone movement, initiative or programme of action.

²⁹ See *The Diasporan*, 14 April 1995, which devotes its front and central pages to television in Cameroon, "a revolution that ate its children". The articles or testimonies are by Eric Chinje, Julius Wamey, Melissa Nembang and Orlando Bama, all of whom are former CRTV journalists living and/or studying in the USA. *The Diasporan* is US-based and has as Editor-in-Chief Julius Wamey.

³⁰ *The Herald*, 13-20 January 1993, p.4.

An example of CRTV's unprofessional journalism in this connection is that of the 3 p.m. radio news of 27 April 1994 concerning the second All Anglophone Conference (AACII). An announcement was read to the effect that the AACII scheduled to hold in Bamenda from 29 April to 1 May had been postponed by the convenors. It was purported to have been signed by Dr Simon Munzu, Dr Carlson Anyangwe and Barrister Sam Ekontang Elad. A claim the three refuted. The AAC spokesman, Dr Simon Munzu, prepared a disclaimer for broadcast by CRTV, but this was rejected. CRTV was even unable to provide Dr Munzu with a copy of the announcement alleged to have been signed by him and his colleagues³¹.

Anglophones are of the consistent impression that CRTV is there not so much to respond to their aspirations, but rather to stifle initiative and sense of identify in them. The choice to construct the FM transmitter for the South West Province in Douala instead, was criticised by Anglophone interest groups (e.g. SWELA) and by the media, and taken as another proof of government's bad faith towards the Anglophones. To some, the Francophone authorities were so concerned with the oil in Limbe that they feared what might happen if Buea, given the prevailing trend of sentiments among critical Anglophone leaders and public, were to be cut off from the rest of Cameroon and made capital for a seceding West or Southern Cameroons. So many people thought that the government wanted to be in control of access to radio technology, to be able to cut off transmission should the need arise³².

To Anglophones, it is clear from the content and language of programmes, that television is preponderantly for Francophones. French is the dominant language and French interests seem not only more important than English interests, but are even superior to Cameroonian concerns and priorities. It is possible and indeed quite regular that newscasts on CRTV are shifted (displaced) from their normal time slots in order to make way for the transmission of French football encounters. Hardly has any English league match been retransmitted in a similar manner, and it is not often that local matches or Cameroon's own international encounters get televised (Atanga 1994).

Thus faced with such resistance, critical Anglophone journalists in the official media, thanks to the December 1990 communication law, used the English language private newspapers, some of them under pen names, to insert Anglophone problems, concerns and aspirations on the national,

³¹ For more, see *Cameroon Post*, 29 April - 1 May 1994, p.2.

³² For more on the FM affair, see *The Herald*, 3-5 January 1994, p.3; *Cameroon Post*, 24 November - 1 December 1993, p.13.

political, cultural and economic agendas. Together with their counterparts in the critical English language press, the liberation journalists of the official media were eager to expose the contradictions and inconsistencies in the policies and actions of the Cameroonian leadership. They argued that until government started addressing the problems of the Anglophone minority in Cameroon, it will remain an obstacle to the country's economic progress and social justice. They criticised the rigid suppression by government of contending social forces, especially those of Anglophone origin. They blame most of Cameroon's current socio-political and economic crises on the lack of accountability of successive Francophone-dominated governments, and present the Anglophone and the rigour and selflessness in public service in "the good old days" of Southern Cameroons as the model. They identified with, and were proud of, the achievements of the anglo-saxon culture world-wide. In their view, the anglo-saxon culture, "has been tested and its validity adequately proven", and all Anglophones must take advantage of this identity, "rather than seeking to be Francophones only to wind up ridiculous cultural mulattos to be jeered at and patronised"³³. And in this endeavour, their "heroes" received commendation from the Cameroon Association of English-Speaking Journalists (CAMASEJ)³⁴.

However, the rising tides of the politics of belonging, the failure of the opposition to make a striking difference and the weakening of the leadership of the SCNC, have combined with the arrogance and confidence of those in power, to silence many a journalist that was once critical in CRTV. Many have left and, of those who have stayed on, most have chosen to conform. Once again, the policy of divide-and-rule has triumphed, and Anglophoneness has ended the loser.

THE PRINT MEDIA AND ANGLOPHONE IDENTITY

If, in the first three years of the current democratic process one could identify a consensus on the Anglophone problem in the Anglophone press, this is much less the case today. The increased importance of regional and ethnic politics has indeed been matched by a redefinition of editorial policy on the part of some existing papers, or by the creation of new mouthpieces to take care of ethnic interests. Papers such as *The Weekly Post*, *The Star Headlines* and *The Oracle* have been created to focus on regional issues of interest to the South West Province and SWELA, and to define themselves essentially in opposition to the

³³ *Cameroon Post*, 27-30 May 1991, p.6.

³⁴ See *Le Messenger*, 28 February 1992, p.10.

grassfielders (both the "settlers" in the diaspora and those still in their North West and Western Provinces of origin). With the advent of the Grand SAWA movement, they have now extended their interests to include what the movement stands for in general. Newer papers such as *Elimbi*, *Muendi*, *The Beacon* and *Fako International* (*Mendi me Fako*) have been created to attend more specifically to the political ambitions of the SAWA elite in the Littoral and South West Provinces, and to oppose Grassfields hegemony as a matter of policy. Since 1996, little escapes criticism or comments by this press, including inter-tribal wars in the North West, which it uses to deride the war mongering nature of grassfielders and their penchant for fighting over land. During elections, the press sought, through the rhetoric of "ethnic cleansing", to solve problems of political representation, and to encourage a widespread antagonism to "strangers" as parasites and "traitors in the house" (Collectif Changer le Cameroun (C3) 1994; Eboussi Boulaga 1997; Jua 1997). They sought to achieve, through a language of ethnicity, the necessary level of fear that any kind of mixture with "dubious settlers" will in the end be damaging to the interests of the minority.

As Wang Sonnè (1997: 188-189) notes, the first issue of *Elimbi* on 26 March 1996 coincided with the launching of the SAWA movement. Initially a bi-monthly, *Elimbi* became a weekly in November 1996, as the politics of belonging heated up. It described itself as "a regional newspaper" that targeted the people of the coast, paying attention in particular to the activities and news of the coastal elite. But *Elimbi's* most striking feature was "the production and dissemination of ideas hostile to the Bamileke". In February 1997 (eve of the March legislative elections), the proprietor of *Elimbi*, John Mandengué Epée, a native Douala businessman who, a couple of years back, had initiated a libel case that ended in the imprisonment of Paddy Mbawa of *Cameroon Post*, launched a monthly - *Muendi*, with the mission of further defending SAWA identity and intensifying the anti-Bamileke feeling in Douala.

The grassfielders also used the private press to fight back. In a similar manner, existing papers redefined their editorial focus, while new ethnic or regional papers sprung up. The Bamileke and North West elite used established papers, most of which they owned and/or controlled, to riposte the attack by the SAWA press, interpreting the January 1996 constitutional changes as an impediment to the democratic process. The sheer volume of diatribes, commentaries, opinions and reports related to "autochtonie" and "allogénie" (indigene/settler) in grassfields newspapers such as *La Nouvelle Expression*, *Le Messager*, *The Post* and *The Herald*, were an indication of how absorbing the politics of belonging had become since 1996, with equally blatantly ethnic papers like *Ouest Echo* and *Nde*

Echo leading the show. Paradoxically, although about belonging, the Anglophone problem in Cameroon has become drowned by a press and government obsessed with a different kind of belonging³⁵.

CONCLUSION

The reactivation of Anglophone identity during the political liberalisation process, manifest in the emergence of both the SDF, the first opposition party in the country, and several Anglophone organisations and associations, posed a serious threat to the regime in power and the unitary state. Little wonder that the Biya government was keen to neutralise the Anglophone danger and to deconstruct the Anglophone identity which tended to unite people in the Anglophone territory across ethnic-regional boundaries based on a common colonial heritage.

In this study we have shown that the regime has been quite successful in this endeavour, employing several strategies. One strategy has been the regime's persistent refusal to enter into any meaningful negotiations with the Anglophone leadership about either a return to the federal state or peaceful secession and its concomitant resort to outright repression of Anglophone movements and actions. Faced with this government strategy, the Anglophone leadership, in turn, has proved incapable of reconsidering its own tactics, clinging instead to its motto: "the force of argument". As a result, it has dismally failed to deliver the promised goods. It is now evident that the Anglophone struggles have lost their initial momentum and that the Anglophone movements are more and more subject to inertia and internal schisms. Particularly the Anglophone youth has increasingly advocated the "argument of force".

Another government strategy has been to establish control over the state media, punishing any journalist who dared to propagate Anglophone identity and solidarity, and to tacitly promote the rise and proliferation of ethnic and regional print media.

Again another government strategy has been to capitalise on the existing divide between the coastal/forest and grassfields people in the Anglophone territory, which is mainly rooted in the increasing resentment of South Westerners about large-scale settlement and economic and political domination of North Westerners in their region. In the ongoing struggles for economic and political power during the current political liberalisation process, South West ethnic-regional identity has been boosted by the 1996

³⁵ It is, however, noteworthy that the editorial line of the Francophone Grassfields newspapers, such as *La Nouvelle Expression* and *Le Messager*, in respect of the anglophone problem does not essentially differ from the government's position.

constitution, which promised state protection for "autochthonous" minorities leading to growing resistance of "autochthonous" South Westerners against "dominant and exploitative" North Western "settlers", "strangers", or "camero-no-goes" in their region and various forms of "ethnic cleansing". The regime also appears to have promoted the construction of new ethnic identities, in particular the Grand SAWA movement - an alignment of the ethnic-related coastal elite in the South West Province and neighbouring Francophone provinces on the basis of common feelings of exploitation and domination by grassfields "settlers". The emergence of the SAWA movement had another devastating effect on the Anglophone identity, the Francophone-Anglophone divide becoming cross-cut by alliances that oppose coastal versus grassfields elites. Of late, however, one may observe certain cracks in Sawa solidarity. First, there is a growing feeling among the Littoral elite that they have gained less than the South West elite in terms of political nominations. Some Douala leaders, like Jean-Jacques Ekindi, have even warned the South West elite that they do not want to see Bamileke domination replaced by South West domination. Second, without the North Westerners to blame or scapegoat since the appointment of Musonge as PM in September 1996, the South West chiefs and elites are finding it increasingly difficult convincing their peoples to stay committed to President Biya and the CPDM with promises and good intentions alone. This was evident at a joint conference of chiefs and elites in Buea in July 1999, where the idea of reviving SWELA was examined with little enthusiasm or support from Caven Nnoko Mbelle and Martin Nkemngu, its rival secretary generals of the early 1990s³⁶. It is thus possible yet that more and more of the disenfranchised Anglophone masses would see through the smokescreen of divisions of convenience mounted by their elite under the patronage of a monolithic state at odds with multiparty democracy.

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³⁶ See *The Herald*, 21 July 1999, pp.1-4, for the resolutions of, a critical report and an editorial on, the joint conference of South West Chiefs and Elite which was held at Buca on 17 July 1999.

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