

# Cameroonising Anthropology: Some Trends and Implications

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## Introduction

In the early 1890s, a young German merchant banker, Max Esser, became the first managing director of the largest German plantation company in Cameroon. He was also a famous explorer and together with Dr Eugen Zintgraff, conducted an extensive expedition into the hinterlands, beginning in 1896 and two years later, published a monograph of his cross-country expeditions (Chilver and Röschenthaler 2001). A few Europeans before him had written memoirs of their experiences, describing at length the multifaceted relationships between Europeans and Africans, the complexities of everyday life among natives and as well as the relationship between different Europeans (Ardener 2001). By contemporary canons, these memoirs or monographs will hardly count as anthropological products but without the insights of these few explorers and travellers, Cameroon's anthropology would have remained shallow. Hence, this paper examines among other things, the legacies of these early explorers and its implications for contemporary anthropological practice in Cameroon.

Professional ethnographers began penetrating the country in the early 1900s, the first of whom was a German, B. Ankermann, who toured the Western grassfields between 1907-1909. Gulla Pfeffer, a Berlin Museum ethnographer, visited the Northern areas of the grasslands in the 1920s, notably the Aghem and Fungom districts, taking photographs of their material culture and in the 1930s, Agathe Schmidt carried out fieldwork on 'village life and gender roles in the small chiefdom of Nsei (Bamessing) in the Ndop Plain' (Chilver 1988:1). Although Schmidt's ethnography was published in 1955, her works have remained largely unknown even among contemporary Cameroonian and Cameroonist anthropologists.

In this paper, I sketch in a very provisional way, the contours of anthropological practice as it has developed in modern Cameroon by arguing that although anthropology has secured a solid foothold in the country in terms of field sites and a growing number of expatriate anthropologists, its legacies and practices are not limited to those who pass for trained or professional anthropologists. Inversely, not all trained anthropologists practice what counts as anthropological stuff, the result of which is an anthropology of Cameroon, shaped by diverse influences and configurations that draw on local experiences, traditions, ethnographies, short stories, novels (see for example Jumbam 1980) and travelogues (Murphy 1989) that capture the challenges of everyday life in cultural contexts. These diverse influences have crucial relevance not only to the content of local anthropology but also, to the shape of what anthropology will become. I demonstrate this claim by drawing on grassroots initiatives of anthropology enthusiasts, notably, members of the Kaberry Research Centre (KRC) who have brought to bear on anthropological practices, the richness of their varied experiences and skills in the service of anthropological research in the country. Whilst the paper attempts to render a brief but critical appraisal of anthropological practice in Cameroon, it will pay particular attention to the Anglophone region, partly because of my knowledge of the area and its anthropological endeavours, and partly, because it would take more than the scope of this brief paper to explore the vast terrain of anthropological expressions in the country as a whole. I therefore limit myself, primarily to the Anglophone region of the country with particular bias for the area known to the German imperialists as the *grasslands*<sup>1</sup> or grassfields, which today covers the North West and Western Provinces, where most of my own anthropology is anchored. Often described as a microcosm of Cameroon's diversity, the grassfields has attracted the bulk of expatriate anthropologists in Cameroon. Whereas the grassfields is often depicted as a microcosm of Cameroon's diversity, the

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<sup>1</sup> I use grasslands and grassfields interchangeably. Originally coined by the Germans to describe the vast territories of what constitutes the present West and North West provinces, it has come to assume derogatory connotations, especially as used by coastal peoples to depict people from the hinterlands as more traditional and backward.

country as a whole enjoys the status of what has come to be known as 'Africa in miniature' owing to its exceptional geographies and ethnic diversity<sup>2</sup> (Schler 2003). More so, Cameroon ranks among the few African countries that attract the most foreign anthropologists (Gausset 2004:223).

Anglophone Cameroon constitutes the area formerly known as the British Southern Cameroons which in October 1961 gained its independence by joining the already-independent Republic of Cameroon (French-speaking Cameroon). In July 1884, Cameroon (Kamerun) had officially become a German protectorate, but its defeat at the First World War resulted in the partition of the country into British and French territories. This produced an enabling environment for the penetration of more foreign anthropologists whose competing legacies remain apparent until today.

### **Pioneers: Pathways to Anthropology in Cameroon**

The anthropological enterprise in Cameroon accompanied and advanced the colonising project, the most important of which was the integration of local economic histories into a capitalist framework and the reformation of natives' minds (Mudimbe 1988). Hence, the anthropological gaze tended to focus on the transformations experienced by natives and the impact of capitalist initiatives on native lives and customs. In addition to professional ethnographers, colonial civil administrators who had received training in ethnographic skills<sup>3</sup> made vital efforts to give elaborate accounts of the cultures and beliefs of each 'tribal' group under their jurisdiction. It therefore seems to me that besides a host of German anthropological initiatives of which little is known, it would be fair to assert that British colonial administrators were the foremost pathfinders of what I term anthropological practice in Anglophone Cameroon. Once the British colonial state had been established, its administrators, in collaboration with missionaries, created favourable working conditions for professional anthropologists who soon

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<sup>2</sup> Cameroon is composed of over 150 ethnic groups and counts more than 200 languages for a population of 16 million.

<sup>3</sup> The archives in Bamenda and Buea bear testimony to the anthropological tinge of countless 'area or assessment reports' and confidential files authored by District Officers (DOs).

arrived and began an enterprise that has continued to attract scholars of different anthropological persuasions until today.

Of the earliest English ethnographers who published extensively on the grasslands, M. D. W. Jeffreys remains the most famous. Jeffreys was both a scholar and administrator in charge of the Bamenda Division between 1936 and 1945. His fieldwork took him to many areas of the Bamenda grassfields, resulting in the publication of a substantial number of historical papers and ethnographies covering topics on linguistics, coronation rites among the Bamum, Tikar history, the Bali of Bamenda and the cultural perceptions of twins in the region. He was the first ethnographer to research on a range of themes and many that came after him acknowledge his pioneering role. His archives are located at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, where he returned after his service in the British Cameroons (Shirley Ardener, personal communication).

Not often has the history and anthropology of a region owed so much to so few a host of scholars. Two female English scholars in particular have bestridden the grasslands with colossal familiarity. The first of these, Phyllis Kaberry (1910-1977), famous for her ethnography *Women of the Grassfields* (1952), trained as an anthropologist at the LSE under Audrey Richards. Kaberry was invited by the colonial government to study the economic position of women in the Bamenda region after concern had been expressed about the 'low status of women', 'lag in girls' education...and by medical officers concerned about the high rate of infant mortality in the trust territory' (ibid:1). She made two trips between 1945 and 1948, during which she carried out fieldwork on women in the Bamenda region as a whole, focusing specifically on women in the Nso chiefdom – then and still the largest chiefdom in the entire region. She revisited the Bamenda grasslands in 1958, 1960 and 1963, when she investigated a range of issues including traditional political institutions, farmer-grazier disputes, gender relations, and land tenure systems, especially in the Nso chiefdom. During her third trip to the Bamenda region in 1958, she travelled with Mrs Elizabeth M. Chilver, a historian and archivist who was to describe herself later as 'an apprentice historian in stout boots' (cited in Ardener 1996:xii). At 90, she remains one of the most important pillars and living archives of grassfields history. A more comprehensive account of Chilver's biography has been

published by Mitzi Goheen and Eugenia Shanklin (1996), both of them renowned anthropologists and life students of grassfields cultures. The following account of the circumstances of Chilver and Kaberry's meeting and their careers as research collaborators is drawn from Shirley Ardener (1996).

As secretary of the Colonial Social Science Research Council, a key sponsor of overseas research, Mrs Chilver came into contact with many anthropologists, including Phyllis Kaberry, and later, Edwin Ardener. At the time of their meeting, Kaberry was completing the draft of her book *Women of the Grassfields*. Inspired by exciting stories about Africa, most likely from the British Cameroons, Chilver resolved to take a trip to Africa by accompanying Kaberry for a ten-week visit to the Bamenda grassfields in 1958. The duo returned for further research in 1960 and 1961, during which they studied the transformations experienced by indigenous political institutions owing to German and British colonial rule, and the ways in which these institutions had been manipulated by colonising forces. Kaberry and Chilver authored numerous publications. Both of them, especially Chilver, made further trips to the Bamenda grassfields in the post-independence era and has kept in touch with local scholars and dignitaries ever since.

Part of Sally Chilver's job at the Colonial Social Science Research Council also included 'implementing the policy of establishing research institutes in East and West Africa (The East African Institute for Social Research [EAISR] and The West African Institute for Social and Economic Research [WAISER], now The Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research [NISER])' (Ardener 1996:xii). As noted earlier, it was at her job that she came into contact with many Africanist social anthropologists. Soon after meeting Kaberry in 1951, she also met Edwin and Shirley Ardener, who had just returned from a research trip among the Igbo, sponsored by a grant from the Council. The Ardeners first set foot in the Southern Cameroons in 1953 as part of a team from WAISER to study the impact of plantations on native life (Shirley Ardener, personal communication). The outcome of this research was the publication of a book, *Plantation and Village in the Cameroons* (1960) co-authored by the Ardeners and W. A. Warmington. Edwin and Shirley Ardener carried out extensive research among the Bakweri, the principal ethnic group occupying the coastal territories of the

present South West Province. Even after Edwin Ardener's death, Shirley continued to conduct research in this region of Cameroon and, most recently, co-edited a publication on gender studies in Cameroon. Age and a tight academic schedule at Oxford have still not prevented her from making short visits to Buea most years. The Ardeners, both individually and collectively have made lasting contributions to the anthropology of Cameroon and the Bakweri in particular. Shirley's continuous involvement with Cameroon studies and her collaboration with Sally Chilver (both are based at Oxford) are indications of their passionate commitment to the scholarship of this region.

Kaberry and Chilver have inspired a growing number of expatriate anthropologists who have published extensively on different areas of the Bamenda grassfields. Mitzi Goheen for instance, inspired by Kaberry's *Women of the Grassfields*, returned to Nso to investigate women's position in Nso society, half a century after Kaberry's study. Her ethnography, *Men Own the Fields, Women Own the Crops* (1996) is a powerful analysis of the continuities and transformations of gender relations in a typical Bamenda chiefdom. Some of Kaberry's students, such as Richard Fardon and Ian Fowler, followed after her and have conducted fieldwork in the Bamenda grasslands since the 1970s.

A growing number of local historians and anthropologists have been motivated by the efforts of Kaberry and Chilver, whose published and unpublished materials remain critical sources and basis for further research. In fact, the formation of two local historical societies in the 1960s, one in Nso and another in Bali Nyonga, were conceived to stimulate debate and research on local histories and to position the findings and analysis of expatriate researchers with local experiences and memories. In 1960, the Bali Historical society became the focus of Kaberry and Chilver in their investigations about Bali history and political institutions (Fardon 1996:35). These developments and more recent ones have prompted me to examine grassroots initiatives undertaken to promote anthropological practice among locals. One such initiative was the creation of the Kaberry Research Centre (KRC), which in my mind deserves an important place in the anthropology of Cameroon.

## Indigenising Anthropology: The Kaberry Research Centre

The Kaberry Research Centre (KRC) was created in 1988 as an offshoot of the Association for Creative Teaching (ACT). The latter was an element of a Yaounde University-based project created in the 1980s known as the Guelph-Yaounde Project whose aim was to promote creative teaching among teachers, particularly among primary school teachers. It aimed further to assist teachers and learners to collect and use local stories, literatures, folklore, and histories. It also had the lofty objective of promoting research on local history and cultures in order to acquaint teachers with the diversity of cultures and proper understanding of their local environment. In order to achieve the last objective, some members of the ACT executive led by the late Patrick Mbunwe resolved to create a research wing whose primary and exclusive objective would be to carry out research on local history and anthropology (KRC 1989). Upon arriving at the decision to set up a grassfields research centre, various members of the nascent association began to communicate with Sally Chilver (since Kaberry had died from a stroke in 1977) who contributed significantly towards the collection of a remarkable quantity of historical and anthropological materials, both published and unpublished. However, the decision to name the centre after the anthropologist, Phyllis Kaberry, was based on her moral vision that all anthropological knowledge belongs to the people from whom it is acquired. According to the founding members of the KRC:

*...the most endearing aspect of her contribution to research in this area was her insistence that everything she learnt should eventually be returned to the people to whom that knowledge belonged.... Consequently ... it was agreed that in appreciation of her singular contribution, the proposed Centre be named in her honour (ibid, 4).*

Although the idea was spearheaded and implemented by individuals who had received no formal anthropological training, they showed remarkable zeal and potential in their efforts, sometimes with the collaboration of expatriate anthropologists. Regrettably, most of the academic work that emerged from KRC initiatives is not widely accessible, partly due to poor

marketing by local publishers, while a substantial quantity remains unpublished.

In order to facilitate research among its members, individuals were appointed to study selected themes from their chiefdoms or clans of origin, or in areas they had lived for a significant length of time. Once the allocation of research sites had been accomplished, the enthusiastic scholars set to work, entirely at their own expense. The first of KRC's theme was the classic anthropological subject – the rites of passage – which culminated in a publication of the first volume of their ethnography entitled *Rites of Passage and Incorporation in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon* (1993). Various elements covered in the project included delivery and naming rites of infants as well as the initiation rites of children into adolescence. The project was carried out among the Nso, Yamba, Wimbun, Bafut, Bali Nyonga, Oshie, Oku, Bamunka, Aghem, Kom, Batibo and the Fulani. A second volume, which remains unpublished, addressed a different category of persons, adults, covering such issues as ritual practices on marriage and funeral rites among others.

Leadership crisis soon left the KRC in wreckage, which partly accounts for why the second volume of *Rites of Passage* remains unpublished. However, by 2004 several individuals (myself included), together with the Canadian, Elizabeth Cockburn, who had been involved in both the Yaounde-Guelph Project and the KRC, began to rally interested persons for a revival of the defunct research centre. There was overwhelming enthusiasm among local scholars and several former members who responded positively to a call aimed at reviving the centre. The centre has been operational since February 2005, and counts among its current membership historians, geographers, English and drama teachers, educators, literary critics, medical and legal practitioners, sociologists, journalists, freelance writers and, of course, anthropologists.

### **Anthropology and Anthropologists of Cameroon**

Compared to sociology, its cousin discipline, anthropology has only emerged quite strongly in recent years in Cameroon, especially in regard to



the teaching and training of local anthropologists. But anthropological practice has not been the exclusive terrain of those who pass for professional anthropologists. Many scholars who received anthropological training in the 1970s and 1980s preferred to identify themselves as historians, sociologists, political scientists and philosophers, largely because of anthropology's infamous status as a handmaid to imperial rule. While these claims are abundantly patent and familiar in many academic circles, things have changed and a growing number of scholars trained as anthropologists are today defining themselves as such except among those who remain frozen in the past.

Paul Nkwi was the first Anglophone Cameroonian to obtain a PhD in Social Anthropology in 1975, from the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. He joined the department of Sociology at the then University of Yaounde in 1976, which at the time was dominated by French anthropologists (Nkwi, personal communication). Until the early 1990s, anthropology, in the words of Paul Nkwi, 'had very little visibility' precisely because it was taught as a complementary subject to sociology. However, it remains an interesting irony that whilst sociology existed as a discipline at the University of Yaounde, its teaching content for the large part had been anthropology especially in the 1970s and 1980s when the department was dominated by French anthropologists. However during the 1992/93 academic year, the university granted anthropology the right to exist semi-autonomously and since then, has awarded B.A. and postgraduate degrees in anthropology. Its current struggle involves the quest to establish complete independence from the joint department of sociology and anthropology.

When the Cameroon government decentralised its university system in 1992 by raising former university centres to fully-fledged universities, two more anthropology departments were created. One at the University of Ngaoundere in the Adamawa province, and another at the University of Buea in the South West province. The latter is the only public university whose official medium of instruction is in English. Based in the former capital of what used to be the Southern Cameroons, the University of Buea seemed promising to many scholars and students of English expression who for many decades had endured various sorts of discrimination at the

Francophone-dominated University of Yaounde. At Buea, anthropology was established as a joint programme with sociology and since 1997, has awarded joint B.A. degrees.

Graduates from Yaounde and Buea have gone on to pursue further studies in anthropology abroad. The Netherlands, the USA, South Africa and more recently, Switzerland have proved particularly attractive. Their training in these different countries has the potential to reproduce or, perhaps, transform the legacy of diverse anthropological traditions in Cameroon. However, compared to their Francophone counterparts, there are still relatively few Anglophone anthropologists, which accounts partly for the dearth of anthropological works, a void that arguably, has been filled by other kinds of intellectual works that nevertheless, have crucial relevance for anthropology or better still, have drawn on anthropological methods and concepts (see for example, Fonlon's ideas on the concept of culture, Fonlon 1967). Research in the anthropology of Cameroon remains dominated by expatriate anthropologists although in more recent years, substantial contributions have emerged from local anthropologists. In the following paragraphs, I will consider just a few of the popular themes that have attracted scholarship both among local and expatriate anthropologists. They include ethnohistory, identity and ethnic politics, chieftaincy and, lastly, witchcraft in the contemporary era.

One of the key challenges encountered by researchers of predominantly non-literate societies is to document and reconstruct the histories of these societies. This claim is particularly true of African and other non-Western societies, which by dint of their non-literate past, provides invaluable opportunity for the intersection of history and anthropology (cf. Fowler and Zeitlyn 1996:6). To this end, a huge, perhaps, ever-growing amount of literature has been produced in the domain of ethnohistory. Some of the key areas include Tikar history and identity (Chilver 1970, Chilver and Kaberry 1967, Jeffreys 1964), which have generated a great deal of debate in the past decade (see Fowler and Zeitlyn 1996 for a summary). The pre-colonial history of many Western grassfields groups have also attracted tremendous scholarship, as seen in the works of Paul Nkwi (1982) and the French anthropologist, Jean-Pierre Warnier (1985). Their works, both individually

and collectively, reveal a strong cultural historical tradition, grounded and steeped in local histories, which, interestingly, echoes the intellectual collaboration between Chilver (a historian) and Kaberry (an anthropologist). A more recent contribution comes from Emmanuel Yenshu (2001), which focuses on inter-community relations between the Kedjom Keku and its neighbours in the pre-colonial and colonial history of the grassfields. Yenshu has taken issues with the ways Kedjom history is presented in the works of Kaberry and Chilver and by Nkwi and Warnier. His contributions reveal the ways in which knowledge produced by indigenous anthropologists link up with and differ from those of expatriate scholars and even with other local anthropologists.

Anthropologists have also focussed on ethnicity, identity and what has come to be known as 'the politics of belonging'. This domain is particularly attractive, partly because anthropology finds profound excitement with the ways in which 'others' are produced and contested by social actors. The introduction of democratic reforms in the early 1990s in Cameroon, for example, provoked new obsessions with belonging and ethnicity, especially in the coastal areas of the country that are host to substantial numbers of migrants from the Western grassfields, known by various names as 'settlers' or 'cam no go'. Although these issues have occupied prominence in political circles, they have also had ripple effects in the religious spheres as brilliantly depicted and analysed by Konings (2003). Stated simply, ethnic politics has had a long history in the body politic dating from the era of Ahmadou Ahidjo, the first president of Cameroon (1960-1982). But its more recent expressions under the present regime of Paul Biya, have assumed deeply divisive, violent and exclusionary proportions, most often teleguided and championed by members of his regime (Geschiere and Gugler 1998, Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000, Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998).

Since colonial times, traditional leadership has remained a fascinating issue with anthropologists, precisely because it has shown remarkable resilience and adaptation to successive colonial and postcolonial regimes (Nkwi 1976, Nyamnjoh 1985). In fact, scholars have given attention not only to the ways traditional leadership have been influenced by different colonial regimes –

German, British and French (Geschiere 1993) – but also to their position in the modern state and their relationship with new elites (Fisiy 1995, Jua 1995, Konings 1999). It should also be noted that traditional leadership features conspicuously in many ethnographies on Cameroon (see for example, Geschiere 1997, Goheen 1996), largely because chiefs play decisive roles in the lives of their subjects, such as resolving witchcraft disputes, land conflicts, participating in development projects or initiating them, co-opting new elite, and getting involved in modern politics both at national and local levels. My own research has shown that contrary to claims about the incompatibility of chiefs and democracy, the reality is that political transition in Cameroon produced contradictions which created space for chiefs to fill but on condition that they were able to draw from different kinds of legitimacy and had not been discredited by their past or present involvement with the postcolonial state. In Cameroon, this claim could be substantiated by the fact that the emergence of the discourse of autochthony provided space for the resurgence of chiefs in regional and national politics. By posing as the protectors or guarantors of the rights of their subjects, some chiefs have appropriated the discourse of democracy and autochthony to secure advantages for themselves and their regions or chiefdoms (Fokwang 2003).

Lastly, witchcraft remains a domain that has consistently received anthropological attention and increasingly among local researchers, precisely because people seem to be concerned that witchcraft has become even more pervasive and destructive in the modern society. Concerns about witchcraft are not limited among so-called ordinary people as it has also made significant and sometimes shattering inroads among powerful elites and government circles (see for example Rowlands and Warnier 1988, about elite's fear of witchcraft) and (Nyamnjuh, 2002 for accusations against leading government officials' involvement with witchcraft). Geschiere (1997) draws heavily on data from Cameroon, and he is indeed one of the leading researchers of this phenomenon in the country. Researchers have also drawn our attention to the diverse ways in which witchcraft issues are dealt with in different parts of Cameroon, with emphasis on regional trajectories and their implications for societal harmony

(cf. Fisiy and Geschiere 1996). Tatah Mbuy, a catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Bamenda, has also been involved in research on witchcraft, both from an academic perspective as well as for pastoral concerns. Mbuy's writings about witchcraft have raised eyebrows even among church circles (Mbuy 2000), which tend to dismiss witchcraft issues as a sign of backwardness and lack of faith among Christians. Certainly, witchcraft will remain a critical theme for research, insofar as misery, despair and dictatorship remain key companions both to the downtrodden as well as the rich and powerful.

The above themes are far from exhaustive as scholars continue to make inroads into research domains that were previously unexplored. Anthropologists are now looking at women and the (in)formal economy (Niger-Thomas 2000), youth identity and their relationship to the state (Fokwang 2003) as well as *feymania* (Malaquais 2001), a phenomenon associated with fraudulent schemes involving the use of deceit and trickery to dispossess people of their savings and property.

### **Anthropology's Future and Implications**

Anthropological training in Cameroon has shifted its bearing to the realm of applied studies, aimed at arming students with necessary skills to be competitive in the job market upon graduation. The reasons for this are varied. First, relatively few students take up anthropology at the postgraduate level because according to local perceptions, its economic value leaves much to be desired. This is not entirely unique to Cameroon, as this seems to be a widely held belief in many West African countries. Hence, recent anthropological training in Cameroon is tailored to meet the needs of students who intend to join the civil service, work in NGOs or communication and health sectors. Whilst this initiative seems not only necessary, there remains the risk of sacrificing the theoretical merits of the discipline at the altar of expediency.

Already, the consultancy syndrome has made significant inroads into academia and in some cases, has led to a compromise of academic standards and practices. This is more so with local anthropologists, for

whom research grants are extremely rare, and remains a vexing concern. Thus, a shift in the kinds of training offered to undergraduates might not be a function of foresight only, but also arising from scholar's own experiences in both the academic and economic domains. Given this trend, comparatively little ethnographic work in the nature of 'thick description' and prolonged fieldwork might be undertaken by local scholars. However, this is not to insist that scholarship counts as anthropological only when its data are obtained through specific methods such as prolonged fieldwork, particularly in the current era when research funds are hard to come by. As argued earlier, the production of anthropological knowledge in Cameroon has not been the prerogative of trained anthropologists only. However, in my mind, three categories of researchers continue to occupy a constituency which I see as crucial for the practice of anthropology in Cameroon.

First, there remains the crying need for indigenous anthropologists, who for job-related factors, live abroad, to continue researching and publishing about Cameroon. Cameroonian anthropologists trained in Western universities who have opted to remain in the West, either practicing anthropology or involved in other professional ventures might have significant bearing on anthropological practice in Cameroon. Both local and foreign-based Cameroonian anthropologists have potential to contribute on a range of questions that demand anthropological insights. Concerns about the country's endemic culture of corruption, greater clamour for gender equality and the crisis of masculinity provoked by prolonged economic crisis, the panic of an impending national implosion owing to Cameroon's enormous ethnic diversity, constitute just a few of the issues that need further anthropological investigation.

Second, I anticipate a more assertive and productive role for local research bodies such as the KRC and the Yaounde-based Centre for Applied Social Science Research and Training (CASSRT). With specific reference to the KRC, I see enthusiasm among local researchers which promises exciting opportunities and discussions on a range of themes. The KRC, unlike CASSRT, is made up non-professional anthropologists, but whose experiences and research interests have significant contributions to the anthropology of Cameroon. Their participation in the knowledge production

enterprise will raise questions about insider-outsider positionalities, which constitute a major area of debate in contemporary anthropology. The KRC, prior to its untimely demise, had already demonstrated its potential to carry out quality and publishable research. Its revival is a welcome initiative and has the potential of promoting local research by locals, as well as networking with expatriate scholars of this region.

Lastly, there is promise that the grassfields will continue to attract an ever-growing number of expatriate anthropologists whose academic influences remain indelible. Drawn from several traditions, especially, the Anglo-American, French, and Dutch, it is apparent that the grassfields, indeed, Cameroon as a whole, will continue to be host to diverse anthropological traditions, which in real terms will continue to enrich the practice of anthropology in so divergent and sometimes disparate a country. In fact, many expatriate anthropologists remain connected in various ways to this region, either through their close-knit networks abroad, or by making short regular trips. This raises the very interesting issue if anthropologists ever really leave the field – given their deep involvement in matters of the region even when not physically present in their field sites.

## Conclusion

Since the early twentieth century, Cameroon has emerged as a strategic locus for anthropological practice. It is on this grand theatre that diverse anthropological traditions have mingled, perhaps competed against each other for the understanding and articulation of native livelihoods and customs. This seems almost apposite, given Cameroon's triple colonial history. The country's geographical, historical and cultural diversity have made of it 'a true African crossroads, a microcosm of the continent' (Fowler and Zeitlyn 1996:xviii). Of course, Nigel Barley (1982, 1986) has done his fair share of bringing Cameroon to a rather odd limelight through his absurd but hilarious account of certain mountain 'tribes' in the north of the country. His *innocence*, notwithstanding, Cameroon seems to have established fairly intimate relationships with anthropology and anthropologists:

The Bamenda grassfields in particular, described as a 'microcosm of this microcosm', has been the subject of a huge number of ethnographies emerging from the country. These works go a long way to celebrate the legacy of the pioneers such as Jeffreys, Kaberry and Chilver, and indeed, the lives of those who inhabit the rugged territories of the grassfields. The pioneers whose works and legacies I have examined in brief have remained indispensable among Cameroonian and Cameroonist historians and anthropologists. Usually, not all pioneers enjoy the glorification that seems to be endowed on them by virtue of being the first to set foot on a region of write about a people's lives. But if anything, most of the pioneer anthropologists examined above have immortalised their names, thanks to their insightful and fascinating studies in Cameroon. The growing number of local anthropologists also promises exciting times for anthropology in this region. Their own contributions, it is anticipated, will foster the kinds of conversations that stimulate and propel intellectual networking to the benefit of both locals and expatriates.

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