Europhone Divide in Cameroon: Constraining Nation-Building and Democratization in the Post-Colony

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Abstract

Colonialism's influence still resonates across all facets of African society even though the continent attained independence more than half a century ago. While a majority of African countries experienced colonialism from a single European colonizer; Cameroon's case deviates from the norm radically as her colonial biography was authored not by one but by three different colonial powers-Germany, France and Britain. Noting that Germany's influence as a colonizer was significant, it however ended abruptly in 1916 following its ouster from the territory by allied forces. As such, Germany's cultural influence did not permeate into the socio-cultural fabric of Cameroon unlike that of France and Britain. This paper's main thrust therefore intends to demonstrate how the Anglophone/Francophone (Europhone) divide remains the main cultural legacy of colonialism in Cameroon and suggests that this divide constitutes an impediment to democracy and nation building. Further, it seeks to shade light on Francophone (majority) cultural dominance of the Anglophone (minority) within a context of other influences such as regional and ethno-tribal heterogeneity which presupposes the incubation of latent conflict. Since the paper adopts a historical approach, secondary data constitutes its main source of information with a focus on content analysis. As a recommendation, it is submitted that a paradigm shift must occur at the policy level through the development of genuine cultural alternative which emphasizes building strong socio-cultural bonds based on the unique cultural experiences of Cameroon society. By so doing, the impediment posed by the Europhone factor can hopefully be neutralized. As such, democracy and nation building may be fashioned on the basis of Cameroon's unique historical and cultural realities.

Keywords: Anglophone, Francophone, British Cameroons, French Cameroons, Plebiscite, Referendum.

Introduction

The history of a people represents their socio-political and cultural identity especially in a context as Cameroon's whose past events are sometimes presented according to the whims and caprices of the regimes that have occupied power since the colonial period [1]. In as much as certain elements and forces may sometimes aim to control and confiscate the social memory of a people as the case of Cameroon amply demonstrates, it becomes necessary to embark on a path of illumination and clarification so as to set the record straight. By so doing, an attempt is made to tell history as it unraveled and continues to unravel for without such an exercise, a knowledge gap emerges which can be filled with un-trues and half-truths. Cameroon's history can be termed to be a chequered one, not because the country has experienced any major socio-political hiccup since attaining independence in 1960-61, but rather on the grounds that socio-cultural fault lines belie a false projection of normalcy. In Cameroon, social tensions are glossed over and when there is a hint of social mobilization on the part of the masses provoked by exasperation with the regime, authorities react with lightning speed proffering either cooptation or outright suppression of the movement and its ring leaders. In a country such as South Africa, dialogues and reconciliation talks represent an important modus-operandi for reconciling socio-cultural animosities and
political fissures as was the case in the immediate post-Apartheid era. However, from independence in 1960-61, there has never been a national platform composed of the vital components of Cameroon society with regards to arriving at consensus vis-à-vis Cameroon’s multifaceted socio-historical problems. Following the organization of a Tripartite Conference composed of the ruling Cameroon’s People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM), opposition parties and civil society Organizations, the conference failed to achieve broad based consensus from the stakeholders with regards to constitutional reform. “This conference that was held from 30th October-18th November 1991 proved to be futile as national aspirations became mortgaged on the altar of parochialism [2].

Political authorities continue to deny the existence of any social frictions such as the Anglophone problem [3] and use the results of questionably organized elections to legitimizes their actions towards the Anglophone minority. Achille Mbembe [1] has analyzed the relationship between the regime and citizens in Cameroon within the framework of post-colony. He observes that “the notion post-colony identifies specifically a given historical trajectory-that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization and the violence which the colonial relationship par excellence, involves” [1]. He goes forward to add that “the official discourse [in Cameroon] made use of all necessary means to maintain the fiction of a society devoid of conflict [1]. Rather, “attempts have been made to minimalize the Anglophone-Francophone divide by emphasizing that this did not exist during the German colonial era” [3]. By so doing, social fissures such as Anglophone socio-economic, political and cultural marginalization by the francophone dominated regime are allowed to simmer and fester with the possibility that they can sporadically evolve into physical violence. Because of Cameroon’s rich socio-cultural diversity which is made up of more than 250 ethnic groupings and two broad linguistic groups (Anglophones and Francophones) coupled with a rich natural biodiversity, the country is proudly shown off as Africa in miniature by its authorities. However, current realities in Cameroon exist within a context of oppressor (Francophone) and oppressed (Anglophone) giving the impression that all is not fine and dandy as the authorities are wont to say. Francis B. Nyamnjoh an expert on Cameroon politics highlights the flip side of this Africa in miniature mantra when he writes that,

To refer to Cameroon as Africa in miniature the way its authorities tend to do with pride, is to imply that Cameroon is a reflection and representation of Africa in terms of endowments (and only reluctantly in terms of pitfalls as well). While this may be true in many regards it certainly stretches our credulity when it comes to testing out social scientific theories or making predictions therefrom. Far from being Africa in miniature in this sense, the country has earned distinction as a burial ground for many a theory or generalization [3].

While other social frictions such as high unemployment rates, endemic corruption and ethno-regional antagonisms are discernable, this paper’s prism is limited to examining the extent to which the Europhone legacy of colonialism has influenced the democratization process and nation building project in Cameroon. As such, it intends to show that, due to the Europhone factor, culturally diverse people who experienced colonialism from two different and incompatible perspectives came together in 1961 only for the Anglophones to later on discover that their value systems was not compatible with that of French Cameroon. Cohabitation between the two colonial value systems has therefore occurred within a context of French cultural and political dominance and Anglophone domination. This implies that, Anglophone numerical minority status has been concertedly undermined by the Francophone dominated regime through overt and covert maneuvers, discriminatory policies and other mechanisms of social assimilation and subversion. The implications of marginalization pose a threat to the democratic and nation building project as Anglophones have been made to exist within

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a context of second class citizens whose role in nation building is either under-appreciated or completely ignored. Seeing that the article will refer to mostly historical occurrences, it adopts a historical analytic approach and uses content analysis methods as a method of analysis. Analyses will emphasize on the evolution and implications of the dichotomy between Anglophone versus Francophone relations within the ambit of the democratization and nation building paradigms. Information is sourced mainly from secondary sources. This article is organized into two main sections. Section one presents the background of the Europhone factor in Cameroon. The second part is focused on the evolution of Anglophone-Francophone relations and the implications of this relationship on the two variables identified.

Colonial Background

Cameroon’s colonial biography was authored by three colonial powers namely Germany (1884-1916), France (1916-1960) and Britain (1916-1961). Germany’s influence as a colonizer though short-lived laid the foundations of modern Cameroon [4]. Following her ouster from the territory by Allied forces in 1916 with the advent of World War I, nationalist movements forty years later were to reignite their nostalgia for German Kamerun when most of them resorted to denote Cameroon with a “K” instead of a “C” in show of their desire for an undisputed Cameroon as was the case during Germany’s rule [5]. The influences of both France on the one hand and Britain on the other can be traced to the Anglo-French defeat of Germany from the territory. The ouster of Germany from the territory Kamerun preceded the delineation of the territory as Mandates of the League (1922) and Trust territories of the United Nations (1946) respectively. Britain and France were charged firstly by the League of Nations and secondly by the United Nations Organization (UNO) to administer Cameroon and other conquered colonial possessions of Germany as international territories, preparing them towards eventual self-rule. It therefore begs the question that if Cameroon was an international territory of the LON/UNO, why is the country’s democracy and nation building projects being haunted by the ghosts of Britain and France 54 years after independence? This necessitates a revisit of Cameroon’s post World War I history for it represents the starting point of Cameroon’s present predicament [6].

From Partition (1916) to Reunification (1961)

Following the defeat and expulsion of Germany from Kamerun by Anglo-French forces in 1916, Kamerun was partitioned between France and Britain after the failure of a joint Anglo-French condominium [7-9]. In the partition agreement, the British sphere was one fifth while the French portion was four fifth. “The British sphere consisted of two disjointed, narrow strips of territory in the west stretching from Lake Chad to the Atlantic Coast and bordering on Nigeria” [7]. Due to the irregular nature of British Cameroons, the United Kingdom further divided its sphere of influence into British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons so as to ease administration of the said territory [8]. In 1919, the Versailles peace makers approved this partition agreement and the League of Nations through Article 22 of its Covenant gave Britain and France complete powers over the administration of the Cameroons as mandated territories of the League [7]. Britain integrated and administered British Cameroons as part of her crown colony of Nigeria while France organized her sphere independently though within the framework of French Equatorial Africa [8]. Willibroad Dze-Ngwa posits that “through the League of Nations agreements, the British and French spheres of Cameroon were administered separately under British and French colonial legacies respectively [9, 10].

With the replacement of the League of Nations by the United Nations (UNs) in 1946, the status of the two territories changed from mandates of the League to Trust Territories of the UNs [10]. Whereas the mandate system of the LONs did not make explicit guarantees for international territories under its supervision to aspire
towards eventual self-rule and independence, the Charter of the United Nations proclamation [10] with regards to Trust Territories aimed; to promote the political, economic, social, and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territories, and their progressive development towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned, and as may be provided by the terms of each trusteeship agreement [11].

This change of ideology from the League of Nations mute stance on the political destiny of mandates to the UNs clear position with regards to the political future of Trust Territories provided fresh impetus to nationalists from British and French Cameroon to renew and intensify demands for self-rule.

Early nationalist aspirations in Cameroon can be traced to criticisms of the Anglo-French partition of German Kamerun. “Soon after partition Cameroonians regrouped themselves into nationalist movements, calling for the return of the territory as it existed during the German era” [9]. This view can be substantiated on the basis that “in 1919, a group of Douala people petitioned the Paris Peace conference against the 1916 partition and called for [Cameroon for Cameroonians and Africa for Africans]” [5]. In British Cameroons, nationalist aspirations unraveled along peaceful channels unlike in French Cameroon where nationalism as espoused by liberation political parties such as the Union des Peuples du Cameroun (UPC) had to engage in headlong violent confrontations with the puppet colonial regime installed and supported by the French [10]. Following the brutal suppression of the radical anti-colonial stance of the UPC in French Cameroon, and also taking into consideration the change of orientation by colonial powers such as France to grant paternalistic independence to their colonial possessions, political independence for African territories became fashionable from the 1960s. Added to this was United Nations resolution 1514 upon which colonial powers drew inspiration for decolonization. The next step was that France in the presence of the United Nations Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld granted superficial independence to French Cameroon on 1 January 1960 [5,8,9,10].

Events in British Cameroons were to unravel along different lines. Southern Cameroons which had been administered as part of Nigeria for purposes of administrative convenience attained self-governing status in Nigeria in 1953 [8]. The political climate in British Southern Cameroons was more tolerant than what obtained in French Cameroon and so allowed for many nascent grassroots political movements such as the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) of Emmanuel Endeley and the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNP) of John Ngu Foncha to mushroom. Seeing that British Southern Cameroons had been in contact with Nigeria from the time she became a British fief in 1916/1922, Verkijika G. Fanso, emeritus professor of history at the University of Yaoundé I suggests that “Anglophone nationalism in British Cameroons was influenced by nationalist developments in Nigeria. It is his view that “Nigerian politics influenced the thinking of Cameroonians and broadened their outlook on life” [5].

The political destiny of British Southern Cameroons revolved around the ideological camps of the KNDP and the KNC even though other political movements such as the Kamerun United Party (KUP) of P.M Kale could be identified which favoured independence for British Southern Cameroon [12]. Nationalists in British Southern Cameroons could be grouped into three broad categories. In the first category could be found political movements which vied for autonomy within Nigeria such as the KNC of Endeley. The second category was made up of parties which espoused reunification with French Cameroon within a loose federation such as the KNDP of Foncha, and the last category which envisaged secession from Nigeria and
independence as a separate political entity embodies in KUP. The ideological divide that emerged within the file and rank of Southern Cameroon nationalists can be attributed to the preponderance of ethno-regional cleavages between the North West grassland people and the South West coastal people who constituted British Southern Cameroons \[13,14\] As Piet Konings and Francis B. Nyamnjoh \[13\] succinctly capture it; The Anglophone elite initially demonstrated a large degree of unity during nationalist struggles after the Second World War but they became increasingly divided during the last phase of decolonisation. Different views on the political trajectory of the Southern Cameroons tended to be reinforced by personality differences between the major political leaders and ethno-regional differences within the Trust Territory: the South West-based Kamerun National Convention (KNC) party led by Dr Emmanuel Endeley championed integration into Nigeria, while the KNDP led by John Ngu Foncha favoured (eventual) reunification with Francophone Cameroon. The KNDP's victory in the 1959 elections was a political event with important consequences for South West-North West relations. While the South West elite had dominated the political scene in the Southern Cameroons until 1959, the KNDP's victory signified the start of North West hegemony in the Anglophone region, with Foncha becoming Prime Minister \[13\].

In 1960 with the independence of French Cameroon and Nigeria already achieved, the fate of Southern Cameroon had to be decided. Based on the political ideologies of the KNDP and KNC the United Nations decided to solve the Cameroonian issue once and for all through a plebiscite that was organized on 11 February 1961. “Foncha favored a vote on separation from Nigeria to be followed by a period of continued trust status (gestation) while Endeley favored association with Nigeria…”\[4\].The independence of Southern Cameroon was therefore tied either to the umbilical cord of the Nigerian Federation or the newly independent Republic of Cameroun by the United Nations. The option of independence favoured by other less popular parties was excluded by the United Nations. The KNDP's victory over the KNC implied that Southern Cameroonians had opted to reunify with the Republic of Cameroun rather than join the Nigerian Federation while British Northern Cameroon opted for integration with Nigeria. It has often been reported that the overwhelming vote to reunite with La République du Cameroun manifested by Southern Cameroonians in 1961 was not in itself an expressive popular desire for reunification with French Cameroun but represented a backlash from the oppression and abuse suffered by the inhabitants of British Southern Cameroons in the hands of Nigerian administrators (ibid). Implications of the United Nations decision not to include the third option (Independence) during the 1961 plebiscite resonate across the political landscape of Cameroon with its impact felt more in the Anglophone community who feel that they have been cheated out of their political destiny.

As in other colonized territories, the people of Southern Cameroons wanted independence and sovereignty. At a conference held 26–30 June 1961 in Bamenda on the issue, 29 delegates (67%) advocated for a fully sovereign Southern Cameroons state unassociated with French Cameroon or Nigeria. According to one report, by 1959 the territory ‘possessed internationally delimited boundaries, had for several years administered itself under United Nations Trusteeship as a Self-Governing Region, and had, thus evolved its own system of government and of the conduct of public affairs. Compelling the Southern Cameroons to unite with either Nigeria or Cameroun aided the foundation for future dissatisfaction \[8\].

A trip down memory lane within the vicinity of 1961 demonstrates that the basis of the current Europhone divide and its multifaceted implications on the democratic project originated in what can be termed the confiscation of Southern Cameroon’s sovereign status by the United Nations.
simple fact that the third option of independence was disqualified by the United Nations denotes the deprivation of a very important opportunity for Southern Cameroonians to decide on their political future. The current generation of some Anglophone activists and ordinary citizens have decried this oversight and continue to question why despite possessing the minimum requirements for statehood (internationally recognized boundaries, defined territory, stable administrative and political institutions, population, economic viability, etc), the United Nations and United Kingdom compelled their parents and territory to attain independence by either joining Nigeria or La République du Cameroun [5, 8]. In defence for this decision to exclude the independence option, the United Nations have proffered feeble arguments such as the territory’s small size to justify its actions. However, there are countries in Africa such as The Gambia, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon which are not only smaller in terms of population but also in terms of surface area. Fonkem Achankeng’s view seems to contradict that of the United Nations when he asserts that it was the self-interest of Britain within the context of cold war relations that served as a basis for the United Nations actions [8]. British Southern Cameroon’s therefore attained independence by reunifying with La République du Cameroun on October 1, 1961.

Events from the point of reunification in 1961 have sufficiently demonstrated that Anglophone Cameroonians are marginalized in Cameroon seeing that their status as a linguistic group and a party of the reunification agreement has been consistently violated by various Francophone administered regimes in Cameroon. The persistent violation of a people’s rights especially those of minorities implies that there is a rupture in so far as social harmony is concerned and foreshadows the incubation of violent conflict. The dynamics of this Europhone divide in the context of Cameroon has compromised the practice and consolidation of democracy and nation building which in turn has implied that the country’s social evolution and democratic entrenchment trajectory has been greatly jeopardized.

**Value Systems at Logger Heads-Strange Bedfellows**

The bringing together of two culturally distinct people into a single political unit implied the mutual cohabitation of Anglophone and Francophone value systems developed in the course of the colonial process. Cohabitation of two culturally distinct and traditionally antagonistic value systems such as Anglophone and Francophone cultures was as much a matter of practicality as it was of convenience [8]. British Southern Cameroon’s had been extensively influenced by the trappings of British culture from the time the territory became a British mandate. In the course of the Mandate and Trust interaction processes with the United Kingdom, the Southern Cameroonian developed a strong attachment to the British ways and subsequently forged a unique identity based on the principle of interdependence. As such, the Southern Cameroonian was and is still very attached to and influenced by Anglo-Saxon traditions especially in the domains of Education and legal practice (Common Law). The same situation also obtained in French Cameroun where French values had been proliferated by French colonial administrators within the context of the French colonial policy of Assimilation. So, for example while the legal system in British Southern Cameroon’s was influenced by the common law tradition, the legal regime in French Cameroun drew inspiration from civil law practices. Incompatibilities of this nature could also be identified in the educational system whereby general certificate exams were the norm in British Cameroons while the baccalaureate system obtained in French Cameroon [13]. French Cameroon had a para-military police force whereas the former British Southern Cameroons had an unarmed civilian police [5].

Taking into consideration the Francophone/Anglophone cultural divide and the implications of favouring one culture over the other in such a delicate and sensitive issue as reunification, the political
leaders agreed in 1961 at the Foumban Constitutional Conference that a bi-cultural character should constitute the bedrock of the new Republic. This was made more poignant by the fact that English and French could not be forced on either the Anglophones or the Francophones.

“The choice of using English and French in Cameroon was arrived at after considering the expediency of using two languages that were historically relevant to both East and West Cameroon in the early sixties ... [the numerous] national languages and the lack of a consensus on which of these could be used as the official language...[made it logical] to use established European languages. Bilingualism (English/French) was seen as one of the most opportune instruments of unifying hitherto separated parts of Cameroon.” [9].

Without making explicit guarantees of this nature to safeguard the cultural heritage of the Anglophone minority, it was feared that the values of Anglophones will be subsumed by the numerically dominant Francophone regimes [13]. These fears have come to pass, as will be presented subsequently in this paper.

**Trivialization of Anglophone Identity in the State Construction Project**

Cameroon’s history from 1961 is replete with evidence of the systematic trivialization and marginalization of the historical identity and political significance of Anglophones. This process can be traced to the machinations of President Amadou Ahidjo in 1966 when he set in motion a process of consolidating power and the creation of a strong and all powerful single party state with vast powers concentrated in the hands of the president [4]. With the consolidation of national unity as one of his *raison d’êtres* for this political maneuver, Ahidjo like his contemporaries in other African countries at the time instituted policies designed to enhance his powers with the objective being political survival [15]. This process of political monolithism saw the light of day at the price of “federalists arrangements, such as constitutional amendments, that allowed for the political autonomy of groups or regions based on ethnic, linguistic, or religious claims” [15]. The preceding stance adopted by Peter Schraeder aptly captures the political reality in Cameroon where the most significant action taken by Ahidjo to trivialize the Anglophone minority was the May 20, 1972 unconstitutional amendment of the 1961 Federal constitution which transformed Cameroon from a Federal Republic into a United Republic [16]. By this gesture, Ahidjo effectively emasculated the Anglophone community, depriving it of its status as an integral party of the Union that exists today as the entity appropriately dubbed Cameroon. The 1972 constitutional amendment which came to light by way of a referendum was in contravention of article 47 of the 1961 constitution which stated that “Any proposal for the revision of the present constitution which impairs the unity and integration of the Federation shall be inadmissible.” As observed by Piet Konings and Francis B. Nyamnjoh [3], the advent of this clause in the 1961 constitution had been inserted to soothe the fears of the Anglophones in the advent of any tinkering with the federation. Incase circumstances necessitated the reconfiguration of the state’s political regime, this could only be done via a vote at the federal assembly and not by way of referendum as was done by Ahidjo, who in opting for the referendum option abrogated clause 3 of article 47 [3,5]. This process of trivialization has been continued and refined by Ahidjo’s constitutional successor Paul Biya who singlehandedly and unconstitutionally changed the name of Cameroon from United Republic to Republic of Cameroon in February of 1984 to Republic of Cameroon [3]. This gesture signified the boldest step, total annihilation and complete emasculation of the identity, political significance and strategic importance of Anglophones in Cameroon. This name change implied that the country had reverted to the name adopted by French Cameroon when it attained independence in 1960. This action has provoked two main reactions from the actors of the Anglophone movement. The first view holds that “the
new name was clear evidence that, as far as Biya was concerned, the Anglophone territory and people had lost their identity…” [8,12] while the second view championed by Fon Gorji Dinka posited that the move was “unconstitutional and called for Southern Cameroons to become independent and be rebaptised as the Republic of Ambazonia” [12].

Added to foregoing are numerous attempts by the Francophone dominated regime to assimilate the Anglophone educational and legal cultures respectively. The first overt attempt occurred in 1983 when the minister of national education tried to assimilate the Anglophone General Certificate of Education (GCE) system into the Baccalaureate system practiced in the French zone [3]. Though the Teachers’ Association of Cameroon (TAC) and the Confederation of Anglophone Parent Teachers Association of Cameroon (CAPTAC) successfully averted this ploy, other attempts have been made and continue to be made to abolish the Anglophone educational system. On May 6, 2015, a ministerial text was drafted pertaining to the harmonization of the academic programs of “fundamental disciplines” in Cameroon’s Universities so as to facilitate the mobility of students [17]. This move has been strongly criticized by various organizations in Anglophone Cameroons among which is the Buea chapter of the Union of Teachers of Higher Education (SYNES) in Cameroon. The position adopted by SYNES is very critical seeing that the supposed harmonization program intends to scrape common law from the curriculum of all universities in Cameroon and replace it with civil law. In a letter addressed to the minister of Higher Education SYNES points out that;

“The proposal to suppress common law from undergraduate law programme is suspect. Common law is unique to Anglophone Cameroon and it is the foundation of legal practice in English-speaking countries while civil law is culturally Francophone. Why would MINESUP (Ministry of Higher Education) envisage a Cameroon with Anglophones but without common law?

Could it be part of a vast conspiracy to delete everything in the legal system that identifies Anglophones in Cameroon as an existing cultural group…? [18].

In another dimension, attempts have been made to francophonise the legal domain in Cameroon by the Biya regime. In 2014, the Ministry of Justice attempted to appoint notaries in the Anglophone regions to the constellation of Anglophone lawyers. This move was strongly resisted by Anglophone lawyers who argued that this was a violation of the common law tradition seeing that advocates become notaries by default. In February 2015, Anglophone Lawyers decried the fact that they were being obliged to make submissions in French in courts in Bamenda. Seeing that predominantly French speaking judges have been appointed to these courts, it can be said that it is only but natural that these judges will prefer French as a working language in an English setting. Anglophone lawyers reacted to this assimilatory move by explaining that it was neither practical nor legal especially in view of the fact that the move did not only violate the rights of minorities but also tampered with the legal tradition as practiced in Anglophone settings. The North West lawyers Association (NOWELA) reacted by dispatching a resolution to the president of the North West Court of Appeal in which they reiterated that “the language of communication in North West Courts is English” [18]. The president of NOWELA Robert Nso Fon remarks that “it is clear that they simply want to completely eliminate the common law system in Cameroon” (ibid).

In a radio programme on Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTC) entitled “Cameroon Calling” on June 28 2015, Social Democratic Front (SDF) parliamentarian Awudu Mbaya Cyprian, pointed out the marginalization of Anglophones and the English language in Cameroon. He highlighted that most signboards, road signs, official documents and signs in government hotels such as Ayaba Hotel in Bamenda (an English Zone) were written exclusively in French [19]. In a similar vein, the speaker of Cameroon’s national assembly Cavaye Yegue Jibril caused uproar during a parliamentary
setting when he said “We are not here in the Bamenda Market!” [20]. This remarked followed protest from SDF parliamentarians who “had been protesting the passage of bills without adequate debate by the house” (ibid).

**Implications of Europhone Divide on Democracy and Nation Building in Cameroon**

The wind of change that blew across sub Saharan Africa in the 1990’s engendered serious democratic implications in the continent [21-23]. In Cameroon, the reintroduction of multipartyism was spearheaded by an Anglophone John Fru Ndi who defied the Biya regime and launched the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in May 1990 in Bamenda, Capital of the North West Region [24]. “Given the Anglophone frustration with the Francophone-dominated state, it is not surprising that the first opposition party in the country emerged in Anglophone Cameroon”. The regime responded with brute force resulting to the death of six Anglophones. Apologists of the Biya regime decried the emergence of multipartism and tended to label Anglophones variously as “treacherous”, “enemies in the house” and “Biafrans”-a derogatory term used to describe Nigerian who live in great numbers mostly in the English regions in Cameroon [3,13]. Dismayed by this callous response from the regime, one of the most prominent Anglophone politicians John Ngu Foncha resigned from the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) as its vice president. Faced with increasing external and internal pressure, the regime switched gears and started operating on the basis of “if you can’t defeat them, lead them.” Biya therefore announced the reintroduction of multipartism in Cameroon in 1990 and had this to say to that effect “I brought you to democracy and liberty … You now have liberty. Make good use of it. As incredulous as this may sound, Paul Biya takes credit for the reintroduction of multipartism in Cameroon for no other reason than for the one that an Anglophone should not be credited for this epic political paradigm shift. Eventhough the SDF has presented itself as a national party, apologists of the Biya regime still label it as an Anglophone party thereby giving the impression that the party is out solely for Anglophone interest [24]. This view can be seen as flawed on the basis that, the SDF is the only opposition party in Cameroon with a truly national character possessing a track record of victories during municipal and legislative elections in both the Anglophone and Francophone zones. It can be deduced from the foregoing that, because the origins of the Social Democratic Front can be traced to Anglophone Cameroon, this has been used to undermine and discredit its role and importance as the major opposition party. It has been offered that, in the absence of a strong and viable opposition movement in the body politic, the masses have only the streets as a source of recourse. This situation might soon become reality in Cameroon as evidenced from recent occurrings in which aggrieved individuals such as Female footballers of the national team and some soldiers went on strike to draw attention to their poor treatment.

Since the early 1990’s, the democratization process in Cameroon has been highly influenced by the Anglophone versus Francophone dichotomy. Following the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1990, presidential elections were organized in 1992. “In fact, in the October 1992 presidential elections, which many observers acknowledge was rigged in favour of Paul Biya, the incumbent president, John Fru Ndi and the SDF won 35.9 percent of the votes cast while its nearest rival, the Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et Progrès (UNDP) won 19.2 percent” [24]. It should be highlighted at this juncture that the SDF has “continued to position itself as the major opposition party among the more than 150 opposition parties in Cameroon. Despite this impressive performance, the political opposition has been unable to pose a veritable challenge to the power of the regime. While acknowledging the multitude of problems plaguing opposition parties in Cameroon, it can be offered that the Europhone divide has played a very significant role in the opposition’s inability
to form coalitions or collaborate in such a way as to consolidate its role and offset the political force field in its own interests. Attempts to form coalitions such as the 1991 National Coordination of Opposition Parties and Associations (NCOPA) have all disintegrated because the leaders have failed to look past their personal and ethno-regional/linguistic differences [24]. The leader of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) Fru Ndi has been accused of torpedoing many an alliance because he was not considered as the leader of such alliances. It can however be said that linguistic differences—a byproduct of the Europhone divide—have played a negative role in the democratization process in Cameroon. Opposition movements as well as the ruling party have failed to look past this Francophone/Anglophone linguistic divide. This situation has occasioned a serious bump in the democratization process in Cameroon.

Within the context of nation building in Cameroon, it can be observed that a pattern of marginalization has been established by the various Francophone regimes in which overt and covert strategies have been repeatedly employed to strip the Anglophone community of its sense of identity and solidarity. With an emphasis on the slogans national unity and territorial integrity (vertical integration), the Ahidjo and Biya regimes have systematically pitted Anglophone and Francophone cultures against each other, consequently resulting to the relegation of Anglophones to the back burner of national life. These attempts have sowed seeds of mutual distrust between Anglophones and Francophones which have in turn threatened the nation building project in Cameroon. Through a process of assimilation, Anglophones have unconsciously internalized a secondary status vis-à-vis Francophones in Cameroon seeing that the cultural identity and heritage of the former is continuously being disregarded by political elites originating from the latter.

In Africa, the nation building project has in most cases progressed at the detriment of minority groups which are either coerced or forcefully compelled to adopt a national image [16]. As highlighted by Claude Ake (2000), the state construction project has operated in a manner that is; “initially self-defeating in throwing up, organizing and invigorating social formations in competition with each other and with the state for political allegiance. These social formations whose identities are often defined in cultural terms, are essentially strangers to each other, and their relation is largely based on an amoral calculus of power and characterized by intense competition” [23].

The preceding position sits at home within the context under discussion. Rather than opting for cultural interdependence, the political regimes in Cameroon have repeatedly attempted to obliterate the cultural identity of the Anglophone minority instead proposing French values as an alternative.

**The Way Forward**

This article has attempted to identify the dynamics of the Europhone divide in Cameroon and how this divide has impacted nation building and democratization. Tracing the origins of this divide to the Anglo/French partition of Cameroon in 1916, it has been able to demonstrate that the Anglophone/Francophonic cultural clash engendered by the advent of colonialism poses a serious threat to the democratization process and nation building in Cameroon. From the foregoing arguments presented in this paper, it will be easy for someone not conversant with occurrences in Cameroon to conclude that Anglophones are significantly marginalized in Cameroon. While this view is true to a greater extent, it is however important to state in passing that some attempts have been made by the Francophone dominated regime to uphold Anglophone cultural heritage. The most notable of these initiatives was the creation of the University of Buea in 1993 as an Anglo-Saxon institution of higher learning. Also, in the conduct and management of public services, some governmental departments and individuals make an effort to embody the bilingual nature of the
country. This can be seen from the translation and publication of government documents in both English and French (even though this is not always the case). Though these efforts and a good number of other initiatives are welcomed by Cameroonians of goodwill, it is still necessary to state that Cameroon has the potential to achieve more in terms of fostering its bicultural heritage. The lackluster manner in which political officials approach the bicultural character of Cameroon poses a serious threat to the country’s socio-political stability and sustainability. The bias for French cultural values over English ones in Cameroon has caused frustration in the Anglophone community to the extent that some Anglophones have opted for secession from the Republic of Cameroon and are even poised to resort to violent confrontation to achieve this goal. While the Biya regime has been very successful in thwarting the secessionist standpoint proposed by some Anglophones, it is however important to state that, if genuine efforts are not taken to allay the frustrations of the Anglophone community, the secession option stands the chance of becoming irresistible to most Anglophones. Many Anglophone Cameroonians love the fact that they are citizens of the only country in Africa in which French and English are the two official languages and will like to see this unique cultural attribute maintained. The Anglophone opposition elite feel that if Cameroon can be organized into a Federation as was the case in the immediate post-independence era (1961), their cultural heritage will be maintained and preserved. The institution of a federal system of government in Cameroon will give Anglophones reassurance as to the preservation of their cultural heritage and thereby going a long way to dispel the social tension created by the Anglophone/Francophone divide. With their fears allayed in a Federal arrangement, Anglophones will be more predisposed to view themselves as wholesome Cameroonians and will work hand in hand with their Francophone brothers towards the development of Cameroon mutatis-mutandis.

References
11. United Nations Charter, Article 76b