

**WRITING FROM THE MARGINS: POLITICAL MASCULINITIES AND SEPARATIST (AUTO)
BIOGRAPHIES IN CAMEROON**

*(ÉCRIRE DES MARGES: LES MASCULINITÉS POLITIQUES ET LES (AUTO) BIOGRAPHIES SÉPARATISTES
AU CAMEROUN)*

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Anglophone human rights activist Albert Mukong described his six-year imprisonment from 1970 to 1976 in his 2009 biography, *Prisoner without a Crime*, in painstaking detail.¹ He describes his prison gendarmes as lawless and bent on humiliation; he describes frequent beatings, intimidation, and mental torture. He shares that one brutal beating from a gendarme left him hospitalized for days because he had refused to embrace President Ahidjo's political party.² But before all this he describes the soldier who escorted him to the capital into the custody of the Brigade Mixte Mobile, Ahidjo's paramilitary secret police of Cameroon, thus: "[H]e was very civil and respectable in his conduct, maybe because he was Anglophone and also from Bamenda. He comported himself rather more [as] a bodyguard than a police escort for a detainee."³

Mukong's autobiography cast issues of Anglophone political identity and dignity within the framework of ongoing Anglophone social and political marginalization during the first two decades of Cameroon's independence from British and French European rule. Historicizing the lives of such men illuminates individual agency and highlights how past events shaped the ideas and understanding of the world in which they lived. Excerpts of their

¹ A.W. Mukong, *Prisoner without a Crime. Disciplining Dissent in Ahidjo's Cameroon* (Bamenda, 2009), 1.

² Ibid., 143.

³ Mukong, 11.

life history draw out not only the ambiguities of such activists, but also the many obscurities of historical and contemporary power structures that male political figures have faced when striving to preserve Anglophone political identity and dignity. Using the selected (auto)biographies of men like Mukong allow us to see their everyday lives and envision how the Anglophone drive for self-determination is recast into real and imagined memories over time, fabricating the “personal/self” in print space. Through the communicative process in autobiographical literary styles, they write from the margins, scribing Anglophone political imaginings of everyday lives past, present, and future.

Drawing on interviews conducted between 2011 and 2017, as well as archival records, this article traces the genesis of contemporary Anglophone secessionist/separatist intentions in Cameroon by examining print spaces, such as (auto) biographies, as key sites in which elite male urbanites grappled with issues of masculinity, dignity, and Anglophone political identity in the 1960s. During this time frame, Anglophone Cameroonian male political elites feared the growing power of the hegemonic Francophone state. In their (auto) biographies, various male political elites portrayed systematic Anglophone Cameroonian social and political marginalization as a central part of their lives from childhood to adulthood. Gender, specifically ideologies about masculinities, likewise shaped perceptions about dignity and political power and its violation as expressed in their (auto) biographies. The fact that this mistreatment has taken place within highly visible and open spaces contributed to feelings of humiliation and the perceived loss of men’s socio-political authority; this stoked support for secession and separatism among elite Anglophone men in the 1960s. While each autobiography aims to historicize individual agency, I contend that, together, they

demonstrate the collective actions of Anglophone political male elites who combated Anglophone oppression by the authoritarian Francophone state.

As Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher assert in their 2003 ground-breaking work, *African Masculinities in Modern Africa*, men were rarely the subject of gender research in Africa prior to their book.⁴ The research that has followed that explores constructions of masculinity in sub-Saharan Africa, has typically highlighted the colonial period and movements for independence.⁵ Attention to how men have contested and transformed shifting meanings of gender behaviour and influence in the colonial and postcolonial eras has been minimal.⁶ Using Anglophone Cameroon as a case study, this work will underline how male political elites' imagined their social and political marginalisation by a dictatorial Francophone African "other" within print space. Gender analysis further illuminates how dual European administrative legacies distinctively shaped these new cultural and political identities and how they played out in varied spaces and everyday lived realities. This work contributes to a broader conversation about how gender and public dignity shape cultural and political identities in secessionist and separatist movements in the Global South, such as the

⁴ C. M. Cole, T. Manuh, and S. Miescher, 'Introduction', in Cole and Miescher (eds.) *Africa after Gender?* (Bloomington, IN, 2007), 6.

⁵ For examples, see: E. S. A. Odhiambo, J. Lonsdale (eds.), *Mau Mau & Nationhood: Arms, Authority & Narration* (Columbus, OH, 2003); M.R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, OH, 2014); P. Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age: The Politics of Manhood in Kenya* (Athens, OH, 2017).

⁶ Cole, Manuh, and Miescher, 'Introduction', 6.

Polisario Front independence movement in Western Sahara, and in the Global North, such as in the Quebec sovereignty movement in Canada.

The movement I examine here is complex; Anglophone Cameroonian male political elites did not always form an ideological bloc. They expressed wide-ranging responses to the ruling Francophone state during the 1960s. Diverse rural/urban colonial African men recreated and challenged dominant ideas of masculinities to preserve the socio-political positioning Western or Christian mission education had afforded them. Such men sometimes opposed grassroots African independence movements, upholding the social and political authority acquired under European rule. Similarly, some male Anglophone political elites did not openly oppose the hegemonic Francophone government.⁷ Urbanite elites such as Thomas Tataw Obsenson, famed crusader journalist of the “Ako-Aya” columns for the *Cameroon Outlook* during the late 1970s and early 1980s, condemned both Anglophone and Francophone political elites equally for corruption and mishandling of government affairs. In newspapers and public speeches, space became a central stage for the conflict; resistance and cooperation with the Francophone occupation of this space alike reveals the politicization of the everyday life of male urban elites.

This paper draws on multiple sources. Published autobiographies of Anglophone male political elites who lived through the period of focus, which I term separatist (auto)

⁷ Walters Samah calls many of these Anglophone political elites ‘yes-men’; he asserts that they defend the government for fear of losing their posts, downplaying the existence of an Anglophone community poorly integrated into Cameroon. W. Samah, ‘Anglophone minority and the state in Cameroon’, in M.U. Mbanaso and C.J. Korieh (eds.) *Minorities and the State in Africa* (Amherst, NY, 2010), 259.

biographies, comprise the first and key source. Various male political elites—parliamentarians, poets, civil servants, and male journalists—portray systematic Anglophone Cameroonian social and political marginalization as a central part of their lives from childhood to adulthood. These (auto) biographies powerfully illustrate the daily experiences of Anglophone male political elites who have long sought Anglophone secession or separatism. Second, this work draws on archival records, such as newspapers. While privately owned, the newspapers I examine reflect a strong influence of Anglophone Cameroonian political elites. While the sources have limitations, they nonetheless provide a view onto various ways Anglophone Cameroonian male political elites grappled with ongoing Anglophone marginalization and how they highlighted issues of dignity and gender-specific cultural mores related to masculinity and political engagement in print.⁸

The final source consists of oral interviews and participant observations conducted in 2011–12 and 2015-17. The former includes conversations with Anglophone political elites such as Anthony Yana Zumafor, a former civil servant for the West Cameroon government and an active member of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), the leading Anglophone secessionist political group in Cameroon. My research also built upon ties I have established in Buea, the capital of the Anglophone Southwest Region, where I employed participant observation in local bars, which are often wooden shacks with few or no women. In them, elderly men and male university students talked to me at length about the history of the British Southern Cameroons and how their ongoing marginalization in present-day

⁸ W. Jong-Ebot, 'The mass media in Cameroon: An Analysis of their post-colonial status' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1989), 141, 156.

Cameroon fractured their pride, dignity and self-esteem. I am an outsider in these conversations as a woman, born in Francophone Cameroon to French speakers and a U.S. citizen, but I have studied Anglophone grievances for more than a decade and I believe they recognized my sympathy with their causes. The men asked me about my experiences with social, educational, and political marginalization as a black woman in the United States, which provided shared experiences of marginalization and promoted trust between us.

THE ORIGINS OF FRANCO-ANGLO CONFLICT IN CAMEROON

Cameroon was under German colonial rule until the First World War, which a League of Nations mandate divided the country between Britain and France. Although the British governed the Southern Cameroons from Nigeria, the regions were mostly administered separately.⁹ Nevertheless, British Southern Cameroonians elected representatives for the Eastern House of Assembly in Enugu, Nigeria until 1954,¹⁰ when the British government gave the Southern Cameroons an autonomous House of Assembly in Buea, the capital of the Southern Cameroons from 1949 until 1961 and the capital of the West Cameroon State until 1972. Britain stressed women's domestic roles and subservience in Africa just as it did domestically; the merging of its ideological systems with African systems continued the

⁹ R. Mbuh, M.D. DeLancey and M. W. Delancey, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Cameroon* (Lanham, MD, 2010), 350; Harmony O'Rourke, "Foncha, John Ngu," in *Dictionary of African Biography*, eds. Emmanuel K. Akyeampong and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ A. Ndi, *Southern West Cameroon Revisited (1950-1972) Volume One: Unveiling Inescapable Traps* (Bamenda, Cameroon, 2014), 2-3.

exclusion of Cameroonian women from politics.¹¹ Cultural customs that prevailed in most pre-colonial West African societies recognizing men as societal leaders largely continued under British rule.¹² While Christianization significantly lessened the practice of polygynous marriage among the wealthy elite during the colonial period,¹³ men wielded broad, unilateral authority in their households.¹⁴ Most women were submissive to their fathers, husbands, or some form of male jurisdiction. Unlike women, men might drink in bars, speak their minds, and pursue extramarital liaisons.¹⁵ Fertility, chastity, care for children, respect for elders, endurance, effective household management, and respect for husbands' authority defined ideal femininity and womanhood.¹⁶ With few exceptions, patriarchs determined the marriage of all females in a family.¹⁷ Protestant groups like the British Basel Mission and the American Presbyterian Mission taught women to observe Christian morals, which meant

¹¹ M. Goheen. *Men Own the Fields, Women Own the Crops: Gender and Power in the Cameroon Grassfields* (Madison, WI, 1996), 54.

¹² E. Konde, *African Women and Politics: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Male-Dominated Cameroon* (Lewiston, NY, 2005), 31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35; E. Burrill, *States of Marriage: Gender, Justice, and Rights in Colonial Mali* (Athens, OH, 2015), 32.

¹⁴ P. Konings, *Gender and Class in the Tea Estates of Cameroon* (Aldershot, UK, 1995), 7, 28-30; E. Yenshu, *Gender Relations in Cameroon: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Bamenda, 2012), 77, 83.

¹⁵ L.L. Atanga, *Gender, Discourse and Power in the Cameroonian Parliament* (Bamenda, 2009), 97.

¹⁶ C. Saidi, *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa* (Rochester, NY, 2010), 75-88.

¹⁷ Goheen. *Men Own the Fields*, 60.

remaining subservient, socially and politically.¹⁸ Men also dominated political leadership throughout the country.¹⁹

The patriarchal social order continued after the British Cameroons gained independence on 11 February 1961 and merged with the area of Cameroon that France had controlled.²⁰ At that time, a United Nations-sponsored plebiscite that gave Anglophone Cameroonians a choice between union with Nigeria and union with former French Cameroons, on a federal basis was held.²¹ Outright independence did not appear on the ballot, and Anglophone Cameroonians allege that France and Britain may have rigged the votes.²² In any case, the Northern Cameroons became part of Nigeria, which had been a British colony, while the Southern Cameroons joined Francophone Cameroon, which had been independent of France for a year, in the Republic of Cameroon.²³ The reunified state was a loose

¹⁸ J.A. Amin, *The Peace Corps in Cameroon* (Kent, OH, 1992), 59.

¹⁹ Goheen. *Men Own the Fields*, 31.

²⁰ Former French Cameroun achieved independence on 1 January 1960 as the Republic of Cameroon.

²¹ Ndi, *Southern West Cameroon Revisited*, 2-3.

²² M.A. Ayim, *Former British Southern Cameroons Journey towards Complete Decolonization Independence, and Sovereignty: A Comprehensive Compilation of Efforts* (Bloomington, IN, 2010), 348.

²³ As per the UN documents, British correspondences, and recent scholarship there is clear evidence that the decisions taken by the French and the British were done depending upon their own interests. Both countries had clear intentions for the future of Cameroon following the colonial rule and its influence in the region preceding that. The British foreign office was in the firm believe that owing to the minute size of Southern Cameroon it would not be viable independently. Hence the British officials were urging for a pro-Nigerian approach to this problem, simultaneously appeasing the political leaders of Nigeria. The French identified Ahidjo a vantage point to establish a French influence to the region. John Foncha was told by officials of both the parties, the French

confederation consisting of semi-autonomous states, the West Cameroon State (Anglophone) and the East Cameroon State (Francophone). Each state had an executive and a bicameral legislature. West Cameroon had an independent (though heavily government-influenced) press, while East Cameroon's was strictly state-controlled. Although the cultures and histories of the two regions differed, some cultural identities (Cameroon has over 250 ethnic groups) crossed the Anglo-French border, such as in the region of the Bamenda Grassfields.²⁴ At the time of reunification, East Cameroon had a landmass of 432,000 square kilometres or about 90 percent of the landmass, and a population of 3.2 million people constituting about 98 percent of the country. West Cameroon's population was 800,000 and its land surface area 43,500 square kilometres.²⁵ In the course of this article, I sometimes refer to Anglophone Cameroonians as West Cameroonians because during the federal republic this was the term

and the British, to appeal to the United Nations general assembly to obtain full independence on the plebiscite. Due to numerous political rivalries in Southern Cameroons, this did not materialize as there was not enough agreement about the independence option on the plebiscites. It was evident that Foncha had considerably less influence in the United Nations compared to Britain or France. Southern Cameroons was politically divided to the extent that voting for full independence was virtually impossible. Mélanie Torrent, *Diplomacy and Nation-Building in Africa: Franco-British Relations and Cameroon at the End of Empire* (New York City, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 23–27; Calson Anyangwe, *Imperialistic Politics in Cameroon: Resistance & the Inception of the Restoration of the Statehood of Southern Cameroons* (Oxford, UK: African Books Collective, 2008), 13.

²⁴ N.F. Awasom 'Towards historicizing the ossification of colonial identities in Africa: the Anglophone/Francophone divide in postcolonial Cameroon', in Bahru Zewde (ed.), *Society, State, and Identity in African History* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2008), 47-72.

²⁵ M. Atanga, *The Anglophone Cameroon Predicament* (Oxford, UK, 2011).

for the Anglophone state, and occasionally as Southern Cameroonians, as present-day Anglophone Cameroonians call themselves to emphasize the legacy of British rule.

The two dominant Anglophone political leaders of the period of the federal republic were Emmanuel Mbela Lifafa (E.M.L.) Endeley and John Ngu Foncha. They had served succeeding terms as Premier of the British Cameroons between 1957 and 1961, with Foncha serving second. Endeley was a part of the Bakweri ethnic group, whose wealthy members politically dominated the southwestern part of the country in the 1950s while Foncha was part of the royal family of the Nkwen Fondom who dominated the northwest region in the same period.²⁶ Endeley's party, the Cameroons Peoples' National Convention (CPNC), advocated for unification with Nigeria while Foncha's Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) advocated for reunification with Francophone Cameroon at independence. Supporters tended to vote along ethnic/regional lines from the 1950s through the 1970s, reflecting significant ethnic/regional distinctions.²⁷

²⁶ T.N. Ekali, 'The fluctuating fortunes of Anglophone Cameroon towns: the case of Victoria, 1858-1982', in S.J. Salm and T. Falola (eds.), *African Urban Spaces in Historical Perspective* (Rochester, NY, 2005), 325; G. Courade, 'The urban development of Buea: an essay in social geography' (Paper presented at the International Colloquium of the Centre National De La Recherché Scientifique, Bordeaux, France, September 29th to October 2nd, 1970).

²⁷ C.C. Fonchingong, 'Exploring the politics of identity and ethnicity in state reconstruction in Cameroon', *Social Identities Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 11:4 (2006): 363-80; P. Konings and F. Njamnjoh, 'The Anglophone problem in Cameroon,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35:2 (1997), 211.

Political elites such as Foncha and Endeley rightly perceived East Cameroon as a threat to their political power. The Francophone government banned the multi-party system in 1966, effectively prohibiting both the CPNC and the KNDP and marginalizing or co-opting Anglophone male political elites, including both Foncha and Endeley. On July 1972, the Federal Republic of Cameroon became a unitary state, the United Republic of Cameroon, effectively annexing West Cameroon just as its Anglophones elites had always feared. But the federal republic had always given them significantly less power than they believed they should have.

THE 1961 FOUMBAN CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE: (IN)DIGNITY AT REUNIFICATION

In July 1961, after the referendum, President Ahmadou Ahidjo called the Fouban Constitutional Conference, nominally to negotiate the constitution of the federal republic. John Foncha led the Anglophone delegation, which consisted of 25 Anglophones who met with 12 Francophones.²⁸ President Ahidjo, a Francophone, claimed in public speeches that he chose Fouban, a Francophone city located in western Cameroon, to host the meeting because it was a “place where one would like to go for rest and relaxation.”²⁹

(Auto)biographies and journalists’ reports of the conference reveal that only the Francophone delegation could relax, however. Nerius Namaso Mbile, who was elected into

²⁸ DeLancey, Mbuh, and DeLancey, *Historical Dictionary*, 176-77.

²⁹ F. Achankeng, “The Fouban 'constitutional' talks and prior intentions of negotiating: a historico-theoretical analysis of a false negotiation and the ramifications for political developments in Cameroon”, *Journal of Global Initiatives*, 9:2 (2014), 124.

the Eastern Regional House of Assembly in Nigeria during the 1950s, and later served in the West Cameroon House of Assembly, described the Anglophone delegation's anticipation in his 2011 memoir, *Cameroon Political Story: Memories of an Authentic Eye Witness*:

At last, the time had arrived for us now reasonably united on this purpose in West Cameroon, to tackle the politicians of the East in a conference that would define our constitutional relation. Here, we would confront the “brothers” [from] across the Mungo [River] in a battle to test our wits and our experience in constitution making. Indeed, against the background of having attended four Constitutional Conferences, three in London and one in Lagos, several of us in the West Cameroon contingent felt confident to be more than a match for our Francophone counterparts.... In men like [E.M.L.] Endeley, [John Ngu] Foncha, [Salomon Tandeng] Muna, Motomby [Woleta], [Augustin Ngom] Jua, my humble self to name only these, the feeling was that in wrestlers, on hearing the drums and music of their favourite sport.³⁰

The Mungo River was once the natural border between British- and French-controlled Cameroon; Mbile suggests the Anglophones an invading army. His comparison of the Anglophone delegation to warriors and athletes invokes their virility, which was soon challenged. Contradictory ideas for the future federal republic became apparent on the first day of the conference. Conflicting visions of Anglophone power at entry were evident too. President Ahidjo handed the Anglophone delegation an already drafted version of the constitution the morning of the first day of the conference and invited them to make

³⁰ N.N. Mbile, *Cameroon Political Story: Memories of an Authentic Eye Witness* (Oxford, UK, 1999), 137.

comments on the draft.³¹ The Anglophone delegation was shocked and insulted, having expected to have a key role in negotiating the terms of the constitution.³² Mbile's memoir records that the delegation was humiliated by this presentation of a document giving the Francophone government "unlimited" power and that they felt they had wasted their time in attending.³³ It seems that some members of the international community framed Ahidjo's actions as trickery; Pierre Messmer, one of the last French high commissioners in French Cameroon and one of Ahidjo's close advisors, claimed that he and others knew at the time that the meeting was a sham and Ahidjo's plans purely annexationist.³⁴

The Anglophone delegation demanded three more weeks to review the draft of the constitution in a bitter protest, but Ahidjo refused. Endeley cautioned the Francophone delegation that this would have "far-reaching consequences on the people of the Cameroons."³⁵ Mbile disclosed in his biography that Ngom Jua, another Anglophone delegate, reportedly shouted, "I have never seen people expected to write a constitution in two days!"³⁶ The tense atmosphere caused one journalist present at the conference to write, "Political observers are wondering if it is really here in Foumban in this rowdy atmosphere that the guidelines of a federal constitution are going to be effectively drawn".³⁷

³¹ Achankeng, "The Foumban 'constitutional' talks", 129-54.

³² Ibid.

³³ Mbile, *Cameroon Political Story*, 89.

³⁴ P. Messmer, *Les Blancs s'en Vont: Récits de Décolonisation* (France, 1998), 134-5.

³⁵ Achankeng, "The Foumban 'constitutional' talks".

³⁶ Mbile, *Cameroon Political Story*, 140.

³⁷ Achankeng, "The Foumban 'constitutional' talks".

The Francophone representatives had, in fact, spent months drafting the constitution with the assistance of French constitutional law experts in Yaoundé. Their mood, according to journalistic accounts, was complacent, even as the Anglophone delegation talked loudly among themselves and directed glares and shouts at the Francophone delegation. Some changes were made, but Foncha's persistent arguments for a loose form of federalism availed nothing.³⁸ In the end, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon largely conformed to the centralized pattern that Ahidjo sought, rather than the loose framework that Foncha and his delegation had envisioned. Anglophones had been promised that the republic would continue as two politically independent states, but Ahidjo clearly articulated that Francophone power would far outweigh the power of Anglophones.

Scholars and ordinary Anglophones alike term the five days of the Foumban conference the “Anglophone Waterloo”—the point when the Francophone state cemented its political domination over Anglophone political elites.³⁹ In the process of consolidating their domination, the Francophone state also formally cemented paternalistic rule over Anglophone men. It marginalized and infantilized their political power and cultural identity. Drafting the constitution without the input of Anglophone male politicians enforced a symbolic age hierarchy, infantilizing and suppressing their political power; the fact that the constitution disempowered Anglophone local governments compounded the effects. Holding the conference in a Francophone city also possibly implied that Ahidjo controlled and

³⁸ Mbuh, DeLancey and Delancey, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Cameroon*, 176-7.

³⁹ For example, see: M. Jumbam, ‘Fiftieth anniversary of Cameroon's reunification: the summit magazine story’, *MartinJumbam.com*, May 24, 2014.

regulated the movement of male Anglophone political elites, which further emasculated them.

Ahidjo endeavoured to become the “father of the nation.” Michael Schatzberg identifies fatherhood as a central part of the political imaginary in states across Africa after independence that figured all citizens, regardless of their wealth, age, sex, religion, or ethnic groups, as brothers and sisters in the great endeavour of nation-building and beneath their political father.⁴⁰ Gender studies scholarship suggests that while women represent the authentic voice of their people, men, through political activities, represent the political strength and virility of their people on the national and international level.⁴¹ In this context, Ahidjo’s actions at the 1961 Foumban Conference threatened Anglophone political prowess and therefore Anglophone political masculinity. Ahidjo would continue to suppress this masculinity within political structures over the ensuing decades by enforcing patrimonialism and emphasizing ethnic politics and clientelism during his regime (although he would do this to a lesser degree than his predecessor Paul Biya).

Mark W. Delancey sums up Cameroon under Ahidjo as centralization, coalition building, and repression.⁴² Centralization began with the banning of political parties under the then Cameroon National Union (CNU) in 1966. Yaoundé became the capital of the country,

⁴⁰ Michael Schatzberg, *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa: Father, Family, Food* (Bloomington, IN, 2001), 3.

⁴¹ For examples, see: D.R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c.1935–1972* (Cambridge, UK, 2012).

⁴² M. W. DeLancey, *Cameroon: Dependence and Independence* (Boulder, OH, 1989), 51.

and all central powers gathered there. The constitution gave the president the power to personally nominate all government workers within the administrative system the country had inherited under French administration. Ahidjo built coalitions to consolidate his power further. He used a sophisticated system of patron-client relations by giving power to a few selected persons who in turn brought their loyalists to support the president.⁴³ While the relationship was hierarchical, obligations were mutual. Ahidjo selected his clients by ethnic arithmetic or ethnic balancing.⁴⁴ Ahidjo built a cabinet, national assembly, and civil service that reflected all of the major ethnic groups in society.⁴⁵ While he killed, jailed, or scared into exile many former Anglophone politicians who had opposed him, he co-opted others, including Foncha and Endeley, who gained limited political power. Ahidjo demanded complete allegiance; any Anglophone politician who sought to gain civilian support beyond the limitations Ahidjo imposed was removed as a disloyal member of the government.

THE LOSS OF DIGNITY AND POLITICAL SURVIVAL

John Foncha became a symbol of waning Anglophone autonomy and Anglophone male elites blamed him for their marginalization. Rumours abounded Ahidjo co-opted Foncha by promising to make him vice president even before the Fouban conference and that Foncha had known about the pre-drafted constitution.⁴⁶ Mbile went as far as to share in his

⁴³ Ibid., 52-65

⁴⁴ Konings and Njamnjoh, "The Anglophone problem in Cameroon," 207-229.

⁴⁵ P. Konings and F. Njamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon* (Leiden, Netherlands, 2003), 5.

⁴⁶ Ndi, *Southern West Cameroon Revisited*, 172; Jumbam, 'Fiftieth anniversary of Cameroon's reunification'.

autobiography that during the Foumban Conference “Premier Foncha, having lost time in not showing us the East [Francophone] proposals [beforehand]...treating them as a ‘secret’ document... [and] stood for swallowing the proposals virtually hook, line and sinker... we were being rushed through a difficult job... in order to make up for Foncha’s fault.”⁴⁷

Consequently, Foncha’s political oppositions and critics, such as Mbile, blamed him for Anglophone marginalization and painted him as a Francophone puppet throughout the 1960s.⁴⁸ In a January 2014 interview, his widow, Anna Atang Foncha, addressed this accusation.⁴⁹ She said that the failure of Anglophone political elites to support her husband had doomed his efforts to resist the hegemony of the Francophone state, that without them he was no match for Ahidjo, who received strong support among Francophone politicians. She also said that her husband had said “everything went well” at Foumban, which contrasts with the account of Mbile and others. She said that the East Cameroon majority had “crushed” her husband, suggesting it was brutal and dominating. In her account, John Foncha was a victim in an authoritarian regime. She noted “My husband engaged in the fight to reunite Cameroon with all his heart... In West Cameroon it was easy for him because people understood him. But the terrorism [at work on] the other side of Cameroon could not allow him [to] travel

⁴⁷ Mbile, *Cameroon Political Story*, 140.

⁴⁸ For example, see: ‘CNPC Unearths KNDP Sins’, *Cameroon Champion*, 2:64 (December 5, 1961), 2.

The *Cameroon Champion* was founded in 1960 by EML Endeley’s opposition West Cameroonian party, the CPNC, which it openly supported. It was printed and distributed in Limbe until 1963, when it closed due to lack of funds. W. Jong-Ebot, ‘The mass media in Cameroon’, 177-81.

⁴⁹ L. P. Nyuylime, ‘My husband wanted a united, progressive Cameroon’, *Cameroon Tribune*, 27 January 2014.

safely.”⁵⁰ Indeed, John Ngu Foncha’s vehicle had been shot at when he travelled in French Cameroon in the early 1960s. Anna Foncha’s characterization of Ahidjo's domination suggests Ahidjo possessed a more domineering political power.

Anna Foncha’s defence of her husband may not paint him as favourable a light as she would wish, but John Foncha was not the only politician the totalitarian Francophone state co-opted. Endeley for example supported Ahidjo’s moves to create a one-party system in Cameroon, thus securing for himself a position in the CNU’s Central Committee. Salomon Muna was essentially a figurehead as the Prime Minister of West Cameroon, after Ahidjo displaced Foncha to give the position to Muna in 1968. Muna frequently published letters in Anglophone papers reminding Anglophone urbanite elites to maintain Anglophone dignity by forbearing from opposing Ahidjo's rule.⁵¹ Nantang Jua and Piet Konings’s research describes such co-optations of the Anglophone elite as one of the reasons Anglophones did not organize openly until the early 1990s.⁵²

In my interviews, Anglophones repeatedly shared that the British had allowed Anglophones a greater semblance of political autonomy than Francophones and thereby shown male political elites a level of respect.⁵³ In his autobiography, *Nomads*, literary scholar Emmanuel Fru Doh who grew up in Buea shares that because of the legacy of British

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ For example, see: ‘Make Cameroon a nation to live with dignity’, *Cameroon Telegraph*, 1 July 1969, 4.

⁵² N. Jua and P. Konings, ‘Occupation of public space: Anglophone nationalism in Cameroon’, *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, 175 (2004), 609-33; M. Krieger, ‘Cameroon's democratic crossroads’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 32:4 (1994), 605-28.

⁵³ Interview with Anthony Yana Zumafor, Buea, Cameroon, 30 July 2015.

rule, “Southern Cameroonians were already enjoying an incredible high level of democracy and therefore order and freedom... [consequently] citizens of East Cameroon started flooding into West Cameroon” after reunification.⁵⁴ However, the British did not assist Anglophones in resisting Francophone hegemony, which aligns uncomfortably with idealistic and nostalgic views of British rule. A 1999 biography of John Foncha describes his receipt of declassified documents from the British archives in London in the 1990s showing that colonial officials he had trusted had prevented the inclusion of an independence option in the 1961 plebiscite. The biography underlines Foncha’s disappointment of what he perceives as the betrayal of the British: “These documents show how British officials through intrigue and stabbing in the back frustrated Southern Cameroons possibility of acceding to independence... Foncha in his frustration realized that the British colonial functionaries such as James Robertson and J.O. Field whom he respected as men of integrity and addressed [as] ‘your Excellency’ and [as] ‘your Honour’ were after all just petty men who lied to him.”⁵⁵ In response, Foncha sent a letter to the United Nations asking Britain and the UN to acknowledge their role in permitting the annexation of English-speaking Cameroon.⁵⁶ Foncha died soon after making the request, but more recent developments prove that the British were not as supportive of the UN granting Southern Cameroons self-government as they let on to Anglophone Cameroonian politicians. Nonetheless, persistent narratives about the superiority of British rule in Cameroon belie this history.

⁵⁴ E.F. Doh *Nomads: The Memoir of a Southern Cameroonian* (Bamenda, 2013), 36

⁵⁵ P.S. Bejeng, *John Ngu Foncha: The Cameroonian Statesman: a Biography* (Bengal, India, 1999), 237.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 238-243.

While Ahidjo proclaimed in speeches throughout the 1960s that Cameroonians had to put aside their ethnic difference and be unified, othering Anglophones were likely strategy that the Francophone state used to bolster its political power, hegemony, and legitimacy.⁵⁷ Thus, the Francophone government relies on othering marginalized groups, such as the Anglophone political elites, to maintain its totalitarian regime. Ultimately, Franco control of English-speaking regions bolstered and secured the power of the Francophone state; the state likely never intended to truly incorporate Anglophone elites into governance or a Francophone national identity.

In fact, the unitary state had its adherents among Anglophone Cameroonians. While Thomas Tataw Obsenson called attention to corruption in the West as well as the East State, saying that Anglophone Cameroonians were susceptible to immoral actions, post-1966, he believed a single party state would bring greater political unity in Cameroon.⁵⁸ A July 1961 letter in the *Cameroon Champion* by an M.N. Namata argued for a unitary state, saying that the federal state was dividing Cameroonians and objected to loyalty tied to differing cultures and past European administrative rule.⁵⁹ Namata also describes political unity as a means to gain economic strength for the country as a whole. He concludes, “If the constitution is reviewed and amended for a unitary one, Cameroon would from then on continue winning

⁵⁷ See, for example: ‘Ahidjo advocates national unity’, *Cameroon Champion*, 1 June 1962, 1;

‘Cameroon operates on a unified not unitary party system’, *West Cameroon Press Releases*, 4 February 1969;

‘Bring down barriers raised between tribes: [speech] by President Ahidjo in Garoua’, *Cameroon Telegraph*, 19 March 1969, 4-5.

⁵⁸ Ako Aya, ‘I wept’, *Cameroon Outlook*, 3 September 1971.

⁵⁹ M.N. Namata, ‘Unitary system suitable for Cameroon’, *Cameroon Champion*, 24 June 1962, 5.

appraisal of her alacrity by the world.”⁶⁰ Clearly divergent perspectives about Anglophone political autonomy existed among elites. Today, Anglophones continue to debate whether some level of unity benefits them, and many do support separatism over secession.

CONCLUSION

The recent news in modern-day Cameroon shows how the use of print and new forms of communication continues to shape political activities in Anglophone Cameroon. Since October 2016, people in Cameroon’s two western English-speaking regions, reflecting British administrative legacies, have joined protests against what they say is their marginalization by a French-speaking majority in Cameroon. In January 2017, the Francophone government outlawed various Anglophone resistance groups. It also ordered the country's telecommunications providers to shut off internet connections to Anglophone regions of Cameroon, forcing residents to become “digital refugees,” travelling to Francophone towns or Nigeria to access the internet.⁶¹ Although international pressure led to the restoration of the internet on 21 April 2017, the government has announced its determination to control internet

⁶⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁶¹ ‘Cameroon shuts down internet in English-speaking areas’, *Aljazeera*, 25 January 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/cameroon-anglophone-areas-suffer-internet-blackout-170125174215077.html>; A.B. Atabong, “‘Digital refugees’, repression and the death penalty – Cameroon’s escalating language conflict”, *Equal Times*, 21 February 2017, <https://www.equaltimes.org/digital-refugees-repression-and#.WMxHgfnyvIU>

use and block its use by secessionists and political dissidents.⁶² Nevertheless, numerous Anglophone men continue to seek ways to access the internet and pen blogs and twitter their eyewitness accounts from the margins. No doubt their experiences complicate meta-narratives about Anglophone social and political marginalization, read in various forms of communication media.

⁶² M.E. Kindzeka, 'Cameroon applauded for restoring internet after blackout in English-speaking areas, *Voice of America (VOA) News*, 21 April 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-applauded-restoring-internet-blackout-english-speaking-areas/3820458.html>