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## Review Article/Note de lecture

Piet Konings and Francis Nyamnjoh, 2003, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity. A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon*, Brill, Leiden, and Boston: African Studies Series, 230 pp. Maps, bibliography, index

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This book is a critical analysis of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon and is constructed against a background of political liberalisation in Cameroon since 1990. Anglophone Cameroon ‘has been at the forefront of ethno-regional protests and demands for the re-arrangement of state power’ (p. 2). According to the authors:

there appear to be sufficient grounds to justify the claims of Anglophone movements that the nation-state project after reunification has been driven by the firm determination of the Francophone political elite to dominate the Anglophone minority... and erase all cultural and institutional foundations of Anglophone identity (p. 96).

They note that Anglophones have been regularly relegated to inferior positions in the national decision-making process and have been constantly under-represented in the various spheres of public life. This graphical presentation constitutes the Anglophone problem in Cameroon. The problem is of topical relevance and impacts directly on the survival of postcolonial Cameroon, and regional security. Yet it has hardly been subjected to a comprehensive and a critical analysis that facilitates deciphering its nettlesome nature as Konings and Nyamnjoh have done. Authors writing on the Anglophone problem typically approach it from emotional and narrow perspectives, which tend to obfuscate the problem. One school championed by the SCNC ideologues<sup>1</sup> (Tata 1991; Anyangwe 2000) has the tendency of demonising the Francophones as the sole author of their problems. Another championed by J.C. Ngoh (1996, 1999, 2001) argues forcefully that the Anglophones have no case whatsoever and have themselves to blame for their current predicament. Ngoh unsparingly castigates the ineptitude, naivety, and cowardice of Anglophone leaders as significant factors that contributed to the emer-

gence of the Anglophone problem. The last school, which is the official mind of the Francophone-dominated government, uses the media to consistently accuse Anglophones as a new set of troublesome rebels, infatuated by the oil wealth of Anglophone Cameroon, who have no genuine grievance that is exclusive to their region.<sup>2</sup>

This book by Konings and Nyamnjoh is a magisterial work on the Anglophone problem in Cameroon and is a culmination of the research of these two internationally renowned scholars for over a decade since the eruption of the Anglophone problem. It is brilliantly researched, argued, and well annotated, and contains a substantial select bibliography and up-to-date information on the activities of Anglophone nationalist or sovereigntist movements in the Diaspora tapped from their websites. It is an immensely valuable contribution to our understanding and knowledge of contemporary Anglophone-Francophone relations, and sets the platform for the commencement of real scientific research on nation-building endeavours in Cameroon. Most of the contradictory and confusing issues about the Anglophone problems that constitute topics of discussion in the public sphere in Cameroon as well as on CAMNET and the SCNCforum/SCNCNation are addressed and clarified with expertise, sagacity and objectivity. I would say 'le débat est relancé pour tous' and this book would certainly generate much interest and attract several reviews, especially when the French edition is made available. The authors in essence posit that the Anglophone problem is real and it can be explained by multiple factors and actors, each of which carries its own share of responsibility although of different magnitudes. No academic, diplomat or politician seeking a deeper understanding of the Anglophone problem can afford to circumvent this very resourceful book.

The eight chapters of this book address the following issues: the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the Anglophone community; the nature and evolution of the Anglophone problem; Anglophone strategies for sustaining and managing their identity; Anglophone-Francophone perception of the Anglophone problem, and the question of the distribution of blames for Anglophone marginalisation; strategies of the dominant Francophone government to contain the Anglophones and finally proposals to tackle the Anglophone problem. The first chapter examines the political liberalisation and the mobilisation of an Anglophone identity in Cameroon. The second looks at the Southern Cameroons road to reunification and federation. An interesting revelation in this chapter is the deconstruction of 'the widespread belief among Francophones that Southern Cameroonians warm-heartedly embraced reunification and fed-

eration' (pp. 48–49). The third chapter deals with the development of Anglophone consciousness during the federal and one-party unitary state (1961–1990). The fourth chapter is about the struggles for the return to the federal state while chapter five is about the strategies employed by the Biya regime to deconstruct the Anglophone identity. The sixth chapter ingeniously highlights Anglophone and Francophone responses to the views of the Anglophone movements, which is quite innovative. Chapter seven treats the Anglophone struggle for the preservation of its educational and economic legacy. The eighth chapter is the conclusion and examines the impact of the Anglophone problem and possible solutions to it.

In the Francophone memory and writings, Anglophones are treated as a homogeneous bloc; people from the same ancestry with one vision. This view is corrected and amply illustrated by the authors by highlighting 'the contradictions, contentions and contestations between the North-West and the South-West elites' (p. 14). The authors reveal that the federal framework, which was established in 1961, was expected to protect the institutions of the Anglophone minority. They admirably captured the fragility of the federated states and the limited areas of competence of the West Cameroon government. They noted that 'the customary courts of West Cameroon and primary education had some constitutional warrant for being taken as state tasks'. Other tasks left to the West Cameroon government in the early years of the federation, by convention rather than constitutional prescription were local governments, social welfare, archives... (p. 45). The Federal government soon assumed responsibilities in almost all spheres within its competence and this 'created disillusion among the majority Anglophones who strongly resented the loss of their region's autonomy and Francophone hegemonic and assimilative tendencies'. This led to the 'emergence of an Anglophone consciousness: a feeling... that their community with its distinct colonial legacy was a subject' of 'marginalisation, exploitation and assimilation by the Francophone-dominated state and even the Francophone population as a whole' (pp. 51–52). Then followed Francophone arrogance like attempts dismantling the West Cameroon state and absorbing it into the neighbouring Francophone regions by decreeing West Cameroon as one of the six regions into which the Cameroon federation was carved, and placing it under a succession of Francophone Inspector Generals who were more powerful than the Anglophone Prime Ministers. Anglophone officials were harassed with impunity. According to the authors, 'on several occasions gendarmes stopped and searched top West Cameroon officials, parlia-

mentarians and even Secretary of States by the roadside for no apparent reason other than to demonstrate their powers over these officials' (p. 54). Consequently, 'the demeanours of the gendarmes generated considerable public protest in Anglophone Cameroon but it also indicated effective powers of the federal inspector of administration who [and not the West Cameroon prime minister] had direct command over the gendarmes' (p.54). 'Foncha regularly protested while the renowned Anglophone academic, B. Fonlon, predicted the total "frenchification" of West Cameroon in two or three generations at the rate things were moving. With the event of the one-party state in 1966 and the ascension of Muna at the expense of Jua and Foncha, things were never the same again. The Anglophone political elite appeared to be more interested in seeking Ahidjo's patronage than safeguarding West Cameroon autonomy and identity' (p. 64). With the discovery of oil in West Cameroon and its consequence on the psychology of the Anglophones, there was the rush to establish a unitary state without any genuine consensus or consultation. In this way the original agenda of the Francophone elite to destroy the autonomy and identity of West Cameroon was realised. The renaming of the country from the 'United Republic of Cameroon' to the 'Republic of Cameroon' by President Paul Biya in 1984 was the logical conclusion of the long term Francophone agenda. It was a 'clear indication that the Francophone elite simply denied the fact that the Cameroon state was made up of two distinct entities' and a suggestion that 'the Anglophone territory had been assimilated and absorbed by the former Republic of Cameroon...' (p. 74).

The authors make the strong argument that 'there appear to be sufficient grounds to justify the claims of the Anglophone movements that the nation-state project after reunification has been driven by the firm determination of the Francophone elite to dominate the Anglophone minority in the postcolonial state and to erase all cultural and institutional foundations of Anglophone identity' (p. 196). They note that 'Anglophones have been regularly relegated to inferior positions in the national decision making process, and have been constantly underrepresented in ministerial as well as senior and middle level positions in the administration, the military and parastatals' (p. 196). This observation is evident to all interested observers of Cameroonian affairs but the point would have been more solid if it was buttressed with statistics, which clearly indicate Anglophone-Francophone ratios in certain spheres. If Francophones are accused of bad faith by Anglophones today, it is because 'the Francophone political leaders had assured [them] during the constitutional talks on reunification that the inherited colonial differences in language and insti-

tutions were to be respected in the bilingual union' (p. 196). This agreement not only remained a dead letter but the Anglophone region remained 'relatively underdeveloped which shows that it has not benefited sufficiently from its rich economic resources, particularly oil' (p. 196). The union in essence was not a worthwhile endeavour.

The merits of this book notwithstanding, some critique touching certain points, especially of historical details, must be unavoidably made. The argument cited from Ebune that links the formation of the KNDP to Catholicism because of protestant dominance of the hierarchy of the KNC (pp. 29–31) is not tenable because religion was not really an important issue in the politics of the Southern Cameroons. The KNDP was a creation of the Francophone émigrés in the Southern Cameroons and Foncha was simply invited and offered the crown of leadership because he was an indigene of the Southern Cameroons and he could easily mobilise support (cf. Awasom 2000). The authors appear to be prisoners of the logic of the politics of belonging as they tend to perceive everything from a regional basis. Foncha's KNDP is consistently presented as a North West party while Endeley's CPNC is called a South West party. Foncha and Endeley did not perceive their parties that way and voter behaviour in the Southern Cameroons did not conform to the ethnic logic of the authors (cf p. 39). Equally, the SDF, LDA etc. are labelled regional parties as if their founders so defined them or so intended them to be. Despite the fact that TAC and CAMTAG had an Anglophone-wide representation, the authors cannot resist the temptation of perceiving their leaders in ethnic lenses. The logic of appointing Drs Dorothy Njeuma and Herbert Endeley from the same Bakweri village as Vice-Chancellor and Registrar respectively of the so-called Anglo-Saxon University of Buea for an unprecedented record period of more than a decade could be better appreciated if it is seen in the wider framework of one of the several divide and rule strategies containing the Anglophone agitation.

The warning of the British Colonial Secretary of State for Colonies, first made in 1957, that the Golden Key of the Bank of England would not be handed over to the British Southern Cameroons (p. 33), has been misconstrued by the authors. It was not a threat at any attempt at extending the period of trusteeship. What the British meant was that the Southern Cameroons would be deprived of economic assistance if it opted to join the French Cameroons in the place of British Nigeria (Awasom 2004). The christening of Anglophone Cameroon as 'the Southern Cameroons' dates from 1954 when the territory was raised to a quasi-region in the

Nigerian federation under the Lytelton Constitution and not earlier as indicated on page 23.

There is also a common tendency to treat the Anglophone political elite in the pre-reunification era as actors in a sovereign state when the final decision actually depended on the administering authority. The authors opine that Anglophones 'have been inclined to lay all the blame for the Anglophone problem on the Francophone-dominated state, and gloss over the co-responsibility of the Anglophone elite who have dismally failed to form a united front in the pre- and post reunification period for the representation and defence of Anglophone interests, being preoccupied with their own internal power struggles' (p. 196). This observation does not totally hold for the pre-reunification period. Union with Francophone Cameroon was not a popular option and was never envisaged as a short-term possibility but an issue to be explored leisurely after the independence of Anglophone Cameroon. The authors recognised the fact that Endeley was opposed to reunification while other smaller political formations stood for an independent Southern Cameroons state (pp. 19, 32-33). When it dawned on the Anglophone political elite that the electorate was overtly hostile to reunification and even integration with Nigeria, which was being pushed down the throat of Southern Cameroonians by the UN, they quickly resolved their differences and collectively requested independence for the Southern Cameroons during the November 1960 London conference (Awasom 1998, 2000; Kale 1967). Unfortunately, the UN rejected to consider this option. It was therefore the international circumstance that conspired against the Southern Cameroonian political elite from acting as a united force in the defence of their interests before reunification.

Finally the preferred style of the organisation of the book is somewhat awkward. It should have followed the traditional format providing a preface of the work, which would appear in Roman numerals, followed by the eight chapters of the book, which would be outlined in the preface. In this regard, pp. 1-2 up to the fourth paragraph and pp. 20-21 beginning from 'Organisation of the Book and Research Methodology' should have constituted the preface. Chapter One of the book should have started with the title: 'Postcolonial Nation State Project from p. 12 up to the first three paragraphs (i.e. line 1-28). The preface of this book should be extracted from Chapter One and stand out distinctly from the rest of the book. The preferred format followed in this book is not very tidy to me.

The critique made in no way waters down the substantive part of this book, which deserves a place in the hall of fame. I highly recommend its

usage in all institutions of higher learning and its immediate translation into French for easy reading and understanding by all. Political scientists, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, national and international stakeholders would find this book extremely informative.

### Notes

1. See All Anglophone Conference 1993.
2. This is the typical Francophone government propaganda. The former Prime Minister of East Cameroon often propagated this view over the Cameroon Radio Television on the approach of February 11, which is a national day in Cameroon and the date that Anglophones voted in a UN plebiscites to join their Francophone counterpart.

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