

Before a Cameroonian Rwanda

Critique on Piet Konings' & Francis B. Nyamnjoh's *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon (2003)*

By Bate Besong

CAMEROON RE-UNIFICATION, like an inflated balloon, has the appearance of solidity but there is no substance to it. It is, however, imperative to make certain clarifying statements from the onset, in order to make very clear and straightforward the positions these scholars have taken.

In basing their scholarship on Foumban and post re-unification Anglophone political consciousness and sensibility, Professor Piet Konings and Dr. Francis B Nyamnjoh are only substantiating the fact that these periods are very cogent and decisive in the overall context of the contemporary Cameroonian experience.

Piet Konings' reputation as an insightful and perceptive scholar, who has never relented in the diligent pursuit of his work as a Cameroonologist, is not in doubt. Francis B. Nyamnjoh has gained a reputation as a prominent, pioneering and distinguished Cameroonian sociologist and writer.

To enable them contextualise and place the Southern Cameroonian response to the Francophone hegemony in its proper socio-historical and socio-political matrix, the researchers weigh considerably on the acute contradictions engendered by the repressive neo-colonial economic formation. They also examine the deepening of the crisis of autocracy itself, the open barbarisation of the Anglophone Cameroonian people and their precarious material existence. More important, Konings and Nyamnjoh illustrate how all these have acted as imperatives that have sustained Anglophone revolutionary responses such as the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), the Southern Cameroons

Youth League (SCYL), the Cameroons Anglophone Students Association (CANSAs), the Cameroon Anglophone Public Servants Union (CAPSU) etc.

Suffice it to note that the authors underscore the fact that Cameroon's independence - and subsequent reunification - was awarded because of the assurance that French colonial interest would be protected by Ahmadou Ahidjo, and, later, by the "self-confessed Mitterand's best pupil," His Excellency President Paul Biya.

Biya has acquitted himself in every material particular. He illustrates how the African caboceer plays the stooge to the very hilt: To refrain from what ever displeases the puppeteers, in the metropole.

To do whatever Chirac or France demanded, no matter how unlawful: such as substituting the two stars on the national flag with one star and changing the name of the Federation at re-unification from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroun, which had been the official designation of the French East Cameroun. (In all known history of struggle, chameleons do not have the last laugh).

In predicating their discourse on these positions, these academics demonstrate their understanding of historical and political development and the ruthless nature of indigenous Francophone colonial imperialism which, pretending national integration, actually destroys every bit of humanity in the Anglophone Southern Cameroonian.

Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon is, structured into eight parts.

Chapter One deals with the postcolonial nation state, the construction of an Anglophone identity, the reconfiguration of State power and the research methodology.

Chapter Two addresses the emergence of Southern Cameroons nationalism that led to the plebiscite and Fouban.

Chapters Three and Four address the brutal dismantling of the Federated State of West Cameroon and the demands for secession in the most turbulent epoch of the country's chequered history, 1990 – 2002.

Chapter Six, which we shall pay greater attention to, examines the strategies of the Biya government to deconstruct the Anglophone identity through “the trivialisation and demonisation of the Anglophone problem as well as his creation of a phantom South West Elites Association to perpetuate Anglophone oppression.

In the last two chapters, Biya's demarcatory policy and his hatred of Anglophone values is underscored as a programmed and phased attempt to erase authentic Southern Cameroonian values.

Throughout the 230-page study, the reader takes cognisance of the fact that, in the present epoch of imperialism and re-colonisation, the *blitzkrieg* against people of Southern Cameroonian origin and their eventual Rwandisation, is a permanent coda of French Gaullist policy in Africa.

What Jean-Paul Sartre, in his prefatory note to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1962) wrote about those Africans who, as “white-washed lies”, were, specifically, hand-picked to be branded with Graeco-Roman precepts of individualism and free enterprise in Europe and America, is particularly poignant.

The “New” Deal practises a different brand of national unity, one that has its roots in corruption, nepotism, inept leadership and inefficiency amongst others. Ultimately, Cameroon re-unification lies suspended in a political limbo, in the half-light, somnabulic world of fixated animation without the possibility for the recognition and representation in Cameroon of an Anglophone identity.

The determination of the Francophile Biya to remain relevant to the nation's historical journey, despite all odds on the Federal road, is a clear indication of his moral amnesia. His appeal to quisling associations like the South West Chiefs Conference (SWECC), and the North West Cultural Development Association (NOCUDA), is an attempt in raising a house with a porous foundation, rotten beams and a sagging roof. Even a fresh coat of paint from the immense financial fortress of "First Lady Chantal Biya" will not change the fact that such a foundation of national unity is structurally unsound.

Sooner or later, it would likely collapse. This is an unarguable thesis which one of the authors of this significant study, the Cameroonian scholar, Dr Francis B. Nyamnjoh, in spite of his brilliant academic record, often, fails to take to heart.

In accepting the colonialist and dependencist Francophone paradigm, which is the much traversed terrain of Dr. Nicodemus Fru Awasom and Lucien Mofor Atanga, (resource persons in this study), inevitably, the researchers' idea of South West Elites Association (SWELA) "nationalism" as a historical phenomenon is pseudo-cultural and not political and economic.

It has become apparent, therefore, that the conclusions arrived at in Chapter Six of this research are wholly flawed. For, it has become hyaline clear that the academic verve that generates, sustains and directs this study of the politics of the recognition and representation in Cameroon towards Anglophone *weltanschauung*, is one which, increasingly, finds escape in effusive sentimentality, in idealism and amorphous FENDERS – hued romanticism.

Relying solely on obscurantist criteria and sectarian exotica for meaning and vision in his perceptions of the oppressor sanctioned North West/ South West dichotomy, Dr Nyamnjoh, although he possesses the rare dedication of the academic matador, loses the robust handle of the overall materialist methodology which has impacted in a positive direction to the salutary decoding of the problematic in "negotiating an Anglophone identity".

As a sociological scholar of the purest water, the researcher is aware of the temporality of the Oben Ashus, the Caven Nnoko Mbeles, the Chris Eno Obens and the Sam Moka Liffafa Endeleys and their transitory nature in the context of social development in the inevitable triumph of positive nationalism, yet he fails to link this class to members of their vacillating, compromising, rationalising, and hesitating group in the North West Anglophone region such as the Andrew Azong Waras, the Ephraim Angwafors, the Simon Achidi Achus, the Ntumfor Nico Halles, the Tasi Ntangs and the Omer Weyi Yembes etc.

It is the ideology of this class that shapes their political and social direction, meaning for us that their political failure is a collective one, that is, that of their class!

Nyamnjoh's ahistorical apprehension of the Anglophone social dynamics and process of revolutionary transformation does not take into consideration the maxim that a total uprooting of colonial imperialism and its replacement by a progressive leadership in the Northwest and Southwest Anglophone Provinces, would be a boon to the envisaged commonwealth.

It has become more obvious, after four decades of living in the Ahidjo / Biya gehenna house of re – unification in its apotheosis, that, whatever may be the differences between North West and South West, tolerance is the emotional glue which they need to keep them together as people of Southern Cameroons origin.

Before the holocaust of a Camerounian Rwanda!

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