

Impact of Independence of the Republic of Cameroun on the Future Independence and Reunification of British Southern Cameroons

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Abstract

This paper examines how the independence of the Cameroun Republic or French speaking Cameroon on January 1 1960 impacted on the process of the independence through reunification of the English speaking part of Cameroon or British Southern Cameroons. Cameroon was annexed by Germany in July 1884 but when this European country was defeated by the Allied Powers in the First World War of 1914-1916, the territory was temporarily jointly administered by Britain and France and then partitioned unequally between them. While France went away with four-fifth of the territory, Britain got one-fifth and both partitioned territories were administered as Mandates of the League of Nations between 1922 and 1945 and as Trust Territories of the United Nations between 1946 and 1960/61. The independence of the French sphere in 1960 in a way contributed to speed up the independence of the British sphere a year later. The territory opted out of the federation of Nigeria to re-join the Cameroun Republic. Talks were held with the leadership of the Cameroun Republic leading to reunification and attempts for integration with Nigeria were futile. Through essentially press releases from the National Archives of Cameroon in Buea, these issues are captured and analysed.

Keywords: Independence, Reunification, Cameroun Republic, British Southern Cameroons

Introduction

The period between 1958 and 1961 was marked in Cameroon by the struggle for independence and reunification. In French Cameroon Ahmadou Ahidjo replaced Andre-Marie Mbida as the Premier in 1958 and embraced the idea of reunification. Its original advocate, the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) had been outlawed for its 'terrorist' activities, first in French Cameroon in 1955 and 1957 in British Southern Cameroons.

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With considerable opposition to the government cleared, Ahidjo engaged in discussions with France and the United Nations (UN) for the independence of French Cameroon. In British Southern Cameroons, John NguFoncha won the general elections of January 1959 on the platform of secession from Nigeria, a period of trusteeship and eventual reunification with French Cameroon. The opposition leader, Dr E.M.L. Endeley, championed integration with Nigeria. By the time independence was declared in French Cameroon on 1 January 1960, British Southern Cameroonians were preparing for a UN-organised plebiscite on 11 February 1961. Time was not on their side because Nigerian independence was to be on 1 October 1960.

The year 2010 was the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of the Cameroun Republic which was on 1 January 1960, and the celebration of the occasion took place. The year 2011 was the fiftieth anniversary of the reunification of the British Southern Cameroons with the Cameroun Republic on 1 October 1961 and the event was commemorated on Thursday 20 February 2014, three years after. This double commemoration, especially the impact of the former, on the latter is the subject of this paper.

The 50th anniversary of the independence of the Cameroun Republic in 1960 and the reunification of British Southern Cameroons with the latter in 1961 in 2010 and 2011 respectively (although celebrated in 2014), offered an opportunity for an examination of the impact of the independence of French-speaking Cameroon on 1 January 1960 on the future of independence and reunification of the British Southern Cameroons with the Cameroun Republic on 1 October 1961. When French Cameroun became the independent Cameroun Republic, British Southern Cameroons was in the process of negotiating its secession from the Nigerian federation which became independent on 1 October 1960. After the independence of Nigeria, British Southern Cameroons reverted to the status of a U.N. trust territory under Her Majesty's government until 1 October 1961 when the territory became independent through reunification with the Cameroun Republic. Before and during the one year of trusteeship, the governing party in the territory, the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) and the opposition Cameroon Peoples National Convention (CPNC) were preoccupied with persuading British Southern Cameroonians to choose between either reunification with the Cameroun Republic or integration with the Federation of Nigeria. Following the January 1959 election victory of John NguFoncha, leader of the KNDP over Dr. E.M.L. Endeley, leader of the opposition CPNC, events towards reunification unfolded in very quick succession. The new Premier of the British Southern Cameroons, John NguFoncha, exploited every available opportunity to press home the message of reunification of the two spheres of Cameroon that had been separated for over 44 years and had been ruled first as Mandates and secondly as UN Trust territories.

He had the added advantage that French Cameroon became independent ten months before Nigeria and during this time, he struggled to consolidate his grip on power and tilted the 'ship of state' in the direction of the Cameroun Republic and not Nigeria. All attempts by the opposition CPNC to change the course of the KNDP or steer British Southern Cameroons towards independence through integration with Nigeria failed. The two options were mutually exclusive; the one precluded the other. Thus, the independence of the Cameroun Republic contributed to the future independence of British Southern Cameroons through reunification with the former. This study, based essentially on press releases from the National Archives in Buea, examines how the independence of French Cameroon helped to shape both the process and the nature of independence of British Southern Cameroons and the reunification which was its result. This was made possible through the contacts established between John NguFoncha, the Premier of British Southern Cameroons and Ahmadou Ahidjo, Premier of French Cameroon before 1960.

Foncha -Ahidjo Contacts Before 1960

The February 1959 meeting at the U.N. between the Premier of British Southern and French Cameroons, John NguFoncha and AhmadouAhidjo respectively, contributed to the independence of British Southern Cameroons in 1961 through reunification with the independent Cameroun Republic. This meeting for the first time established the basis for subsequent meetings of the two leaders and their Ministers before and after the independence of French Cameroon. At this meeting, both leaders agreed to discuss the reunification question as Cameroonians and on Cameroonian soil. They emphasised the need for the discussions to be the responsibility of Cameroonians only.² Between July 1960 and September 1961, both men met in Tiko, Buea, Victoria, Douala, Foumban and Yaounde but their positions were opposed to each other. While Foncha bargained for a loose federation, Ahidjo used his position as leader of an independent country to more or less dictate the terms of the negotiations and as a result sovereignty of British Southern Cameroons was eventually transferred to him who bargained for a centralised federal system of government. In his opening speech at the Foumban constitutional talks Foncha reiterated the need for Cameroonians to take full responsibility for determining the future of their reunited country and said it would be foolish if they looked elsewhere for assistance because they could resolve the issues themselves.³ This was more than two years after his meeting with Ahidjo at the UN, but things had

²*Press Release* No 907, An Address by the Premier, Mr J.N. Foncha at a State Dinner in Buea Given in Honour of His Excellency President AmadouAhidjo, President of the Republic of Cameroun on 15 July 1960, 18 July 1960, 1-2.

³*Press Release* No. 1467, All Party Foumban Conference Opens: President Ahidjo Advocates Federal Constitution, 20 July 1961. It is worth noting that while Foncha remained true to himself and did not want any form of assistance

evolved enough for Ahidjo to renege on his earlier position. Contrary to the spirit of the meeting at the UN, Ahidjo made use of French advisers at the Fouban constitutional talks while Foncha continued to believe in Cameroonians discussing about reunification on Cameroonian soil without any foreign assistance. By soliciting and accepting the advice of French advisers, Ahidjo had broken a pledge made more than two years earlier at the UN. He had learnt over time that change, not stagnation, was the most important constant especially in politics and had acted accordingly.

A few months after the February 1959 meeting, Ahidjo invited Foncha to the 10 May 1959 celebrations organised in French Cameroon. The rousing reception which was given Premier Foncha by the teeming crowds in Yaounde and Douala made him more committed than ever to the reunification of British Southern Cameroons with French Cameroon. He became convinced that reunification was indeed a popular option in French Cameroon if only to judge by the crowd turn-out in Douala and Yaounde to receive him during the May celebration.⁴ It was therefore not a surprise that soon after the independence of French Cameroon on 1 January 1960 as the Cameroun Republic or *La Republique du Cameroun*, a rapid succession of official meetings took place between the leadership of the independent Cameroun Republic and the British Southern Cameroons.

Foncha at Cameroun and Nigeria Celebrations

The commitment of the Cameroun Republic to a successful reunification with British Southern Cameroons was evident when Premier John NguFoncha was invited to its Independence Day celebration on 1 January 1960. Foncha arrived Yaounde with a twelve person delegation. During the celebration, Foncha addressed the population and thus publicly and officially indicated the willingness of British Southern Cameroons to be reunited with the Cameroun Republic which also declared its desire and willingness to see reunification become a reality. In his speech during the celebrations in Yaounde Premier Foncha emphasised that:

from elsewhere because reunification was for Cameroonians, Ahidjo did not keep to the idea of reunification being an entirely a Cameroonian affair. This was seen at the Fouban constitutional talks when he enlisted the support of the French when the Southern Cameroonian delegation was discussing without support from the British.

⁴Ibid., 2.

Today, we of the Southern Cameroons see the beginning of the unity of our country in the independence of Eastern Kamerun, we have always believed that the shortest course to unity of the two sectors is through independence. I have all along been immensely impressed with the unanimity of the demand for independence and reunification in Eastern Kamerun, a unanimity which obliged even the United Nations to rule out the need for a plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the people. Encouraged by this patriotic spirit, I would like to assure you that we of the other sector of Kamerun are working hard to make possible the coming into being of this great country of Kamerun.⁵

It seems safe to conclude from this speech that Foncha's commitment to reunification and the determination of his government to achieve it was unequivocal. To him there was unanimity in French Cameroon for independence and reunification of the Cameroons as it was under German administration. This unanimity compelled Foncha to propose that there was no need for the UN to put the matter of reunification to a vote as it had already proposed but he did not succeed. The popularity of reunification in French Cameroon, it should be noted, was largely the handiwork of the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) since its formation in 1948. Although the UPC was for independence and reunification of the Cameroons from its inception in 1948, France was against it only to embrace it after outlawing the UPC in 1955. Nevertheless, Foncha's insistence on reunification of the two Cameroons was consistent with his position he took during his first encounter with Ahidjo at the UN in February 1959.

His speech at the Independence Day celebration in Yaounde pointed to reunification as the way to the future independence of the British Southern Cameroons. His party had won the general elections of 1959 in British Southern Cameroons on the platform of separation from the Nigerian Federation and ultimate reunification with French Cameroon. Despite this commitment to a future reunited and progressive Cameroon, there was no corresponding commitment by Ahidjo and some members of the British Southern Cameroons government. In the several meetings that followed the Independence Day celebration Ahidjo still vacillated with the idea of genuine reunification of the Cameroons. Meantime, some British Southern Cameroonians seemed more preoccupied with personal interests when reunification was finally consummated in 1961 than with its nature.

⁵Press Release No. 620, A Speech by Hon. J..N. Foncha, Premier of Southern Cameroons on the Occasion of the Independence Celebrations of the Cameroun Republic, 1.

Foncha was also invited to the independence celebration of the Federation of Nigeria on 1 October 1960. He used the occasion to tell Nigerians that his government was preparing to secede from Nigeria and to eventually reunite with the Cameroun Republic although some well-meaning Nigerians were not happy about it.⁶ He stated that British Southern Cameroons had reached a point of no return in its drive for reunification with the Cameroun Republic. He then concluded his message during this celebration by saying that:

Mr Prime Minister [Sir Tafawa Abubakar Balewa], Sir, it may sound a pity to some well-meaning Nigerians to learn that the attainment of independence is the separation of the British Cameroons from the Federation. While I appreciate their point of view and disappointment I have to point out that it is a matter for the people to decide and that they should be given the chance to do so... you wish us well whichever way we may choose to go.⁷

By this time Foncha had already held several high level talks with authorities of the Cameroun Republic during which the bases of reunification were discussed. The independence of French Cameroon before that of Nigeria and the meetings between British Southern Cameroonians and those from the Cameroun Republic certainly made the British Southern Cameroons leadership to turn to the Cameroun Republic for the future of their territory. Besides, since the Foncha government knew the date of Nigerian independence, it embarked on reunification talks and used the interim trusteeship from 1960 to 1961 to work out details of reunification. The talks were also used as a ploy for the plebiscite campaign of 11 February 1961. During the campaigns, British Southern Cameroonians were assured that the Cameroun Republic was eager to reunite with their territory after several decades of separation. There was haste in the discussions that were carried out with the Cameroun Republic because time was not on the side of British Southern Cameroonians to determine their fate. The British authorities made matters worse by informing the British Southern Cameroons government that they would pull out their security forces once reunification was agreed upon between the two Cameroon territories.

⁶*Press Release* No. 1016, Premier Independence Message to Nigerian Prime Minister, 8 October 1960.

⁷ *Ibid.*

The popularity of Foncha in the Cameroun Republic also contributed to independence and reunification. His rousing reception and his decoration by the Sultan and Bamum people on 20 July 1961⁸ gave reunification a further boost. The Sultan of Fouban was no mean character in the history of the Cameroun Republic under President Ahmadou Ahidjo. The decoration of Foncha by the Sultan was a significant gesture with the intention of encouraging reunification between the Cameroons territories. Besides, the Bamum in French speaking Cameroon and the Nso in English speaking Cameroon have a common history hence a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood underlay the welcome in Fouban. The decoration of Foncha was symbolic of the Sultan's invitation to the British Southern Cameroons delegation to Fouban to contribute to making the constitutional talks leading to reunification a reality. Several stages were followed in the process of reunification and there were also hurdles on the way.

Stages and Challenges to Independence-Reunification

During discussions on the nature of the reunified state, Foncha and some members of his delegation stressed the importance of a loose federation. He also cautioned against the absorption of British Southern Cameroons into the French Community.⁹ In informal meetings in Yaounde with members of government of the Cameroun Republic in January 1960, the Minister of Commerce and Industries for the British Southern Cameroons, S.T. Muna and his counterparts of the Cameroun Republic noted that British Cameroons (Northern and Southern Cameroons) was brought up in the British tradition of politics and government and French Cameroon on French traditions. Consequently, they agreed that it would be wrong to impose French traditions on British Southern Cameroons and vice versa. The solution, they agreed was to preserve the different colonial legacies.¹⁰ Ahidjo seemed to have recognised this fact but after reunification, his policies were heavily weighted in favour of French culture and seemed to be designed to assimilate British Southern Cameroonians culturally and politically.

⁸*Press Release* No. 1465, Big Reception for Southern Cameroons Premier at Fouban, 20 July 1961; *Press Release* No. 1469, Premier Foncha Decorated by Sultan of Fouban for Meritorious Service to the People of the Cameroons.

⁹*Press Release* No. 927, Minister of Social Services Opens Second Annual Convention of the National Union of Kamerun Students, (NIGERIA), 5 August 1960; *Press Release* No. 965, Address by the Premier of Southern Cameroons Mr. J.N. Foncha at the Opening Session of the National Union of Pan-Kamerun Students on Thursday 25 August 1960, 4; Southern Cameroons Plebiscite 1961: The Two Alternatives, 3; *Press Release* No 618, MrMuna Explores Unification Issue with Ministers of Cameroun Republic, 4 January 1960.

¹⁰*Press Release* No 618, MrMuna Explores Unification Issue with Ministers of Cameroun Republic, 4 January 1960.

During most of the discussions with Foncha between July 1960 and September 1961 he said nothing that was binding on himself or the Cameroun Republic.¹¹ This was shrewd leadership at a critical point in the history of Cameroon

Between July 15 and 17, Ahidjo and Foncha had held talks about the form of union if the impending plebiscite elections were in favour of the governing KNDP party and reunification. On arrival in Tiko on 15 July 1960, Ahmadou Ahidjo said that it was the hope of the people of the Cameroun Republic to see reunification become reality without animosity from the British or any other government. Ahidjo emphasised that the goal of reunification with British Cameroons was not annexation. Amidst cheers from the over 2,000 people at the Tiko airport, Ahidjo said that “Unification is not for me alone, or for Mr Foncha or for Dr Endeley; it is a national affair.”¹² Many were those who took him for his words but subsequent meetings showed that Ahidjo was being more rhetorical than firmly committed to reunification for the good of all Cameroonians.

The official communiqué that was issued at the end of the three- day visit of President Ahmadou Ahidjo to British Southern Cameroons reaffirmed the people’s desire for reunification. They also agreed to reunify on a federal basis which was adapted to conditions peculiar to all sections of Cameroon. Both delegations also decided to set up a Joint Committee to study the various constitutional problems that might result from reunification. Above all, they resolved that a conference to represent all sections of Cameroon should be held on a later date to examine the proposals of the Joint Committee.¹³ If this first official meeting achieved anything, it was in fact the putting in place of a Joint Committee that would look into the issues highlighted in the official communiqué namely, a strong desire for reunification, reunification based on the peculiarities of all the sections of Cameroon and the calling of a future conference to examine the proposals of the Joint Committee. These were issues if they were eventually taken into serious consideration would certainly have handled in a fair manner some of the challenges of reunification but this was not to be because of Ahidjo’s politics of concentrating power in one person.

¹¹ Malcolm Milne, *No Telephone to Heaven: From Apex to Nadir-Colonial Service in Nigeria, Aden, the Cameroons and the Gold Coast, 1938-61* (Lancaster: Meon Hill Press, 1999), 410.

¹² *Press Release No 906, President of Cameroun Republic Arrives in the Southern Cameroons, 16 July 1960.*

¹³ *Press Release No. 909, Official Communiqué: Four Resolutions Taken at Joint Meeting between the Governments of the Republic of Cameroun and the Southern Cameroons, 18 July 1960.*

Meanwhile, during a visit to Victoria as part of the three-day official visit, Ahmadou Ahidjo told the over 5,000 people gathered at the Motor Park that reunification was a natural cry and a debt which was bequeathed to the people by their grandparents.

He denied allegations that he was going into the French community and repeated that his government's desire was reunification on a federal basis not annexation of British Southern Cameroons.¹⁴ Once again, Ahidjo had failed to tell the people the form of the federation after reunification although earlier in the year Foncha had talked of a "loose" federation. Later at Foumban in July 1961 he spoke of a centralised federation. Ahidjo was exploiting such vague words as "loose," "federation," "centralised federation" while biding his time. But so I think was Foncha. Meantime British Southern Cameroonians and perhaps French Cameroonians too became used to these vague terms which eventually became the pious platitudes of reunification politics. Ahidjo also failed to keep a promise to the people after reunification when Cameroon was absorbed into the French community and British Southern Cameroons lost its membership of the Commonwealth. It took until 1995 for Cameroon to be admitted into the gentleman's club.

The independence of French Cameroon in 1960 widened the rift between the government and opposition party in British Southern Cameroons. While the government wanted the future independence of the territory through reunification, the opposition proposed integration with Nigeria when it later became independent on 1 October 1960. The government of British Southern Cameroons recognised the difficulty of talking the opposition out of integration and making it accept reunification before the 11 February 1961 plebiscite. At the same time, the government was aware of the dilemma created in the Cameroun Republic by the UPC 'terrorist' activities. Premier Foncha alluded to this difficulty while addressing the National Union of Pan-Kamerun Students on 25 August 1960. Among other things he said:

In the British Cameroons the opposition to Unification is seen and understood and therefore can be overcome [sic]. In the Republic of Cameroun the Opposition have taken to terrorism and making it impossible to know what they want. Terrorists [sic] activities and their atrocious deeds are the greatest setback to unification and a propaganda weapon in the hands of the integrationists.¹⁵

¹⁴*Press Release* No. 911, President Ahidjo Flies Home after a Successful Visit, 19 July 1960.

¹⁵*Press Release* No. 965, Address by the Premier of the Southern Cameroons Mr. J.N. Foncha at the Opening Session of the National Union of Pan-Kamerun Students' on Thursday 25 August 1960, 6 September 1960,4.

The problem with the opposition was compounded by the Frambo affair. Hon. Frambo, a KNDP member of parliament from Mamfe, was said to have been “induced” by the leadership of the CPNC to cross the carpet because of the unpopularity of reunification in his constituency.¹⁶

This episode led to a serious problem between the KNDP and CPNC. The CPNC had been a merger of the KNC and KPP in May in 1960 to ease the integration of British Southern Cameroons with Nigeria and not the Cameroun Republic.¹⁷ Following the interim findings of the Burke Commission on 18 September 1960, it was revealed that Frambo told a lie that the CPNC forced him at gunpoint to sign a letter of his resignation from the KNDP. The report also alleged that £2,000 had changed hands from Mr H.L. Leman, an expatriate businessman resident in the British Southern Cameroons, to Frambo and that Frambo’s alleged letter of resignation was drafted by N.N. Mbile, deputy leader of the CPNC.¹⁸

In addition, the leader of the opposition CPNC, Dr. E.M.L. Endeley, in a response to the address of Sir James Robertson Governor-General of Nigeria and the Cameroons on 19 September 1960, among other things said that he wanted British Southern Cameroons to remain within Nigeria and the British Commonwealth of Nations. According to him, the eventual transfer of power on 1 October 1960, following Nigerian independence, to officials within British Southern Cameroons would smack of foul-play and injustice which did not exist in the British colonial administration.¹⁹ Although no clear reason was given, Endeley did not believe in the Foncha government’s sincerity in discussions leading up to the independence of British Southern Cameroons through reunification or integration. It was also not true that throughout British colonial rule in British Southern Cameroons, there was no injustice as Endeley intimated. The remarks of Endeley came at a time when the Foncha government was already engaged in talks with officials of the Cameroun Republic to find common ground for reunification. Furthermore, the independence of French Cameroon and the talks with British Southern Cameroons caused the opposition in British Southern Cameroons to challenge the KNDP government with the aim of succeeding it.

¹⁶Press Release No. 908, Burke Commission of Inquiry, 18 July 1960.

¹⁷Daily Times, 21 May 1960, 2.

¹⁸Milne, *No Telephone to Heaven*, 411.

¹⁹Press Release No. 984, Response by Dr E.M.L. Endeley, Leader of the Opposition to the Address given in the House of Assembly by His Excellency the High Commissioner for the Southern Cameroons Sir James Robertson on Monday 19th September 1960.

This explains why the CPNC desperately wanted Hon. Frambo and other British Southern Cameroons members of parliament to cross the carpet and tilt the balance of power in its favour. In one of the attempts to torpedo reunification, Hon. John Mendi Boja, KNDP Member of Assembly for Wum, crossed the carpet to the KNC on 11 March 1960.

The reason he gave for doing so was that he thought that elections that led to his election to the Assembly was for continued trusteeship of British Southern Cameroons under the UK administration after Nigeria became independent on 1 October 1960. Boja argued that the question of reunification with the former French Cameroons was not included in the campaigns and in obedience to the wishes of his electorate he was bound to resign from the KNDP and join the KNC.²⁰ The resignation of Boja changed the party affiliation in the Assembly where the KNDP and the KNC/KPP alliance had 13 seats each. This carpet crossing did not however lead to a new election because the KNDP had the support of the Native Authorities (NAs) and special interest representatives. Calls from the opposition for fresh elections were therefore not heeded to by the KNDP government.²¹

The opposition in British Southern Cameroons continued its scathing attacks on Foncha and his government. In one such instance, Hon. Rev. J.C. Kangsen, member of the KNC from Wum Central, argued that Premier Foncha had lost grace with the people because of his attempt to win continued trusteeship for the British Southern Cameroons which was not acceptable to the UN General Assembly. Kangsen further argued that Foncha's popularity had declined because of the unpopularity of his option of reunification with the Cameroun Republic among the people of British Southern Cameroons.²² Similar arguments were voiced by other members of the opposition in the British Southern Cameroons House of Assembly. Many of these criticisms were intended to shape public opinion and tilt the argument against the independence of British Southern Cameroons through reunification with the Cameroun Republic and not necessarily because Foncha's policies were not popular among the population.

²⁰ *Press Release No. 711, KNDP Member from Wum "Crosses the Carpet," 11 March 1960; Milne, No Telephone to Heaven, 410.*

²¹ *Milne, No Telephone to Heaven, 410.*

²² *Press Release No. 733, House of Assembly Debates: Motion to Establish a Cameroons Militia Passed, 24 March 1960; Press Release No. 734, House of Assembly Debates: Motion on Southern Cameroons Militia (Concluded), 25 March 1960.*

Many British Southern Cameroonians would certainly have preferred independence in 1960 when many other colonial territories were gaining theirs than to an extended period of trusteeship which Foncha proposed. Nevertheless, others supported Foncha's arguments for extended trusteeship after the independence of Nigeria.

This would give the government time to meaningfully negotiate the terms of reunification with the Ahidjo government. Milne, the Deputy Commissioner to the British Southern Cameroons at the time, claimed that Hon. A.N. Jua spoke of a period of separate existence of "at least five years" but Foncha and Muna said nothing about the duration of the Trusteeship. All members of the KNDP however agreed that the period of separate existence must be dependent on three issues namely: the internal situation in the Cameroun Republic, the speed with which military force could be built up and the rate of economic development in the territory.²³

As the British Southern Cameroons government pressed for an extension of trusteeship to better negotiate the terms of union with the Cameroun Republic, it faced no problem in joining Nigeria. Steps had been taken to facilitate the integration of the territory with Nigeria if they voted for integration in the plebiscite of 11 February 1961. Kangsen was right and also wrong when he said that reunification was unpopular. While it was unpopular in places like his Wum Central constituency, it gained currency in other areas, especially many of the border areas with people of the same ethnic group like the Mungo, Mbo, Bamileke and Bakossi areas.

The chiefs were also in one way or the other engaged in the debate for a united Cameroon after the 11 February 1961 plebiscite. While some questioned the way the British Southern Cameroons government went about it, others who opposed it did not seem to bother. The Fon of Mankon, S.A.N. Angwafor, called on the government to make public its proposals for the constitution of a united Cameroon so that the people would be able to decide their future by contributing their own ideas.²⁴ During one of the sessions in the House of Chiefs, members from the Victoria Division were conspicuously absent. This was the keen observation of Chief Okumo from Mamfe.

²³ Milne, *No Telephone to Heaven*, 416.

²⁴ *Press Release No. 967*, Southern Cameroons House of Chiefs, 8 September 1960, 2.

He stated categorically that there were two irreconcilable points of view regarding the political future of the British Southern Cameroons among the chiefs namely, those who believed in a better future for their communities within the Federation of Nigeria and those who saw it through reunification with the Cameroun Republic.²⁵

The chiefs from Victoria Division who wanted integration with Nigeria were probably disappointed and frustrated by the several meetings that were taking place between Foncha's and Ahidjo's governments. These meetings reflected the influence of the independence of French Cameroon on the search for independence and reunification of British Southern Cameroons. History proved them right because after reunification and following the so called 'peaceful revolution' of 1972, the West Cameroon House of Chiefs was dissolved, and today chiefs are still crying foul for a House of Chiefs to enable them regain lost glory. They want a separate house with defined functions. This notwithstanding, different parties and other forces also variously contributed to reunification.

Parties and Other Players

In spite of the initial conflict of interests between the British Southern Cameroons government and the opposition, when it became clear that reunification was on course, different political persuasions made contributions to the birth of a re-united Cameroon. This was a most compelling fact if British Southern Cameroons was to make a meaningful contribution to the constitutional process leading to reunification. This came to pass in Foumban in July 1961 because Endeley's request for a few more days for the British Southern Cameroons delegation to study the draft constitution presented by the Cameroun Republic was accepted. During the closing session of the Foumban talks, he talked about the mending of fences with Foncha although he had reason to see him as an enemy just as the 'terrorists' in the Cameroun Republic were against President Ahidjo. He however made a passionate appeal to these 'terrorists' to find common ground and work with Ahidjo to build the nascent Cameroun state just as he had done with Foncha at Foumban for the sake of unity. In the following words Endeley addressed the people in the concluding meeting of Foumban:

²⁵Ibid., 3.

If I, as Opposition Leader [in British Southern Cameroons], and my colleagues can reconcile with Mr Foncha, I can't see why those who are the opposition and have gone wild in the bush can't reconcile with your Government [of the Cameroun Republic]. I have had great reason to feel that Mr Foncha is an enemy to me and I would not work together with him, as the terrorists have felt against President Ahidjo. We've come to set an example-that by working together we can make a better country. If, by this example which I have set with my colleagues we can't produce a peaceful Cameroon, then we will be a laughing stock to the country.²⁶

Endeley's remarks at Foumban were one of brotherly love not only for Premier Foncha but the other brothers and sisters of the Cameroun Republic, members of the UPC party, who were branded as terrorists. He did not see why instead of moving Cameroon forward after reunification he should chase after the wind, so to speak. The independence of French Cameroon and the vote for reunification of British Southern Cameroons with the Cameroun Republic certainly contributed to this gesture of collaboration from Endeley even if some members of his party never saw reason in doing so. After the Foumban conference, subsequent meetings to discuss the fine details of Foumban scarcely included members of the British Southern Cameroons opposition. This was one source of tension and jostling for alliance at the centre with Ahidjo's *Union Camerounaise* (UC) by different leaders of British Southern Cameroons and it contributed to undermining the unity of Cameroon and for maximum benefit to be reaped by the new state of West Cameroon in the Federal Republic of Cameroon, today known simply as Republic of Cameroon which is similar to the name of French speaking Cameroon after independence in 1960.

Another area of grave concern for British Southern Cameroons following discussions for reunification was the question of general security when the British withdrew their forces either on 1 October 1960 or 1 October 1961, the status and functions of the West Cameroon Police in the new dispensation, the nationalist insurgency in the Cameroun Republic, the return of Southern Cameroonians serving in Nigeria and other countries, the deployment of the Gendarmerie from the Cameroun Republic to British Southern Cameroons, general defence and responsibility for it. These security and security-related concerns were very hotly debated and suggestions made for the way forward.

²⁶Press Release No. 1468, Foumban Conference Ends in Complete Agreement on Major Issues, 24 July 1961.

On general security after the withdrawal of British forces from British Southern Cameroons on 1 October 1960, several opinions were voiced and debated. This would not have posed any problem if the British Southern Cameroons decided to join Nigeria in the 1961 plebiscite but if they voted for reunification, the country would address this issue with British Southern Cameroons.²⁷ This was the view of the Deputy Commissioner of British Southern Cameroons, M.N.H. Milne, but the KNC held a different view. During a conference in Mamfe in 1960, the party recommended that for security purposes, Nigerian troops in the British Southern Cameroons should be retained even after the independence of Nigeria on 1 October 1960.²⁸ Other views were expressed in memoranda by the KNDP and the CPNC all of which called for the British to assist in ensuring that security was not at risk during the transition period.

Her Majesty's government was requested to remain in the British Southern Cameroons for a few more months to undertake a rapid training and equipping of a military force that would provide security for the territory.²⁹

This request had little meaning after the plebiscite results showed that a majority of British Southern Cameroonians were in favour of reunification with the Cameroun Republic and not integration with Nigeria. Discussions between authorities of British Southern Cameroons and the Cameroun Republic on general security of the territory culminated in the Tripartite Talks of August 1961. At the end of the talks, decisions concerning the maintenance of Public Security and law and order were taken to ensure military security following the withdrawal of British forces from the British Southern Cameroons on 1 October 1961.³⁰

There were also heated debates on the status and functions of the British Southern Cameroons Police if the territory voted for reunification. After all, British Southern Cameroonians were also concerned about the presence of the Gendarmerie from the Cameroun Republic and the potential conflict between their functions and those of the British Southern Cameroons Police. These were concerns that would not have arisen if the territory voted for integration with the Federation of Nigeria.

²⁷*Press Release No. 973*, Southern Cameroons House of Chiefs, 14 September 1960, 3.

²⁸*Daily Times*, 21 May 1960, 2.

²⁹*Press Release No. 1428*, Southern Cameroons Constitutional Conference: KNDP and CPNC Memoranda on Security matters, 1 July 1961.

³⁰*Press Release No. 1492*, Yaounde Tripartite Conference: Official Communiqué, 8 August 1961.

Members of the opposition party in the Assembly like Ajebe-Sone from Kumba East proposed that the British Southern Cameroons Police should work with the Gendarmerie to control the excesses of the latter because rumour had it that some of them were involved in ‘terrorist’ activities in the Cameroun Republic.³¹ To allay the concerns of the people Foncha and Jua, Minister of Social Services dispelled rumours that the British Southern Cameroons Police would become ordinary Native Authority orderlies or a gang of messengers. Hon. Jua quoted Article 18 of the Federal Constitution to buttress his argument. The article stated that if any law was passed in the Federation which was considered by members of any one state to be contrary to their own constitution, those members could vote against it. Hon. Jua argued that if this happened, the law would not be adopted.³²

Jua’s citing of article 18 of the Federal Constitution meant that if a law was subsequently passed to downgrade the British Southern Cameroons Police in a reunited Cameroon, the members of the federal assembly would vote against it and block the reform. These arguments notwithstanding, the status of the Police was still to be clearly defined because at reunification the Police and Gendarmerie were to function in the state of West Cameroon and this would create some problems. Foncha said that at reunification, the Police would perform the same functions as they did before reunification but things turned out differently because after reunification open clashes were reported between the Police and Gendarmes in places like Mamfe and other towns of West Cameroon.³³ The Police, though still very important, have come to play subordinate roles to the Gendarmes in the modern Cameroon state.

Another concern that arose following the independence of the Cameroun Republic and the search for independence and reunification of the British Southern Cameroons was the issue of repatriating willing British Southern Cameroonians from Nigeria and other countries. The first preoccupation was to get them back home to support the territory when it passed into another period of trusteeship after the independence of Nigeria. The second concern was to bring them home to serve in a reunited country. Both the CPNC and KNDP were unanimous on the need to call up all able-bodied ex-servicemen of all ranks for crack training. They also recommended an approach to the Nigerian government to repatriate all willing Cameroonians in the Nigerian army for service in the British Southern Cameroons.³⁴ The request

³¹ House of Assembly Debates Official Report 13-18 September 1961, 56.

³² *Ibid.*, 54-5.

³³ Walter Gam Nkwi, Henry Kam Kah and Martin Sango Ndeh, “The Gendarmerie, (In)security and Popular Reaction in West Cameroon, Federal Republic of Cameroon 1961 – 1964.” (Forthcoming)

³⁴ *Press Release No. 1428, Southern Cameroons Constitutional Conference: KNDP and CPNC Memoranda on Security Matters, 1 July 1961.*

for a return of Cameroonians serving in Nigeria was also taken up by Ahidjo and Foncha who sent a delegation to Lagos to secure their release to put them at the disposal of the British Southern Cameroons government for service in the Cameroon army. These soldiers were assured that in their new situation all the benefits they had earned in their careers would be duly respected.³⁵ These security concerns were fallouts of the decision of British Southern Cameroonians to re-join their compatriots of the Cameroun Republic. While these led to heated debates, the end result was always to find common ground and move the reunification process forward.

While efforts were being made to ensure security for British Southern Cameroonians in a reunited country, the ‘terrorist’ activities in the Cameroun Republic became a hotly debated issue. The Leader of Opposition in British Southern Cameroons, Dr. E.M.L. Endeley, alluded to it when addressing the closing session of the Fouban Constitutional talks of 17-21 July 1961.³⁶ Another member of the opposition in the British Southern Cameroons House of Assembly representing the Kumba East constituency, Hon Ajebe Sone, had discussed the rumour circulating that the Gendarmes in the Cameroun Republic were involved in ‘terrorist’ activities.³⁷

These concerns also preoccupied the government of the British Southern Cameroons because on several occasions the Premier of the territory, Foncha, addressed it. In January 1960, for example, while addressing the population that turned out in Santa to welcome him he called on refugees from the Cameroun Republic to return and assist the government in the fight against ‘terrorism’ instead of running away from ‘terrorists.’ He however reassured the crowd that he would discuss the matter with President Ahidjo during his visit to British Southern Cameroons later in the year.³⁸ In the same year in Kumba, Foncha argued that if general amnesty was granted to them by the government of the Cameroun Republic, these ‘terrorists’ would agree not to continue the struggle against the government. He recognised that the acts of terrorism in the Cameroun Republic were disquieting but that his government was committed to

³⁵ *Press Release No. 1453, Yaounde Talks Communiqué, 13 July 1961.*

³⁶ *Press Release No. 1468, All Party Fouban Conference Ends in Complete Agreement on Major Issues, 24 July 1961.*

³⁷ *House of Assembly Debates Official Report, 13-18 September 1961, 56.*

³⁸ *Press Release No. 644, Prime Minister Ahidjo to Visit Southern Cameroons in February, 27 January 1960.*

reunification.³⁹ The activities of the 'terrorists' did not however dampen the Foncha led government's commitment to reunification.

In the economic domain, while the Nigerian Customs department began to treat goods to and from British Southern Cameroons as foreign goods from 1 October 1960,⁴⁰ efforts were made for a comprehensive economic arrangement for the territory as part of the Cameroun Republic. In August 1961, after the tripartite talks between the British, officials from the Cameroun Republic and British Southern Cameroons, an economic mission was despatched from Yaounde to the British Southern Cameroons.

Among the problems this mission was mandated to study were customs, currency, prices, exchange control, internal and external trade, the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) as well as general development and financial matters of British Southern Cameroons. The mission held meetings with the Premier, Ministers, the Chairman and General Manager of the CDC, the banks of British Southern Cameroons, Southern Cameroons Chamber of Commerce and the Southern Cameroons Development Agency (SCDA) and other government officials.⁴¹ At the end of this fact finding economic mission, proposals were made on the harmonisation of the economy of British Southern Cameroons with the Cameroun Republic. The custom barrier that had existed at the Mungo between British Southern Cameroons and the Cameroun Republic was abolished at reunification while Nigeria for its part erected customs barriers with British Southern Cameroons as a foreign country.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the impact of the independence of French Cameroon in 1960 on the independence and reunification of British Southern Cameroons with the Cameroun Republic in 1961. It tried to show that even before the official declaration of the independence of French Cameroon as the Cameroun Republic, the Premier of British Southern Cameroons, John NguFoncha, had met and discussed with Ahidjo at the United Nations in February 1959 about the future of the Cameroons. Subsequently, he was also invited by Ahidjo to the Independence Day celebration on 1 January 1960. Foncha led a twelve person delegation to the celebration and made a speech which was in favour of reunification.

³⁹*Press Release No. 689, Refugees May Have Total but not Unconditional Amnesty, 2 February 1960.*

⁴⁰*Press Release No. 1008, Customs Duties Post After Separation, 6 October 1960; Press Release No. 1010, Explanatory Note on New Customs Duties and Exemptions, 6 October 1960.*

⁴¹*Press Release No. 1518, Economic Mission from the Republic of Cameroun, 23 August 1961.*

The Independence Day invitation was the beginning of a series of meetings between the British Southern Cameroons leadership and that of the Cameroun Republic. These meetings intensified after the independence of the Federation of Nigeria on 1 October 1960 when Foncha told Nigerians that British Southern Cameroons was pulling out of the federation.

Throughout the period from 1960 to October 1961, there were discussions on a wide range of issues including the nature of the state, security, air travel, posts and telecommunications, training of manpower, the return of Cameroonians serving in the Nigerian army to serve Cameroon; the contribution of the opposition to an independent and re-united Cameroon, customs, currency and other economic matters. Time was not on the side of the British Southern Cameroonians and there seemed to be some duplicity on the part of the Cameroun Republic delegates.

Meanwhile some well-placed British Southern Cameroonians were more concerned with the benefits they would derive from union than with establishing a solid foundation for a just united Cameroon free from the exploitation and assimilation of one linguistic group by another.

The union finally became reality on 1 October 1961 following the promulgation of a federal constitution which preserved the bilingual and bi-cultural nature of Cameroon. The main problem with the constitution was that unlike other federal constitutions in the world it created a very highly centralised state. President Ahmadou Ahidjo exploited Article 47 as well as the internal wrangling among British Southern Cameroonians to erase all traces of specificities and peculiarities of West and East Cameroon. This article gave the president power to initiate the revision of the constitution in consultation with the Prime Ministers and Deputies of the Federal Assembly whom he could manipulate. Besides, articles 8 to 15 gave the president wide ranging powers which he used to undermine the functions of other services.

As Cameroonians celebrated the independence of the Cameroun Republic and the union of British Southern Cameroons with the Cameroun Republic, there is now need to pause for a moment and take a critical look at the much-trumpeted national unity which for many Cameroonians has come to mean union without unity, diversity or a collective and shared vision. The history of independence and reunification strongly suggests that Cameroonians should look beyond their narrow horizons and their gullibility. For the past fifty five years Cameroonians seem to have been pulled together by beer, music and football but these alone will not provide for Cameroon a lasting legacy of a bilingual heritage which is still to be fully exploited for the full advantages of genuine bilingualism.

At present, only a few self-seeking individuals have access to the resources of the state which they misappropriate and with impunity for personal ends. Unless and until their arrogance and impunity are reined in, Cameroon will continue to be held hostage to their fortunes and their successors even during the next fifty years.

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