

The Making of the Political Architecture of Modern Cameroon

Emmanuel Konde, Ph.D.

Albany State University

United States

Abstract

This paper is an interpretive analysis of the political events of the late-1950s in British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroun that shaped the contours of political life in post-independence and post-reunification Cameroon from 1961 to 1972. These events include the anlu of 1958 in the Bamenda Grassfields; the electoral victory of John Ngu Foncha that toppled the premiership of Emmanuel Mbela Lifaffe Endeley in 1959; the French orchestrated replacement of Prime Minister André-Marie Mbida with Ahmadou Ahidjo in 1958, and the assassination of Ruben Um Nyobe that same year. These momentous events apparently adversely impacted and altered the trajectory of Cameroon politics, and provided both Ahidjo and Foncha the leverage to forge a new state apparatus according to their whims. Whereas in Francophone Cameroon the assassination of Um Nyobe created a vacuum of credible opposition and offered Ahidjo the latitude to consolidate his power, in Anglophone Cameroon the lack of cooperation and dissension within the ranks of her politicians were ably exploited by Foncha to single-handedly negotiate with Ahidjo, without the necessary checks and balances from the opposition CPNC party, in crafting the political architecture¹ of modern Cameroon.. Although the paper posits Ahidjo as the major architect of the modern Cameroon state, other political actors who either enabled or sought to obstruct his political designs were Foncha, Augustine Ngom Jua, and Solomon Tandeng Muna. The methodology adopted for this study combines diachronic and synchronic analysis in its narration.

Introduction

Modern decolonized Cameroon² was largely shaped by two momentous events of 1958: one in French Cameroun and the other in British Southern Cameroons. The making of the contemporary Republic of Cameroon can hardly be fully understood without a deep appreciation of how the political forces spawned by the events of 1958 influenced the trajectory of her evolution. Originating in the colonial era, reverberations of these events are still echoing in the postcolonial epoch of that country's political history, contributing to the most important political discourses, and raising difficult questions about the past. This paper examines and analyzes the political impact of these developments in the French and British administered United Nations Trust Territories of Cameroon during the colonial period, through the federal and united republics in the post-colonial era. The most significant political figure that dominated this period of Cameroon's history was Ahmadou Ahidjo, who loomed larger than life from 1961 after reunification of the two Cameroons to 1982 when he abruptly relinquished power to his hand-picked successor Paul Biya. A brief introduction to the rise of Ahidjo to power would be *apropos*.

In February 1958, Ahmadou Ahidjo, a northerner, replaced André-Marie Mbida, a southerner, as Prime Minister of French Cameroun. This event signaled a major shift of political power from the south of French Cameroun to the north. A few months later in July of that same year, Augustine Ngom Jua, a grassfielder of the interior hinterlands, organized the *anlu* in Kom against the visit of coastal Prime Minister E.M.L. Endeley.³

¹ See Andrew MacIntyre, *The Power of Institutions: Political Architecture and Governance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). Political architecture refers to the complex of rules that determine how leadership of a state is constituted and how government exercises state authority. In Cameroon Ahidjo was instrumental in the design and crafting phases of Cameroon's political architecture.

² Decolonization is not the same as independence: the former is granted by the colonizer; independence is won by the colonized. Hence, I have argued elsewhere that "Cameroon is a decolonized and not an independent country" because "it was decolonized by the French and British under the auspices of the United Nations." See Emmanuel Konde, *African nationalism in Cold war Politics, 1952-1954: Cameroons Um Nyobe Presents the UPC Program for Authentic Independence at the United Nations* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2012), pp. 106-107. See also Henry L. Wilson, *African Decolonization* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), Chapter 9.

³ See Emmanuel Konde, "The Use and Abuse of Women for the Political Empowerment of Men in African Nationalist Politics: The Case of the 1958 *Anlu* in the Cameroon Grassfields." Working Papers in African Studies, No. 147. African Studies center, Boston University, 1990.

Kom was a stronghold of Endeley's ruling the Kamerun National Congress (K.N.C.) party in the Grassfields region and its loss to the opposition Kamerun National Democratic Party (K.N.D.P.) insured John NguFoncha's victory over Endeley in the 1959 elections. This, too, meant a shift of the commanding heights of political power from the coastal elite to the political elite of the Grassfields in British Southern Cameroons. Then, in September 1958, Ruben Um Nyobe, nationalist leader of the fledgling *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (U.P.C.), was assassinated in the forests of Bassaland by the military forces of the French colonial state. This event marked the premature ending of the nationalist struggle in French Cameroun and heralded a new chapter in the political history of Cameroon in which Ahmadou Ahidjo would emerge as the undisputed protagonist.

Whereas in French Cameroun Ahmadou Ahidjo had emerged victorious against Mbida in 1958 with the support of France and diverse political parties in the assembly, in British Southern Cameroons John N. Foncha's rise to the premiership in 1959 resulted from a political machination of diabolical proportions orchestrated by Augustine N. Jua that ruptured the goodwill that had prevailed in the region during ensuing years. The *anlu* of 1958, a supposedly women's uprising in Kom against British colonial policy on agriculture, was in fact a political coup d'état of sorts that assured the K.N.D.P. a short-term victory at the polls but sowed long-term seeds of discord that later blossomed into the much vaunted "Anglophone Problem." The so-called Anglophone Problem that was born during the nationalist phase of British Southern Cameroons' agitation for autonomy in the late-1950s. It crystallized in 1958 after the *anlu*, ossified in the aftermath of the 1959 elections that resulted in Foncha's victory over Endeley, and since that time created a yet-to-be bridged political gulf separating the politics of the Grassfields from the politics of the Coast.

At that time the havoc wrought on political developments by the disjuncture resulting from the *anlu*-initiated Foncha victory was not readily apparent. But these events created a political climate that ruptured the cooperation that had prevailed among Anglophone nationalists from the 1940s to the mid-1950s. The repercussions of this rupture would bedevil the politics of Anglophone Cameroonians in the last decade of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first century. Whether for good or ill, the new realignment occasioned by the events of 1958 and 1959 meant that in French Cameroun Ahmadou Ahidjo's *Union Camerounais* (U.C.) eventually would rise to be the party calling the shots there, while in British Southern Cameroons John NguFoncha's Kamerun National Democratic Party (K.N.D.P.) would likewise rise to a preponderant position. Consequently, the reunification of Cameroon, after more than 40 years of French and British rule over a divided territory, would be directed by two men—Ahidjo and Foncha—and their respective political parties. This paper is an interpretive analysis of some of the major events that contributed to the making of modern decolonized Cameroon, with Ahmadou Ahidjo looming high in the horizon as chief architect of that political experiment in nation-building, and John Ngo Foncha his enabler.

An Inexorable Movement of History

Although the events of 1958 happened independently of each other in the British and French Cameroons, they nonetheless reveal an interlocking pattern that suggests they were precursors to reunification. But the interconnectedness of these events is not so evident if each of them is examined singly as an isolated moment in Cameroon's political history. When examined together as components of a larger political development, however, the seemingly isolated events take on a life of their own that displays some discernible outlines of an inexorable movement of history. The first involved the rise of a strongman from a hitherto backward region of French Cameroun. He was thrust on the political stage by the French colonial authorities to pacify a recalcitrant nationalist party and to usher in a new realignment of power. The second, though different in character and gravity, inaugurated similar power realignment in British Southern Cameroons. The convergence of these two strands, led by Ahidjo and Foncha, would result in the reunification of Cameroon advocated by the U.P.C.⁴ from its inception in 1948.

The French colonial political structures in Cameroun were inherited by Ahmadou Ahidjo, who meticulously put his own distinctive stamp on them. Ahidjo's Cameroon was administered by a state apparatus that he created, and modeled upon a system characterized by Crawford Young⁵ as "the unitary Bonarpatist doctrines of France."

⁴ Ahidjo and Foncha had adopted the position articulated by the UPC, which maintained that reunification was the only approach to independence for the Cameroons. See United Nations, Report of the Trusteeship Council, "Statement made before the Fourth Committee at the 309th meeting on 17th December 1952 by Mr. Ruben Um Nyobe, representative of the Union des Populations du Cameroun."

⁵ Crawford Young, "Zaire and Cameroon," in Peter Duignan and Robert H. Jackson, eds., *Politics and Government in African States 1960-1985* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), p. 151.

Since the president was himself ill-educated and therefore ill-prepared for undertaking this rather awesome task on his own initiative, it is likely that the French assisted him in shaping the contours of the political system over which he would preside. Ahidjo's new State was hegemonic but, as long as significant segments of the country acknowledged his supremacy and rendered deference to central authority, they were allowed to pursue their own agendas. Thus, influential traditional rulers were unchallenged in their local domains, the powerful local Roman Catholic Church left undisturbed, and the industrious class of ambitious Bamileke merchants allowed to garner huge profits from their trading activities.⁶

Ahidjo had the opportunity of transforming his multi-ethnic polity of tribes people of more than two hundred ethnic groups into a nation-state, imbuing in his countrymen with a strong sense of belonging to a nation that transcended ethnic and tribal proclivities. But Ahidjo's primary concern was not to convert Cameroonian tribes people to nationalists. That was Ruben Um Nyobe's task--the UPC (*Union des Populations du Cameroun*) leader who Ahidjo and his French masters had eliminated in September 1958. Besides, Ahidjo was a political leader and not a visionary or prophet. And the French colonial masters definitely did not want a leader who would make Cameroonians out of tribesmen. Hence they settled for Ahidjo, who either sought, or was instructed, to increase his own personal power. Accordingly, Ahidjo constructed a state apparatus that consisted of the government, a single party, and a police state structure, including an elaborate institutional network of professional and political apparatchiks--a politico-administrative class loyal to him. This group of individuals was charged with the responsibility of managing the affairs of the state under Ahidjo's personal, direct supervision.⁷

The Ahidjo regime was highly centralized in Yaounde, the nation's capital city. From that center of power, Ahidjo made all appointments of ministers, governors, prefects, directors, etc. All high-ranking positions in the government, party, parliament, and the bureaucracy were rewards Ahidjo personally bestowed upon mostly qualified Cameroonians whom he deemed loyal and supportive of his regime. The formula for expediting these rewards was "ethnic/regional representation" in the political institutions of the country. Professor Kofele-Kale refers this formula as "ethnic arithmetic" and explains that "in reality it was a sophisticated patronage system through which ethnic groups were transformed into pressure groups with the responsibility of articulating, aggregating and resolving particularistic interests and demands."⁸

For a man of no significant educational background,⁹ Ahmadou Ahidjo was a political genius of sorts. It is not surprising that Ahidjo's political skills so dazzled the leading Cameroonian intellectual of the time, Professor Bernard Fonlon, who left this rather flattering testimonial of the president:

There is one thing about him, which I have personally witnessed for the last twenty-one years: whereas others in his position live in mortal fear of men of mind and liquidate them, President Ahidjo seeks their collaboration. He told a top-ranking West Cameroon politician at Kumba in June 1962: 'If you have intellectuals among you, seek their counsel and service, else they may use their minds to work against you.' He told another, equally top-ranking West Cameroonian in 1964 when the latter came to him with a list of civil servants for reasons to believe that a civil servant has abused your confidence: 'Put him in another post; firing him is not the best solution. About ninety-five percent of the public servants in the East here are against me. Are you suggesting that I should sack the ninety-five percent? With what will I govern thereafter?' I was the only witness in both cases. They heard. They did not heed.¹⁰

Professor Kofele-Kale attributes Ahidjo's political success largely to the president's "shrewd manipulation, excellent timing, and a knack for co-opting potential opponents into his government, as well as the will and ability to use force if necessary."¹¹

As a politician, Ahidjo was legendary. Because of a lack of an African example, I am compelled to draw from European statesmen.

⁶Op. cit., Young (1986), p. 151.

⁷For the most informative work on the politico-administrative class of Cameroon under Ahidjo and Biya, see Pierre-Flambeau Ngayap, *Cameroun Qui gouverne? De Ahidjo a Biya, l'heritage et l'enjeu* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1983).

⁸NdivaKofele-Kale, "Ethnicity, Regionalism and Political Power: A Post-Mortem of Ahidjo's Cameroon." Paper presented to Conference on Cameroon, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C., April 1984, pp. 8-13, cited by C. Young, "Zaire and Cameroon" (1986), p. 153.

⁹Ahidjo is said to have received the equivalence of a secondary education.

¹⁰Bernard Fonlon, "Res Una Publica," *ABBIA: Cameroon Cultural Review*, 38, 39, 40 (May 1982), p. 26.

¹¹NdivaKofele-Kale, Op. cit. in Young (1986), p. 153.

In Ahmadou Ahidjo was combined the iron will of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, and the craftiness of French statesman and diplomatist Charles-Maurice Talleyrand. Ahidjo was one of the greatest statesmen of his time--perhaps the greatest the world over. Had Ahidjo been born a European, historians of the world would have acknowledged this. In fact, Ahidjo's meteoric rise to power is no less dazzling.

Ahidjo's debut in public life began as a radio operator who served the Vichy and then Free France in that same capacity during the Second World War. Following his discharge from that wartime duty, Ahidjo returned to his native north hoping to someday head the post and telecommunications of his region or the country as a whole. Having received the equivalent of formal primary school education, Ahidjo was nonetheless a sophisticated person by the prevailing standards of the Muslim north whence he came. Frank Stark has observed that Ahidjo was a "progressive Moslem", and that he "was only one of a small group of Northerners at the time with 'modernizing' ideas."¹² Philippe Gaillard poignantly described Ahidjo as a man who "knew nothing about economics, history, or political science. But he was intelligent, methodic, hard working, and curious."¹³

Initially averse to politics, Ahmadou Ahidjo's rise to political power was orchestrated by the French colonial regime in Cameroon. The French had begun their search for local leaders Cameroon in the early 1950s, when the importation of Dr. Louis-Paul Aujoulat from Algeria and Jules Ninine from the Antilles failed to produce the desired results. This failure in utilizing external conduits led the French colonial regime in Cameroon to implement a policy of recruiting local politicians. NdehNtumazah, a former U.P.C. leader who spent nearly 30 years in exile, has noted that some of these Cameroonian recruits "were transformed into mercenaries to serve to strengthen French colonialism. Ahmadou Ahidjo was one such, albeit a reluctant one initially."¹⁴ The man who was charged with the responsibility of recruiting Ahidjo was Guy Georgy, the former French Ambassador and Chief Administrator in North Cameroon from 1951 to 1955. Guy Georgy's account of his endeavor in persuading Ahidjo to enter politics was published in *Jeune Afrique* in 1989 and reads as follows:

I held him in very high esteem. I knew him from the start. It has been said in an article that he only had a first school leaving certificate. In fact, he had more than that, because later on he went to the High School of the PTT at Toulouse. That became instead a handicap. He was dreaming of becoming the head of PTT in his region, or even of the whole country, but he did not want to go into politics at all. I actually pushed him into politics and he bore a grudge against me for it for a long time. I arranged for him to be elected a member of the Cameroonian Territorial Assembly. One virtually had to make votes for him, by putting packets of ballot papers into the box. But it was for a good cause.¹⁵

While it is not clear for whose good cause Georgy stuffed the ballot box to get Ahidjo elected, the machinations responsible for the latter's entrance into politics suggest that many, if not all, the elections that were held in Cameroon under French rule were rigged by the colonial state.

It was through this vote-rigging mechanism of stuffing ballot boxes that at the tender age of 22 in 1946, Ahidjo was *elected* to the Territorial Assembly of French Cameroun from his home district of Benue¹⁶ and was re-elected to all the subsequent assemblies. He rose to the presidency of the Territorial Assembly in 1957. For his education in politics, Ahidjo, like André-Marie Mbida and other Cameroonians who were favored by the French, was schooled in Dr. Louis-Paul Aujoulat's *Bloc Democratique Camerounaise* (BDC), which he founded in 1951. In this little, quiet man, whom the French thought malleable, they found a Cameroonian whom they groomed and then entrusted the responsibility of leading the country to independence.¹⁷ In spite of all his shortcomings, Ahidjo's greatest gift was political savvy of a rare sort that he developed to art form over a long period of involvement in practical politics.¹⁸

¹²Frank M. Stark, "Federalism in Cameroon: The Shadow and the Reality," in NdivaKofele-Kale, ed., *An African Experiment in Nation Building: The Bilingual Cameroon Republic Since Reunification* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, Inc., 1981), p. 104

¹³Philippe Gaillard, "Ahmadou Ahidjo: l'Etat incarné," *Jeune Afrique*, 11 Novembre 1989, p. 6.

¹⁴NdehNtumazah, "Crisis and the New Era in Cameroon." Paper presented at the International Institute for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa Conference "Africa Re-Awakening." Hertfordshire, United Kingdom, July 5-7, 1991, p. 5.

¹⁵ Cited by Ntumazah in "Crisis and the New Era in Cameroon," p. 5.

¹⁶Smith Hempstone, *Africa: Angry Young Giant* (New York; Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), p. 205.

¹⁷Gaillard (1989), p. 6.

¹⁸For an extensive discussion of Ahidjo, see Emmanuel Konde, "Cameroonian Women in National Politics Since the Second World War, 1945-1985: An Historical Study of Women and Politics in a Male-Dominated Society." Ph.D. Dissertation. Boston University, 1991, pp. 206-207, 245-264.

Following the result of the February 1961 Plebiscite in British Southern Cameroons, in which 233,571 voters favored reunification with the Republic of Cameroun and 97,741 opted for joining Nigeria, the evolution toward the reunification of former German Kamerun was set in motion. Pursuant to the democratically expressed opinion of the majority at the Plebiscite, three successive conferences were held in June, July and August of 1961. Accompanied by popular fanfare, jubilation, and great expectations, these meetings paved the way for the inexorable movement toward reunification. The first of these conferences was the Bamenda Conference, which met in June 1961. It was attended by the representatives of British Southern Cameroons' political parties (K.N.D.P., C.P.N.C., and O.K.), members of the House of Chiefs, Native Authorities, and British colonial representatives J.H. Beeley as Chairman of the Conference, B.G. Smith as Legal Adviser, and J. Dixon as Secretary. The deliberations at the Bamenda Conference were designed to acquaint the Government of British Southern Cameroons with responsible opinion prior to their final consultation with the Government of the independent Republic of Cameroun. Some of the issues broached at Bamenda in preparation for Foumban included the presidential tenure of office, system of higher education, the judicial system, and official languages.

Ostensibly well briefed at the Bamenda Conference, a 25-man delegation representing the power structure of British Southern Cameroons, led by Prime Minister John N. Foncha, proceeded to Foumban in July 1961. It is not clear what pre-conference arrangements were made between the Government of British Southern Cameroons and the Government of the Republic of Cameroun before the Foumban Conference met. It is not clear what happened at Foumban. But, no sooner was the larger Southern Cameroons delegation confronted by the smaller ten-member delegation of technocrats of the Republic of Cameroon by Ahmadou Ahidjo, than the Southern Cameroonians become stiff, completely flustered, and overwhelmed by the overly-preparedness of their counterparts from Yaounde.

To discerning minds, this inauspicious beginning presaged the end of British Southern Cameroons. Some scholars had initially maintained that the draft constitution that the Republic of Cameroun presented the Southern Cameroons delegation at Foumban was composed in French and no member of the Buea delegation had seen a copy beforehand. If that were the case, the Southern Cameroons delegation should have asked for more time to prepare for deliberating the draft constitution or simply withdrawn. At any rate, it did not. It is now known that copies of the proposed draft federal constitution had been deposited with Prime Minister John N. Foncha, who apparently failed to make available the document to the members of his delegation. We are yet to learn why Mr. Foncha did not distribute copies of the draft constitution to members of the Southern Cameroons delegation prior to the Foumban Conference.

Yet another meeting of August 1961, the Yaounde Tripartite Conference, followed. Attended by members of the governments of British Southern Cameroons, the Republic of Cameroun, and Britain, the purpose of this meeting was to settle matters relating to national defense and security. Representing the Government of Southern Cameroons were K.N.D.P.'s J.N. Foncha [Prime Minister], S.T. Muna [Minister of Finance], and A.N. Jua [Minister of Social Affairs]. No members of the opposition C.P.N.C. party were included in the Southern Cameroons delegation to Yaounde. What is clear is that unification of the two Cameroons was not haphazardly undertaken. The progress from a British Southern Cameroons territory to reunification with the independent Republic of Cameroun was systematically carried out. Had the Southern Cameroons political leaders opted not to reunify at any point during the negotiations, unification would not have been foisted on them.

The reunification of Cameroon was not a marriage of convenience that can now be annulled by divorce by either party or by some external entity; it was the coming together of siblings after decades of forcible separation occasioned by European colonial exploitation. As siblings do not decide after-the-fact on who their biological parents should be, so contemporary Cameroonians cannot decide to dissolve the nation their ancestors created in 1961. They cannot do otherwise but accept their destiny, determined for them by forces from the past. For that which is joined together, like children, by virtue of biology cannot be torn asunder by political machinations, out of sheer disgruntle-ness.

Following the settlement of all relevant issues pertaining to the proposed union of the separated zones of former German Kamerun, the reunification agreement was finally sealed. On September 30, 1961 President Ahmadou Ahidjo flew to Buea and the representatives of the United Nations administering trustee, Britain, constitutionally transferred the *dawning* sovereignty of British Southern Cameroons to Ahmadou Ahidjo as Head of State. The next day, October 1, having attained its new identity as an integral part of the independent Republic of Cameroun, British Southern Cameroons was proclaimed "independent" not as political entity on its own but as an integral part of the Republic of the Republic of Cameroun. Thus the reunification of Cameroon was concluded, and the inhabitants of former British Southern Cameroons, no longer subjects of Her Majesty's, became free citizens—Cameroonians—under their elder brothers and sisters.

This ordering of events must be well understood: (1) sovereignty transfer from the British to the independent Republic of Cameroun (September 30); (2) independence as an integral part of the Republic of Cameroun (October 1). What this ordering suggests is that British Southern Cameroons became, in effect, an integral region of the Republic of Cameroun on October 1, 1961). The transfer of sovereignty from Britain to the President of the Republic of Cameroun, and not the Prime Minister of Southern Cameroons, should be quite instructive. It is important that we pause for a moment and reflect soberly about the symbolism, if not significance, of that solemn handing over ceremony. This seemingly unimportant ritual holds key to the political evolution of Cameroon, from the birth of the federation in 1961 to its ultimate demise in 1972. The symbolism of that event in the political history of Cameroon must not be lost to, or ignored by, any person who seeks to understand the movement from reunification to federation to demise of federation; and from demise of federation to unitary state and now the Republic of Cameroon. It speaks volumes about the trappings of power as well as the nature of the union that was forged.

Foncha and the Politics of Powerlessness

In the meantime, Ahidjo's grand scheme for crafting a single party was confronted by formidable opposition in French-speaking Cameroun, where he had begun his crusade for a *parti unifié* as early as September 1960. After the reunification of the two Cameroons in 1961, however, Ahidjo's scheme gained respectability in English-speaking Cameroon. Ahidjo's initial appeal to the leaders of the Federated State of West Cameroon was made in January 1962, and was repeated during visits there in May, June, and July of that year. Foncha had of course accepted Ahidjo's plan wholeheartedly as early as April 1962, and the two leaders concluded an agreement of non-interference that demarcated the respective spheres of the governing parties in the new federation. The U.C. would not interfere in the politics of West Cameroon, and the K.N.D.P. would likewise refrain from interfering in East Cameroon politics. Following this agreement specifying spheres of influence and non-intervention came the now famous or infamous Ahidjo-Foncha Communiqué of 1962, by which the two outstanding political leaders of the Federation announced the creation of a "national united group" in the Federal Assembly and a "coordination committee" between Foncha's K.N.D.P. and Ahidjo's U.C.¹⁹

To overcome the remaining vestiges of opposition to his grand design, Ahidjo persuaded John NguFoncha, at the time Prime Minister of the Federated State of West Cameroon and Vice President of the Federal Republic to do two things. First, the president convinced his vice president to join him in endorsing the national unified party scheme; and second, to leave his constituency and seat of government in Buea and take up a new residence in the nation's capital Yaounde in 1962. Following Foncha's acquiescence to Ahidjo's scheme, all the political parties in East Cameroon followed suit, only to change their position later when they realized that Ahidjo had actually pulled them towards the formation of a single party. But it was too late to recant at that juncture. Ahidjo responded by simply arresting and incarcerating the opposition leaders²⁰ in East Cameroun.

At this infancy stage of the revived Cameroon nation, the first indicators of dissension within the ranks of West Cameroon politicians began to flicker. This dissension may be attributed to the relegation of Dr. E.M.L. Endeley, leader of the opposition C.P.N.C. party, to a position of insignificance. Against the traditional practices of the then embryonic democratic system in West Cameroon, Foncha had taken up negotiations with Ahidjo without consulting an important part of the West Cameroon political equation—the opposition CPNC. At Foumban, Foncha had reduced Endeley to non-actor status, which led one C.P.N.C. delegate, P.N. Motomby-Woleta, to complain that consultations between the K.N.D.P. and the C.P.N.C. were sporadic at Foumban. At times the K.N.D.P. took the C.P.N.C. into confidence; at other times they chose not to. Essentially, the Foumban negotiations were between two governing parties: the K.N.D.P. and U.C. Two men, Foncha and Ahidjo, largely dominated the deliberations and spent many hours together in seclusion.

Perhaps because of the rebuff he suffered at Foumban, Endeley was determined to neutralize the growing dominance of Foncha and his K.N.D.P. in West Cameroon. Thus, when Foncha gave his approval to Ahidjo's Grand National unified party, Endeley did not just demure but went a step further to best Foncha by expressing his preference for the creation of a single party in the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Endeley wished for his C.P.N.C. and Foncha's K.N.D.P. to be dissolved and, with all their members, join Ahidjo's U.C.

¹⁹See Jean-Francois Bayart, "The Birth of the Ahidjo Regime," in Richard Joseph, ed., *Gaullist Africa: Cameroun Under Ahmadu Ahidjo* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1978), p. 63.

²⁰See Willard R. Johnson, *The Cameroon Federation: Political Integration in a Fragmentary Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 254, note #46.

From that point onward the West Cameroon struggle took a new and disastrous turn. No longer directed toward equalizing the powers of the federated states, if that were ever what the English-speaking Cameroonians had sought, the struggle now centered between the two major parties of West Cameroon: the K.N.D.P. and the C.P.N.C., with each party attempting to curry favor with Ahmadou Ahidjo. For the first time in the short political history of English-speaking Cameroon, party interest took precedence over the interest of the federated state of West Cameroon. This struggle, whose origins can be traced back to the 1958 *anlu* in Kom, and found further expression in the cleavage occasioned by the K.N.D.P. rebuff of the C.P.N.C. at Fouban in 1961, crystallized in the 1962 Foncha-Endeley competition to win favor with Ahidjo. To this struggle can be traced the genesis of the *North West-South West Divide*, the much vaunted "Anglophone Problem." The combined impact of these cleavages not only marred the uneasy coexistence between the two major parties of West Cameroon but also destroyed any prospects of meaningful reconciliation.

In the meantime, John NguFoncha had moved to Yaounde, the federal capital, more expansive and bustling center of power than the foggy, drab-looking West Cameroon capital of Buea in the foothills of Fako Mountain. It would appear that Ahidjo had employed the strategy of the *theatre state*, which provides for governing outlying provinces by making the center of power very attractive, in seducing Foncha. Thrust in unfamiliar surroundings and overwhelmed by Yaounde, Foncha was wholesomely placed at the mercy of President Ahidjo, and could not but nod "yes" to Ahidjo's every commands. The seduction of John NguFoncha to Yaounde heralded the beginning of the end of West Cameroon's political autonomy within the new federation. Ahidjo now moved to implement the last phase of his grad strategy. With the most prominent political leader of West Cameroon at his side in Yaounde, and having succeeded in destroying competitive politics in East Cameroon by 1962, Ahidjo immediately turned his attention to West Cameroon and undertook a skilful manipulation of that state's political machine. Graciously, Ahidjo gradually but systematically eroded that West Cameroon's political independence,²¹ including the quasi-democratic institutions established there by the British colonial state.

Prior to unification the office of Prime Minister was elective in the [British] Southern Cameroons. After unification, however, Southern Cameroons became the Federated State of West Cameroon and by Article 39 of the new Federal Constitution the Prime Ministers of the Federated States of West and East Cameroon were henceforth designated by the President of the Federation. Endeley had strongly opposed this new arrangement in the West Cameroon House of Assembly but, sensing that the prevailing political tide was in favor of destroying parliamentary politics in West Cameroon, this political consideration prevailed over his sense of principle and he, too, conceded.²² Politics in West Cameroon between the early- and mid- 1960s was characterized by a jockeying for power among the political parties, with each party trying to outmaneuver the others in their attempts to win favor with the President of the Federation--Ahmadou Ahidjo. To this end, Professor Kofele-Kale noted that ...the speed with which the principal Anglophone political leaders--men who had a long history of opposition to the very concept of a single party--climbed into the one-party bandwagon suggest that their intentions were not entirely motivated by pristine ideological considerations. Individual greed, ambition, and personal aggrandizement as well as the corporate interests of their class were equally significant motivating factors.²³

In addition, the K.N.D.P. administration's practice of appointing top officials on the basis of ethnic affiliation undermined governmental functions to the point that many West Cameroon civil servants stationed in Buea looked forward to the day when they would be transferred to Yaounde. This attitude contributed to the gradual erosion of the importance of the West Cameroon State.

Furthermore, under Foncha the K.N.D.P. government had effectively destroyed West Cameroon by implementing to a disastrous conclusion the principle of "winner takes all". Whereas Foncha had previously insisted that Endeley disband the C.P.N.C. and join it to the K.N.D.P., when Augustine NgomJua became Prime Minister in 1965 he attempted to remedy the rapidly deteriorating situation by forming a K.N.D.P.-C.P.N.C. coalition government.²⁴ But this effort came too late, since the deteriorating state of affairs in West Cameroon had reached a point beyond salvaging.

²¹A.J.P. Van Rensburg, *Contemporary Leaders of Africa*. First Edition (Cape Town, Pretoria: HollandaschAfricaanscheUitgerersMaatscgappij, 1975), p. 34.

²²See *Cameroon Life* (September 1990), p. 27.

²³NdivaKofele-Kale, "Class, Status, and Power in Postreunification Cameroon: The Rise of an Anglophone Bourgeoisie, 1961-1980," in Irving Leonard Markovitz, ed., *Studies in Power and Class in Africa* (New York: Oxford University, 1987), pp. 137.

²⁴See Stark (1980), pp. 117-118.

Tribalism so pervaded the K.N.D.P. political machine that the practice further exacerbated Foncha's incompetent leadership. The debacle of imposing democratic political practices on un-aculturated Africans was made manifest in Cameroon in the early 1960s. Although Ahidjo and Foncha were elected, the important question is whether democracy is workable in a context in which the majority of voters are illiterate and some of the leading politicians themselves semi-literate. The futility of Western-style liberal democracy in semi-literate societies is that electors vote principally on the basis of tribe and not from an in-depth understanding of the issues. The colonial governments knew exactly what they were doing when they thrust upon Cameroon political practices that were alien to the people. The result was the rise to political prominence of men who were ill-prepared for the task of managing modern political institutions.

The difference between Ahidjo and Foncha was that, whereas Ahidjo learned and grew on the job, Foncha depreciated to the point where he became an instrument of Ahidjo's policy. If Foncha was the instrument of Ahidjo's policy by which the president set in motion his designs to dismantle the Federal Republic and replace it with the United Republic, Solomon TandengMuna was the instrument by which that scheme was fully realized. For it was while Foncha was Vice President of the Federal Republic that all independent political parties of West Cameroon--Foncha's K.N.D.P., Endeley's C.P.N.C., and Muna's C.U.C., along with Ahidjo's U.C. of East Cameroon, amalgamated to form the national single party, Cameroon National Union (C.N.U.), in 1966. And it was while Muna was Vice President of the Federal Republic and Prime Minister of West Cameroon that the United Republic was forged in 1972.

With Foncha occupying the positions of Vice President of the Federal Republic and Prime Minister of the Federated State of West Cameroon, Ahidjo insisted in 1965²⁵ that Foncha could no longer occupy both posts simultaneously because it was unconstitutional. Foncha was thus forced to relinquish one: he unwisely decided to give up the premiership of West Cameroon. Foncha's decision points to the trend in politics that prevailed in West Cameroon during this period. All the West Cameroon politicians saw their fortunes in the Federation hinged in Yaounde and thus they gradually abandoned their own state. The destruction of federalism in Cameroon was the work of West Cameroon politicians, who failed to defend their inherited political traditions.

Rivalry within the K.N.D.P.

Resulting from Foncha's decision to retain the vice presidency, a rivalry developed within the K.N.D.P. between Augustine NgomJua and Solomon TandengMuna for the vacated post of prime minister, and thus it fell upon the leader of the party to decide upon his successor. But Foncha proved indecisive at a crucial moment when leadership was called to play. He vacillated his support by switching his prior commitment from Muna to Jua. Foncha's indecision threw the party into a state of uproar, which resulted in the break-up of the K.N.D.P.--but not before an open vote of the party favored Jua by 27 against Muna's seven.²⁶ Following this ugly incident, Jua suspended Muna from the K.N.D.P. Having lost the premiership to Jua, and with no party affiliation, Muna and his close associates Emmanuel Tabi Egbe and W.N.O. Effiom founded the Cameroon United Congress (C.U.C.) in 1965.

Although clearly beaten by nearly a vote of 4-1, Muna refused to concede defeat and, persuaded by his supporters within the K.N.D.P., he argued that it was President Ahidjo who had the constitutional power to appoint the State's Prime Minister. Although this view was in conformity with the letter of the Federal Constitution, it is not clear whether Ahidjo would have invoked that provision had he not been invited to do so. Thus, Muna's suggestion was a welcome respite, a new development suggestive of a significant number of West Cameroon politicians' amenability to Ahidjo's plans for the country. Muna provided Ahidjo the authority to trample on West Cameroon's political autonomy, just as Endeley had done with the idea of a single party. As time and time again, meeting after meeting, and ballot after ballot Jua one victory after another, so did Muna reject the outcome of each. From all apparent indications, Muna was bent on undermining the quasi-democratic political practices of West Cameroon. Muna's recalcitrance was unbecoming of statesman. At that point a joint West Cameroon -Federal parliamentary delegation intervened to help resolve the impasse. At its May 9, 1963 meeting, Foncha adroitly abandoned Muna and endorsed Jua. Rejected by Foncha, Muna would later accuse Foncha as K.N.D.P.'s "number one devil" and Nzo Ekah-Nghaki as the "number two devil."

The chasm within the K.N.D.P. revealed some terrible cracks in the much-vaunted democracy of West Cameroon, which caused considerable heartaches that required the attention of the country's political doctor--President Ahidjo.

²⁵See Stark (1980), p. 118, where he notes that it was Muna, while coveting the post of Prime Minister of West Cameroon in 1965, who "emphasized the constitutional right of the President of his own authority to nominate the State Prime Minister."

²⁶Stark, p. 116.

The president immediately flew to Buea and, upon reviewing the opinions of the political leadership of that state, Ahidjo likewise acknowledged Jua as Prime Minister. Only after the leader of the Federal Republic has spoken did Solomon TandengMuna reluctantly concede defeat and Jua swiftly moved to restore party discipline by expelling Muna and his supporters: E.T. Egbe, W.N.O. Effiom, J.M. Bokwe, N.N. Ndoke, S. Mofor, L.T. Omenjoh, J.K.N. Tataw, B.T. Sakah, and M. Fusi.

S.T. Muna and his cabal founded their own party, the Cameroon United Congress (C.U.C.), in 1965. The events surrounding this protracted struggle for power within the K.N.D.P. from 1963 to 1965, combined with the troubled birth of the C.U.C., not only gave added momentum to Ahidjo's call for a single party but also signaled the beginning of the end of West Cameroon and the federation. Indeed, from all apparent indications West Cameroon's democracy was anarchic. The infighting within the K.N.D.P. clearly eroded the credibility of the ruling party in West Cameroon. It also revealed the weaknesses of West Cameroonian politicians and opened up avenues through which Ahidjo could ably insert a wedge of discord between the Anglophones and thus manipulate them by playing one group against the other. Stark has noted that the "history of party relations in West Cameroon reveals that Endeley, Foncha, Muna, and Jua...ultimately wished to join their parties to Ahidjo's. They had divided and conquered themselves."²⁷ The political parties of West Cameroon thus died a natural death, resulting from an internal political hemorrhage, and Ahidjo made sure that they were properly entombed.

The Fall of Jua and Rise of Muna

From the ashes of the West Cameroon political machine Ahidjo was about to bury arose a sphinx-like figure in the person of Augustine NgomJua, architect of the K.N.D.P. *anluof* 1958 in Kom. Jua represented the last hope for West Cameroon. Thus, upon assuming the office of Prime Minister in 1965, Jua undertook certain measures aimed at healing the wounds caused by the ruptures within the K.N.D.P. and the historical conflict between the K.N.D.P. and C.P.N.C. dating back to 1958 He immediately called for cooperation between the two political parties and in 1966 formed a coalition government in which C.P.N.C.'s Endeley and N.N. Mbile were appointed Leader of Government Business and Secretary of State for Public Works and Transportation, respectively. Consequently, in the aftermath of the K.N.D.P. debacle in West Cameroon talk of a unified party became the toast of political discussions among all the political parties. This new political comradeship was made possible by the K.N.D.P.-C.P.N.C. coalition government. Thus, long before Ahidjo came calling on the West Cameroonians to fuse their parties and join them to his U.C. party, the tidal wave of unifying the various political parties was underway in the Federated State of West Cameroon. This new political dispensation was in every respect opposed to the political competition among parties that the British had sought to establish in the Southern Cameroons.

In June of 1966, Ahidjo summoned a meeting of then existing political parties. The political parties were represented by their leaders: John N. Foncha (K.N.D.P.), Endeley (C.P.N.C.), Muna (C.U.C.), and Augustine N. Jua as Prime Minister of West Cameroon. Ahidjo's U.C. was represented by a delegation of eight, K.N.D.P. by two and one each for the C.P.N.C. and C.U.C. The representatives of the four parties hatched an agreement to create a single party and, upon dissolving their respective parties, the Cameroon National Union (C.N.U.) came into being on September 1, 1966.

Ahidjo dominated the new political arrangement in Cameroon and his English-speaking counterparts accepted him as such. Ahidjo's plan entailed the forging of a unitary state that would ultimately lead to the eventual abolition of the federation. Between Ahidjo and his design for a unitary state stood Augustine N. Jua, who is alleged to have wanted to retain as much political leverage for West Cameroonians as possible. Jua's political stance was therefore at variance with Ahidjo's, a situation that made cooperation between them very difficult. As a result, the ensuing political battle dictated that one of the two leaders would either relent or be vanquished by his adversary. In the shadow of the heating struggle between Ahidjo and Jua stood Solomon TandengMuna, leader of the Cameroon United Congress (C.U.C.). Muna, an old adversary of Jua, had lost the premiership to his younger colleague in 1965. In the political showdown that was unfolding in 1967 between Ahidjo and Jua, Muna gleefully waited in the wings to pick up the pieces. In fact, it was believed that Ahidjo found in Muna a more willing accomplice to his goal for a unitary state than any other West Cameroonian politician.

Finally, the way forward for Ahidjo and Muna was to dislodge the stumbling block, Jua. In the December 1967 elections to the West Cameroon House of Assembly, the C.N.U. party presented a single list of 37 candidates. The list contained the names of individuals dismissed from the K.N.D.P. Party in 1965 by Jua, following the Jua-Muna struggle for power.

²⁷Ibid., p. 119.

The election of candidates, who were known political enemies of Jua, and allies of Muna, not only spelled doom for the Prime Minister but also suggested that a well orchestrated political scheme of diabolical proportions was at work. Only one of Muna's 1965 supporters was not elected to the West Cameroon House of Assembly in 1967. That person was John Tataw, because he had returned to the K.N.D.P.

The Eclipse of Foncha

Given the fact that Muna commanded an overwhelming support in the West Cameroon House of Assembly, President Ahidjo had no other choice but to appoint Solomon TandengMuna as Prime Minister of West Cameroon. Members of the Assembly accordingly approved the President's choice. The Federated State of West Cameroon thus entered the age of *real politick*. And so in 1968, Ahidjo replaced Jua with Muna as prime minister of West Cameroon. When in 1970 Ahidjo dropped Foncha as his running mate, he also amended the constitution to allow Muna, his new running mate and strongest supporter in West Cameroon,²⁸ to occupy the offices of Prime Minister of West Cameroon and Vice President of the Federal Republic.²⁹ It is thus that, barely nine years after the reunification of the two Cameroons, the top political figure of English-speaking Cameroon, John NguFoncha, was quietly retired to Bamenda at the prime of his political career with the honorific titles of Grand Chancellor of the Nation and Vice President of the C.N.U. party--without any political function. It is not for nothing that Philippe Gaillard referred to Ahidjo as *l'etatincarné*.³⁰

Born on August 5, 1924 in Garoua, Ahidjo entered politics during a trying period in the colonial history of French Cameroun. Ahidjo was indeed a man of destiny. As a man of destiny, he was destined to exercise power, the art of which he meticulously cultivated to the point of refinement at a time when his country was at war with his colonial mentors, and needed the leadership of a strongman. As a political leader and man of power, Ahidjo discharged his functions with the utmost possible grandeur. He not only exuded and radiated power, but his very aura sent cold chills over those whom he consorted with--dominating diminutive men like Foncha, and such big ones like Muna, with equal ease and facility, until his last, fateful gamble of November 1982.

No other end could have befitted Ahidjo, this man of power. Even in his death bed at Dakar, Senegal, on November 30, 1989,³¹ it was noted that Ahidjo's corpse was dreaded by many of his former subordinates in Cameroon. Apprehension of the dead dictator's ghost prevailed over his detractors, prompting President Biya to refuse the return of his remains to Cameroon. And so the eulogy of Ahmadou Ahidjo, architect of the modern Cameroonian state, was not spoken in the country he created. But Cameroon may never see the likes of him again. What an end to a great man!

References

- Bayart, Jean-François. "The Birth of the Ahidjo Regime," in Richard Joseph, ed., *Gaullist Africa: Cameroun under Ahmadou Ahidjo*. Enugu, Nigeria:Fourth Dimension Publishers1978, , pp. 46-65.
- Cameroon Life* (September 1990).
- Cameroon Post* (December 4, 1989).
- Fonlon, Bernard. "Res Una Publica." *ABBIA: Cameroon Cultural Review*. 39,40 (May 1985), pp. 5-57.
- Gaillard, Phillipe. "Ahmadou Ahidjo: l'Etat incarne." *Jeune Afrique*. (11 December, 1989), pp. 5-15.
- Hempstone, Smith. *Africa: Angry Young Giant*. New York; Frederick A. Praeger, 1961.
- Johnson, Willard R. *The Cameroon Federation: Political Integration in a Fragmentary Society* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Kofele-Kale, Ndiva. "Ethnicity, Regionalism and Political Power: A Post-Mortem of Ahidjo's Cameroon." Paper presented to Conference on Cameroon, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C., April 1984, pp. 8-13.
- _____. "Class, Status, and Power in Postreunification Cameroon: The Rise of an Anglophone Bourgeoisie, 1961-1980," in Irving Leonard Markovitz, ed., *Studies in Power and Class in Africa*. New York: Oxford University, 1987, pp. 135-169.
- Konde, Emmanuel. (1990). "The Use of Women for the Political Empowerment of Men: The 1958 "Anlu" in Cameroon." Working Papers in African Studies No. 147. African Studies Center, Boston University.

²⁸See The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report, "Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad" (1990-91), p. 7.

²⁹Victor J. Ngoh has chronicled these events in chapter 8 of his book, *Cameroon 1884-1985: A Hundred Years of History* (Yaounde: Navi Group Publications, 1988).

³⁰See Gaillard (1989).

³¹See *Le Temps* (6 Décembre 1989), p. 3; *La Gazette* (7 Décembre 1989), pp. 3, 15; and *Cameroon Post* (Décembre 4, 1989), pp. 1, 4.

- Konde, Emmanuel. *African nationalism in Cold war Politics, 1952-1954: Cameroons Um Nyobe Presents the UPC Program for Authentic Independence at the United Nations*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2012.
- _____. "Cameroonian Women in National Politics Since the Second World War, 1945-1985: An Historical Study of Women and Politics in a Male-Dominated Society." Ph.D. Dissertation. Boston University, 1991.
- _____. "The Use and Abuse of Women for the Political Empowerment of Men in African Nationalist Politics: The Case of the 1958 *Anlu* in the Cameroon Grassfields." Working Papers in African Studies, No. 147. African Studies center, Boston University, 1990.
- La Gazette* (7 Décembre 1989).
- Le Temps* (6 Décembre 1989).
- MacIntyre, Andrew. *The Power of Institutions: Political Architecture and Governance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Ngayap, Pierre-Flambeau. *Cameroon Qui gouverne? De Ahidjo a Biya, l'heritage et l'enjeu*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 1983
- Ngeh, Victor J. *Cameroon 1884-1985: A Hundred Years of History*. Yaounde: Navi Group Publications, 1988.
- Ntumazah, Ndeh. "Crisis and the New Era in Cameroon." Paper presented at the International Institute for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa Conference "Africa Re-Awakening." Hertfordshire, United Kingdom, July 5-7, 1991.
- Stark,¹ Frank M. "Federalism in Cameroon: The Shadow and the Reality," in NdivaKofele-Kale, ed., *An African Experiment in Nation Building: The Bilingual Cameroon Republic Since Reunification*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, Inc., 1981.
- The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report, "Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad" (1990-91).
- United Nations. "Report of the Trusteeship Council, "Statement made before the Fourth Committee at the 309th meeting on 17th December 1952 by Mr. Ruben Um Nyobe, representative of the Union des Populations du Cameroun."
- Van Rensburg, A.J.P. *Contemporary Leaders of Africa*. First Edition. Cape Town, Pretoria: HollandaschAfricaanscheUitgerersMaatscgappij, 1975.
- Wilson, Henry L. *African Decolonization*. London: Edward Arnold, 1994.
- Young, Crawford. "Zaire and Cameroon," in Peter Duignan and Robert H. Jackson, eds., *Politics and Government in African States 1960-198*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986.