

THE FEDERAL SOLUTION VERSUS NATIONALIST CONSCIOUSNESS: A NEO-FUNDAMENTAL NATIONAL QUESTION IN CAMEROON

EKANGAKI TABE¹, EKPEBISONG GEORGE OTU² & CHE LOVELYNE³

¹Political Science, Dept. of Political Science, University of Buea, Cameroon, Lecturer of political economy in the Pan African Institute for Development, West Africa, Cameroon

²African Literature, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Buea, Cameroon. Lecturer in Communication and Peace, Pan African Institute for Development, Buea, Cameroon

³Lecturer in Development communication and information management, Pan African Institute for Development, Buea, Cameroon

ABSTRACT

The federal issue versus a growing nationalist consciousness is today, the flash-point in the body-polity of the Cameroon state. The agony of the Cameroon question, is compounded by the endless uncertainty, as to whether there would ever be an end to it or not. This paper therefore, attempts to define and examine the dicey ‘national question’ issue in Cameroon, through a methodical foray of the Cameroon policy environment, from 1960 to date. It equally carried field observation of the actions and inactions of relevant political actors. It argues that, the ‘national question’ is related more to the dynamics of creation and the evolutionary process of the state. As a result, the political process has been truncated and/or torpedoed by the prevailing mode of governance which is anchored more on bureaucratic totalitarianism. It opines that the unitary form of government which Cameroon is currently running constitutes a real threat to national unity in a bicultural context as obtains in the country. Hence, it recommends that government should as a matter of urgency, embrace and explore avenues of meaningful and purposeful dialogue with Anglophone stakeholders, in order to resolve the ‘national question’ which undoubtedly, revolves around Anglophone Self-determination. Consequently, it proffers Federalism as the appropriate policy response to adopt, in order to resolve the problem, so as to promote national unity in diversity, as well as guarantee and safeguard the rights of minorities.

KEYWORDS: Bureaucracy, Federalism, National Question, Nationalist Consciousness, Identity

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon as a nation is a fragile construction of Western interest, with a faulty sense of national unity. The problem of ensuring a reasonable degree of unity, under conditions of diverse ethnic groups is central in the structuring and running of government in Cameroon given that, ethnic plurality is a dominant feature of its society. As a common deformity in almost all African countries; the degree to which unity is achieved, determines whether the inclusive government structures and processes will persist as a political system that reflects the socio-political reality of that society.

Most Political Scientists argue that a political community exist, in a society whose members possess mutual sympathy and loyalty with respect to their participation in a common political unit, regardless of differences in ethnicity, custom, religion and socio-economic status. In other words, in a political community there is among the people a shared national identity. It follows logically that, in every society, there is a common political structure shared by members,

createingan affective bonding, among them. As Percy Cohen (cited in Hashim, 1982) has pointed out, the fact is that, if men are committed to the same values, they recognize a common identity, which helps to galvanize their political action. Under such conditions, they will accept common goals and certain prescriptions and prohibitions concerning the means for achieving the goals they set for themselves. In line with the foregoing, the one question, that looms the horizonis whether or notthe verdict of history, as a political resource, informs Cameroon's nation building experiment. Meanwhile, it is important to observe that, virtually all nation-states are at different moments involved in one contradiction, or the other that often produces conflict. These contradictions may be due partly, to the nature and circumstances of formation and emergence of the state, and partly due to the nature of intra and inter class relations, within the state itself. At times as well, it may be, due to a combination of both factors. But, whatever way it occurs, such contradictions represent basic concerns of people, to which they perpetually seek solutions.

Generally in most African countries and Cameroon in particular, such basic concerns stem from contradictions engendered by colonial experience. Colonial experience in Africa has produced a legacy of culturally variegated societies in most countries,—which yoked together various ethnic entities, most of which were capable of standing alone. As a result, colonial boundaries rarely coincided with distribution of the various linguistic, ethnic or religious communities. Hence, the residual effects issue of colonialism in Cameroon remaincentral to posing the national question. This argument has been buttressed by Nzogola-Ntalaja (1987:46) that, colonialism has complex impacts on the national question, in most post-colonial societies. One tenable argument holds that, by uniting different nationalities and peoples under a single political expression has created institutional frameworks, which are hostile to the collective aspiration of the people, which has gai ned experiences of exploitation and oppression – economic, political, administrative and cultural (Abdulrasheed 2007:7).

Thus, at independence, the Federal Republic of Cameroon, emerging from two colonial experiences were faced with the problem of accommodating their diverse cultural elements, within a stable national community because each ethic/cultural group continued to make conflicting demands on the larger state. Apparent inability, to reconcile the conflicting demands produce further contradictions, amounting to fundamental concerns requiring urgent solutions, which lends expression to the papers' central focus, on the “national question”.

The Cameroon Federal structure, existed from 1961 to 1971 and was abrogated in 1972, by the then president, Ahmadu Ahidjo, through an armbushed parliamentary enactment. The end of a Federal structure ushered in a United Republic, with its agenda for a unitary state, which automatically produced a class society with assymetrical power relationship. The Francophones, as the hegemonic power holders and the Anglophones, as those at the fringes of power. It is within this purview that, the contemporary trend in Cameroon towards political disorder, emanating from what has been dubbed the“Anglophone problem”, can be situated. On the spur of the moment,-government through its regulatory organ, the national communication council has barred the media and the civil society at large, from engaging in any discussion on federalism, seen by this group of Cameroonians, as a panacea to the myriad of problems they face, within the national space. The government on the other hand, has equated federalism with secession.

As rightly observed by Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997:207), the political agenda in Cameroon has become increasingly dominated, by what is known as the “Anglophone problem”, which poses a major challenge to the efforts of the post-colonial state, to forge national unity and integration, and has led to the reintroduction of forceful arguments and actions, in favor of “federalism or even “secession”. Government's haze, to articulate a genuing political agenda, to

accommodate the interest of the Anglophone subsystem, in the national question escalated and quickly deepened the crisis, with the resultant outcome of a growing nationalist consciousness, within the homefront and the diaspora, as an external force.

In the light of the foregoing, the purpose of this paper, is to examine the national question in Cameroon, against the backdrop of state creation and the contradictions, engendered by the process of state evolution. It is argued that, the critical issue or aspect of the national question, that is germane to the unity and continued existence of the Cameroonian state centers, around the protests, struggles and conflicts in the Anglophone regions. From the 1990s, the minority Anglophone group has persistently been expressed disaffection, over their perceived marginalization, exploitation and subjugation, within the Cameroonian State. Consequently, this paper contends that, the deeply flawed unitary system in Cameroon constitutes a grave threat to national integration, stability and development and that, unless government properly engages the underlying issues of resource control, power sharing, equal rights and accountability; the country will continue to face an internal crisis of increasing proportions.

Theoretical Perspective

A blend of theoretical perspectives has proffered explanations, surrounding the issues of national integration and nation-building. These issues have been addressed, mainly from the following perspectives: functionalism and the difficulty in welding a united nation, from the multiplicity of ethnic groups, struggles for identity and access to power and other valued resources (Alubo, 2004). This latter perspective, which informs this paper, examines the national question and nation-building in Cameroon, from a Marxist Political Economy approach. Put otherwise, a materialist interpretation of the national question, as it relates to nation building is attempted. Egwu (2002), provides empirical support (for the materialist interpretation) that communal identity remains a potent instrument of material advancement. He shows, how the new patterns of accumulation, especially the transformation of agrarian based state to a rentier state, following the oil boom of the 1970s. In Cameroon, like in some other African countries, there is a growing concern over accentuated the struggle for ethnic/cultural ascendancy, geo-political advantage, personal accumulation and class domination. As a result, he opines that, struggles for identity and self-determination, often take on a material expression, in terms of control over resources, such as access to land and power.

The notion of a ‘national question’, evolved from intellectual discourses in the former Soviet Union, where minority groups were regarded as “nationalities”, as distinct from Russians who were in the majority (Ekeh, 1996:59). Lenin (1975:5), also used the term to refer to the theme of freedom, and the right of nations to pursue self-determination, in a political manner. In his deployment of the term, Lenin noted that, some nations dominate others, even if there was still class domination in society, as a whole. His thesis signposted the possibility of waging both a class and national struggle together, at once (Fayemi, 2014). Lenin stated that:

“The right of nations to self-determination means only the right to independence in a political sense, the right to free political secession from the oppression nation. Concretely, this implies complete freedom to carry on agitation in favor of secession and freedom to settle the question of secession by means of a referendum of the nation that desires to secede” (Lenin, 1975:5).

Thus, Lenin identifies the national question as a matter of freedom and hence, a political question. According to Fayemi (2014), the ‘national question’ can more forthrightly be regarded as a composite of several questions, all relating to

national integration and citizens' rights. He articulates some of the sub-categories of the national question as follows:

- To what extent do citizens and groups feel a sense of identity with the state?
- Does the state protect the interest of all groups in the society?
- Is justice and fairness preserved in the manner in which the state relates to every section of the citizenry?
- To what extent is justice dispensed in the extraction and distribution of the proceeds of resources extracted in certain territories of the state?
- To what extent is the political leadership of the state just in its moderation of issues affecting various groups and constituencies, and does it resolve or manipulate the notions or perceptions of differences to deepen divisions in a plural polity?
- Fundamentally, to what extent are groups able to express their uniqueness as a group (culturally, religiously and economically) without being hindered by the structures of power and the state?

In view of the above, it is obvious that in the African context, the national question is conceived of as the perennial debate as to how to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have some rights and privileges, access to power and an equitable share of national resources (Ajayi 1992, cited in Tenuche 2011: 37). Concerning the issue of equity, Mustapha (1986: 87) notes, based on a Nigerian case study, that the objective basis of the national question, lies in the educational, economic and political inequalities in society.

With regards to the case of Cameroon, the situation reflects a good mix of the elements of structural inequality, as cited above, concerning the relationship of the state with the Anglophone section of the country. Mainstream Cameroonian politics, has proved incapable of transcending its narrow ethnic interests, when dealing with the national question. This explains, why radical mass organizations, trade unions, radical politicians and progressive intellectuals have recently, emerged in the two Anglophone regions of North-west and South-west, with a view to frontally, tackle the issue. This situation, as time fizzles out has mutated from the Federalist position earlier taken by agitators when the agitations just started to now a full blown stream of nationalist consciousness with a deep attachment and desire for restoring the statehood of the Southern Cameroon nation

The nature Of The National Questionin Cameroon

Cameroon achieved territorial and constitutional integration, in 1961, by the way of unification. This kind of integration was later modified in 1972 (re-unification) and at various times, through changes in name (from Federal to United Republic and simply Republic) and the creation of more provinces/ regions ostensibly, to provide more administrative units for effective communication, among various ethnic groups. By the same token, government increased the number of divisions and sub-divisions in the country. However, in spite of all these measures, it cannot be said that Cameroon now possesses the minimum of consensus as a united society which one readily finds in some countries. This reflects the failure of the political modernization exercise embarked upon at the inception of unification. Political modernization it should be noted, involves the setting-up of a nation-state, inculcating loyalty among its citizens and creating national institutions of politics, law, education and voluntary associations which should penetrate into the localities (Ake, 1982:9).

The issue of modernization therefore, deals with efforts directed towards the control of primordial sentiments and values such as tribal, ethnic and kinship particularism, which often stand in the way of nation-building. In this connection, an assessment of the performance of the two regimes, the country has had since unification, in terms of commitment to the task of nation-building leaves, any keen observer with a depressive picture. How pathetic have been, the efforts of these governments (in utter disregard of the wishes of Cameroonian and the requirements of the contemporary age), to struggle and are still struggling to consolidate the machinery of government, previously suited to the colonial style of some races elevating themselves over others, and one people subjecting another, to exploitation, harassment and intimidation.

Focusing on the activities of the present Biya's regime reveals the following: executive lawlessness, when it ought to reinforce the principle of the rule of law, through exemplary action; the fortification of tribe and kinship particularism especially, in its appointments thereby, promoting sectional interest to the detriment of national cohesion. The regime has continued to perform the role of rescuer of French neo-colonial interest in Cameroon, at the expense of the larger interest of the people of Cameroon. The balance sheet of this regime can be summarized as follows: failed promises, betrayed hopes and unrealized expectations and a widening assymetrical power relationship, between Anglophones and Francophones. In brief, it has been a period of unmitigated disillusionment, especially for Anglophones who have been relegated to the unenviable position of second class citizens.

In view of the above, it is obvious that the present climate of agitation is a manifestation of the people's dissatisfaction with the manner in which government has been managing the corporate affairs of the country. However, the failure of government to act as a catalyst in the drive for nation-building is merely a secondary factor that explains in part, the Cameroon trajectory and/or predicament. The primary factor is embedded in the history of the evolution of the Cameroon state.

History tells us that in 1961, the two geographic units that constitute Cameroon entered into a union, a sort of social contract, the basis being Federalism. However, the social contract was unlike that conceived by Rousseau. Cameroon's was the product of manipulation, greed and naivety brought about by the brain waves of two "philosopher kings": Ahidjo and Foncha, under the prodding of colonial interests sanctioned by the United Nations Organization itself, an instrument of western imperialist designs in Africa. As a result, it could perhaps be argued that Cameroon's tendency now towards instability and political disorder might be predicated on the fact that their social contract unlike Rousseau's was an imposition and not voluntary. Similarly, the present unitary arrangement in the country is a logical product of the manipulative process triggered in 1961. Commenting on the unification process two years later (1963), Prof. Victor T. Le Vine had this to say:

"The document which emerged from the series of Cameroun –Cameroons conferences in the spring and summer of 1961 was a curious mixture of presidential and parliamentary governmental forms, bearing the *superficial* imprint of a series of political compromises between the respective positions of Ahidjo and Foncha, but in fact *reflecting eastern wishes than western hopes*" (*italics mine*) (LeVine, 1963:81).

In 1972, Ahidjo swept away the Federal structure, through what he described as a "peaceful revolution", another name for a dubious referendum, where there was only one option and citizens were simple, expected to vote "yes". This event apparently, marked the beginning of the process of the gradual dispossession of the Anglophone population of their natural and legal rights, culminating to their loss of identity and subsequent alienation that engenders rootlessness and a

strong unbearable feeling of not belonging. With the disappearance of the federal structure, the full brunt of the centralization process hitherto unknown in the Anglophone part of the country was brought to bear heavily on the people. De Lancey and Schraeder (1986) observe that, the ending of the federation was a major step in breaking up, not only of an administrative interdependence, but also a political competitor of Yaounde, for the old Anglophone state had its focus on both administrative and political, on its Capital Buea was now divided into two provinces, each tied directly to Yaounde. The movement towards monopoly of power and politics of exclusion had begun.

Recently declassified documents reveal that, Ahidjo had no intention whatsoever, to share power by way of federalism. As early as 1964, cracks had emerged within the union. Barely three years after unification of the British Southern Cameroons and the French Cameroons, and the creation of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, Bernard Fonlon, Secretary General of the KNDP (the ruling party in the former Southern Cameroons) had cause, to address a confidential memorandum to President Ahidjo, informing him that, the KNDP was disillusioned with its marginalization, within the federation. This memo, made public after Fonlon's death shows that, the marginalization of the institutions and people of the former Southern Cameroons is not a recent development. Fonlon noted among other issues that:

“Since we came together, the KNDP has hardly done more than stand by and look on. For talking sincerely, can we name one single policy in any field –economics, education, internal affairs, external affairs- that has been worked out jointly by the two parties? Can we point a finger at one idea that took birth in the KNDP, and was welcomed and implemented by this government?” (*The Post*, No. 01187, Oct. 1, 2010).

Fonlon, then proceeded to spell out the claims of KNDP, by way of six demands, prominent among which were the following two, that emphasized the need for a permanent dialogue:

- That discussion, negotiation and agreement should become the rule in this coalition as from this day, in order to ensure for the KNDP, a dignified participation in this government and an effective contribution in the union, the elaboration and the implementation of all government policy, that the constitution should be revised to provide, *inter alia*, for a Council of Ministers in which, government projects from all ministries shall be fully, freely and frankly debated, before they are submitted to the Head of State.

Ahidjo, ignored these proposals and unilaterally, appointed a Federal Inspector of Administration (one J.C. Ngoh) answerable to him, to oversee the implementation of the liquidation of Southern Cameroons, with impunity (Taku, 2010:4). This, frustrated the West Cameroon government and transformed its Prime Minister, into a glorified puppet. According to Ngoh (2010:5), in spite of the pledge, that reunification was not going to be assimilation or annexation, some West Cameroonians, became apprehensive with each passing event.

It could be recalled that, in 1961, in what some analysts have described as a fallacy of expectation, Ahidjo attested to the basic principle of biculturalism, in fostering co-existence, as the mode of national integration, when he delusively opined that, “the different colonial experiences to which our two colonial territories have been subjected, had left an indelible mark on our political and administrative habits, in our methods of work and in our ways of life, that it would be futile and a sign of serious lack of understanding to this, and it is out of the question that “French Cameroon” would want to impose its system of thought, its ways of life and particularly its manner of conducting affairs that had been so differently brought up in these matters” (cited in CEF, 2017:1).

He continued by emphasizing that “there is no desire by the majority Francophone to annex or absorb or assimilate the Anglophone within a bilingual Federal Republic with co-equal powers”. Yet he made a turnaround and precipitated the 1972 referendum which set the stage for assimilation and the dismantling of Anglophone social, cultural, political and economic institutions, even the road signs, the Chieftaincy institution, public building sign post, the courts, and government business, etc. Thus, Anglophones stripped of all powers have been transformed into second class citizens in their own country. As rightly observed by CEF (2017:1), this has become the hallmark of “the Anglophone Problem”; stripping them out of the cultural heritage that is part of the Union Agreement of 1961”.

It is also worth mentioning that on February 13, 1963, Saoudou Daoudou, without any constitutional mandate, signed Ministerial Order No.65, bringing Gendarmes to the Southern Cameroons and extended the state of emergency, that existed in *La Republic du Cameroun*, to the Southern Cameroons (Taku, 2010:4). He is reported to have cited as his authority in so doing pre-1961 laws operating then, only in *La Republic du Cameroun*, namely, articles 38 of Ordinance Nos. 60-20 of February 22, 1960, regulating the organization, administration and service of the National Gendarmerie Service, as well as Inter-Ministerial Instruction Nos. 18, 32, and 274 of August 10, 1962, applying Decree No.60-280 to West Cameroon. One wonders when annexation deserves the name, if this wholesome application of hitherto, existing laws of one territory by administrative fiat, to the territory of another union partner, in a federal structure was not exactly what was intended, and has been actualized over time.

Given the above scenario, it can be construed that based on the process of its creation and evolution; one characterized by fraud, tyranny and above all, illegality the state of Cameroon can be seen as an artificial creation. It is not real and can best be described as fragile and unconstitutional to any dimension imaginable. As it is today, based on abundant historical evidence, the Cameroon nation is not yet born. And, by genuing introspection to it is inherently callous and deceptive to claim (as the establishment does today) its indivisibility, and to expect manifest patriotism from citizens, especially of the Anglophone extraction, when a nation does not seem to exist. At best, Cameroon remains a mere geographical expression, caught-up in the swamp of the “politics of motions of support and ethno-regional jingoism”, which according to Mbuagbo and Akoko (cited in Forje, 2009:6), “is fanned and sustained by the fact that, in public policy, priority is given to group membership first and the notion of citizenship is therefore, bound to suffer from a geo-ethnic delimitation and order”.

Furthermore, the artificial character of the state is also, reflected in the naming of Cameroon’s regions and to an extent public edifices, which convey no sociological or anthropological reference, to the immediate localities they are found, all in a bid to distort or erase history. It is for these reasons and more that, the concept of a Cameroonian state means different things, to the Anglophones and Franco phones. Little wonder therefore, that after 56 years of nationhood, the country is yet to perfect the art of tolerance, accommodation, mutual sincerity, mutual trust, reciprocal interpersonal respect and commitment to common goals. The point to note here is that, the above list, happens to contain some of the most decisive ingredients of state craft, expected in a composite and diverse polity, like Cameroon.

That Cameroon’s political system is now experiencing a legitimacy crisis, is no surprise. It is merely responding to structural contradictions, which have arisen from the system, being out of tune with the primary vision,wishes and aspirations of one of the two contracting partners (Southern Cameroon). Hence, the transformation of Cameroon’s present harrowing reality would require, more than just a perfunctory, attention from state managers, as they appear to be posturing

at the moment. In brief, the condition of this fledgling and seemingly rickety nation-state fundamentally, requires thoughtful political engineering. Regrettably, government appears to have imposed a limit on the extent it can go, in the direction of re-engineering by placing a ban on Federalism. As a consequence of this act therefore, the government unknowingly activated the latent nationalistic feelings of Southern Cameroonians, who feel asphyxiated by state manipulation, over genuine concerns of Anglophones being expressed, over the years in the union. This situation has made them come to the round conclusion, that the policies of the Cameroon government are not in harmony, with the demands of the Anglophone population. It ought to be stated (based on current socio-economic and political dynamics) that, no matter the kind of remedies prescribed by spin doctors of the regime in place, the bottom-line is that for Cameroon to emerge as a key player in Africa and the global community in the decades ahead the form of state needs to be revisited urgently; to allow for proper grassroots participation in decision making, so as to unleash the potentials of all citizens toward the arduous task of nation-building which to say the least, has never been a given or decreed in any society. It has always been a process of dialogue, agreements and disagreements, culminating in consensus. Politics of exclusion, as presently practiced in Cameroon can only produce one outcome: it intensifies conflict in society. Diametrically opposed to the call for a re-federation, is the growing political consciousness of Anglophones in the union, who are demanding for the restoration of the statehood of Southern Cameroon, championed by both the homefront and diaspora given that, true to type, there is a clear absence of a union treaty, between the two parties in the union, which has made the case legitimate in the eyes of the international community.

Thus, to escape from this seemingly inescapable morass, that of a nation-state in turmoil and in search of an identity, there is an urgent need, to imbue Cameroonians with an enduring sense of history. As Prof. J.F.A Ajayi (1990:41) submitted: The nation suffers, which has no sense of history. Its values remain superficial and ephemeral unless imbued, with a deep sense of continuity and perception of success and achievement, that transcends acquisition of temporary power or transient wealth. Such nation, cannot achieve a sense of purpose or direction or stability and without them, the future is bleak (Ajayi, 1990:41).

Nations are free to choose, either to be guided by accurate sense of history and be saved or neglect history – the super highway to damnation- as abundantly demonstrated by Hegel, who declared that, history leads the wise man and drags the fool (Hegel, 1975).

Federalism

Most wars have been fought and lives sacrificed, over matters of government. The reason is simple; Government is the agent that acts, in the name of the state, to promote and safe-guard the interest of its citizens, and to maintain harmony between its constitutive elements. Thus, government exists solely for the purpose of making it possible for the will of the people to be actualized. In concrete terms, this translates into the notion long held by the likes of Jeremy Bentham that a good government is one that aims at maximizing the pleasure of its citizens and reducing their pains. For Bentham, government policies should be targeted at the greatest good for the greatest majority. For Olson (1965), just as a good society tends to maximize personal well-being, so a good government tends to promote a maximum of stability, harmony, cohesion, justice, material well-being and above all, freedom.

It follows from the above, that where the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation exist solely for the purpose of conserving the privilege of a selfish, arrogant and nonchalant minority group, it immediately

negates its terms of reference together with its role as trustee, thereby forfeiting all claims to legitimacy. It is in this regard, that it ought to be made clear that, while government is essential to the existence of a state, it is not identical with the state. The state is usually permanent and continuing, while its government may be changed, altered, modified or totally obliterated (Khan et al, 1977).

The implication here is that, the people constituted as a social formation and a political community, have the inalienable right, to terminate the life of any regime, whose course of action runs contrary to their expectations and aspirations. The methods of going about this, may vary from one society to another. It is in this connection that, Germany for instance, moved away from monarchy at one time, to republican democracy (Weimar republic). France, Cameroon's avowed role model vacillated between monarchy and republic since the revolution of 1789, until the third republic was firmly in place in 1875.

The important point to note from these experiences is that, in none of these instances did the end of government (or change from one form to another); bring about an end to the state. Another lesson is that the form of state can be changed at any time in the life of the nation at the behest of the people, through democratic means like referendum or via national dialogue which can sometimes assume the form of a Sovereign national confab or of a truth and reconciliation committee. It is therefore, revealing and indeed patronizing, to note that, a government so wont, on displaying her democratic credentials and respect, for the rule of law at the slightest opportunity can demonstrate such a degree of insensitivity to popular demands, for a national dialogue, by placing a blanket ban on any discussion bordering, on the form of state.

Some citizens (mainly Francophones and a few Anglophones for purely selfish ends) have argued that, the country cannot move forward, by going backward to Federalism. The appropriate response to this group is the reminder that, the post of Prime Minister was once suspended in the country via administrative fiat and later reinstated by the same means, when the exigencies of political and ethno-cultural balancing, based on the need to honor pre-independence alignments, fashioned and regulated by the French warranted it. Without doubt, this kind of argument amounts to nothing, but double standards by those who are now benefiting from the truncated contraption, that goes by the name of a decentralized unitary state.

The reality of political life in Cameroon today, is that ethnic nationalism often intrudes rudely into politics and the policy making arena. This condition is accentuated by a twin process, which has become the bane of an exceedingly centralized polity: the bureaucratization of politics, and the politicization of the bureaucracy. Aiding this process is the thin line existing between the ruling (not governing) party and state structures which line further complicates the power equation in Cameroon. This deliberate fusion (so it seems) of state and party organs ensures that the minority ruling caste that controls the party has unfettered access to state structures (for purposes of primitive accumulation) since in practice the party appears to be above the state. Consequently, the politics of exclusion remains a contemporary feature of governance in Cameroon, like most nations that are just evolving, the utmost challenging issue facing Cameroon today is therefore, the establishment of institutional arrangements that can effectively deal with diversity and foster inclusiveness as well as allow population groups to coexist peacefully and productively. This is where the federal facility readily lends itself as a viable alternative.

Cameroon emerged in 1961 as a plural society derived from two geographical blocs distinct in cultural orientation, both sheltering different ethno-cultural groups with attendant fears and suspicions of domination and marginalization expressly, on the part of the minority Anglophones. These fears have become real over time, and have been exacerbated by the mode of governance, which is moored on a sort of bureaucratic totalitarianism in practice. The need to address this national dilemma, either through genuine political restructuring or referendum, to determine the political destiny and the right to self-determination of Anglophones in the union, sums up the national question. Hence, the federal arrangement being advocated by some Anglophones should be seen by all Cameroonians of good will and those who sincerely believe in peaceful coexistence, as an attempt to reconcile tensions and to accommodate the interests of the country's composite entities and diverse ethnic groups. It is an institutional mechanism expected to tackle the national question as defined above. It remains the most viable option, if Cameroon is to mend her "cracked foundation and broken walls" and embark once more, on constructing a nation void of leadership recklessness and executive lawlessness.

The demands for Federalism from Anglophones did not begin today. In fact, during the turbulent days of the 1990s that saw the storming of the feudal walls of political monolithism in the country, through the launching by the opposition forces of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), as an alternative to the Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM) Federalism was, as it is today, a fundamental aspect of the party manifesto. In a similar vein, the South-West Elite Association (SWELA) being a pressure group, at the time, endorsed federalism as a desirable strategy of governance capable of bringing the country out of the woods. Speaking through its Secretary General (Nnoko Mbele), the association underscored the fact that:

"A true, durable and sustainable national unity, in our earnest opinion, is a sine qua non, and we solemnly do affirm that only the application of the principle of unity in diversity which presupposes mutual respect, equality and solidarity can lay the stage for the safe interplay of the relations of all these inherently explosive/diverse traits of Cameroonians that will provide for an effective development of individual initiative, creativity, talent as well as collective effort" (SWELA 1994:4).

Based on its understanding or conceptualization of the national question, the association proceeded to declared as a solution that:

"Our practical approach is Federalism to which we enlist our total devotion and inalienable support and promise to work against all odds to establish. It is our firm conviction that only a Federation, as a political institution at this point in time in our history, is capable of stemming out the tide. Federalism will also pave the way and lay the foundation for national unity (an ideal so much preached about and not much is being done to achieve it)" (*The Weekly Post*, No. 0069, Nov. 11-17, 1994).

Contrary to misconceptions held in some quarters, which are informed more by ignorance and parochial interest as opposed to the larger interest of the nation-state; federalism has its virtues. It is a governmental system aimed at addressing governmental problems bothering on maintaining unity while at the same time preserving diversity. It provides a technique of political organization that permits action by shared government for some common purposes and autonomous action by regional units of government for purposes that relate to maintaining regional distinctiveness (Watts 2000:3). In this way, it allows every region to develop at its own pace. It is also, believed to be capable of mediating the potential and actual conflicts arising from the heterogeneity within the nation-state (Akpata 2000:8). Above all, as Elaigwu (2000:38)

puts it, it is a compromise in a multinational state, between two types of self-determination: the determination to maintain a supranational framework of government, which guarantees security for all in a nation-state on the one hand, and self-determination of component groups to retain their individual identities. Given the above, one may now pose the question: who is afraid of federalism and why. The taboization of Federalism, as a restructuring option by the hegemonic Francophone leadership in Cameroon, has today released forces, which have caught up with the government in their most torrential waves, threatening to sweep to destruction of a historical fallacy, contrived for the interest of a few, and negotiating in to sharp focus, the agenda for self-determination, which is an accepted legal universal instrument, that guarantees the rights of every minority people, held captive by a majority.

CONCLUSIONS

The preceding discussion shows that, the operation of the Cameroonian unitary system since 1972 has not yielded meaningful socio-economic and political development. Instead, half-hearted practices have resulted in over-centralization of political power, increased corruption, tribal and kinship particularism, intense minority agitations over resource allocation etc. This paper acknowledges that the aforementioned problems of nation-building all have their roots in the 1961 unification of Cameroon and colonial rule as a whole. However, while it is futile to resist the argument that the imperialistic motive behind the unification made it more of a liability than an asset, it is also farfetched to hold colonial rule solely responsible for the near failure of the Cameroonian project. The point to note here is that colonial rule ended about 56 years ago, enough time for the Cameroonian state to institute a concrete agenda and strategy to remedy the defective structures it inherited from the French, towards a genuine national integration and development.

Furthermore, it is contended that the failure of post-independence leadership to evolve an equitable mechanism for distribution of power and economic resources is at the root of the Cameroonian problem. We maintain that there is an irrefutable nexus between the desires of Anglophones for equitable access to power and resources on one hand, and the plethora of obstacles to nation-building, on the other. Thus, the prospects of genuine nationhood and development in Cameroon, lies on the one hand, in a swift adoption of Federalism, not super imposed tendencies and contradictions on the processes that guide the bogus unitary system in place or face the inescapable drift towards self-determination.

The problems of nation-building in Cameroon would start to receive proper attention only under a two-state Federal system of government and the great potentials of the country would be best realized within this framework. Some segments of the Cameroonian society are afraid of a return to Federalism as they view it as a prelude to the breaking-up of the country. But on the contrary, we believe that a Federal structure, if well managed, can consolidate Cameroonian unity. It will give each nationality a breathing space and a sense of belonging, allow for healthy competition and an opportunity to develop according to ability and resources of each federating unit. To this end, it is recommended that failure of government to, as a matter of urgency, embrace and explore avenues of meaningful and purposeful dialogue with Anglophone stakeholders, in order to resolve the national question which undoubtedly, revolves around Anglophone self-determination. As suggested by Ake (1995:34), the state should resort to dialogue and compromise in the face of conflicts. It should also, endeavor to avoid future conflicts by being routinely sensitive to the rights and interests of others, especially those who seem weak. The government ought to consider another constitutional conference and why not a referendum on the issue of Federalism. Those who are currently opposing a return to Federalism in Cameroon should know that they are laying land mines for future generations and indirectly making the parties to go their respective ways unavoidable.

Nevertheless, as the government of Cameroon continues to wage war against advocates of federalism by way of arrest and incarceration, it ought to heed to the advice of a former Chief Justice of Nigeria – Attanda Fatai Williams. While swearing-in Shehu Aliyu Shagari, in 1980 as the President of Nigeria's second republic, he counseled thus: "when you drive men from the public arena, where debate is free, you send them to the cellar where revolutions are born. It is indeed better to have uproar, than to have a whisper" (*AfricaNow*, September, 1983). Finally, it is worth mentioning that, no group accepts permanent servitude. As a matter of fact, political frustration on the part of the group that may not lead and pride, on the part of the group, that must lead and can bring about national paralysis.

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