

## **Colonial Administrative Integration of African Territories: Identity and Resistance in Nigeria’s Southern Cameroons, 1922–1961**

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### **Abstract**

British administrative policy in Africa, and particularly in Cameroon, was generally misguided. *Encyclopedia Britannica* supports this largely undisputed perspective, declaring that “British rule was a period of neglect, and this, coupled with the influx of numerous Nigerians, caused great resentment. [...] At independence, French Cameroun had a much higher gross national product per capita, higher education levels, better health care, and better infrastructure than British Cameroons” (“Cameroon”, 2019, para. 2–3). This state of affairs is likely the result of the decision to administer the British portion of Cameroon as a constituent part of Britain’s Nigerian colony. This arrangement dictated the course of events in the Southern Cameroons territory from 1922 to 1961. From this basic premise, this paper argues that the administration of British Southern Cameroons as part of the British Nigerian Colony brought about an identity crisis in which Southern Cameroonians, albeit integrated into Nigeria, predominantly chose to maintain their identity as a distinct, separate group of people. As such, the allocation of their territory to Nigeria exposed them to alien political domination, as most of the administrators in the Southern Cameroons were Nigerian. Consequently, Southern Cameroonians formed political pressure groups, created political parties and wrote petitions to the British Government as well as to the United Nations in an effort to resist the authority of what they considered to be an intrusive foreign entity. A corollary to this state of affairs was the vote in the 1961 plebiscite. With the great majority of voters choosing to sever their ties with Nigeria, Southern Cameroonians reasserted their distinct identity and called for an end to the political domination that resulted from their unsolicited association with Nigeria.

*Keywords:* Southern Cameroons, Southern Cameroonians, identity, Nigeria, politics, political domination, resistance, integration, British Nigerian Colony

## Introduction

Even in cursory retrospect, it is evident that local national identity groups have historically mobilised to counteract a centralised state's efforts to create internal homogeneity, contesting, for example, the imposition of a common language, of a shared education system, of administrative hierarchies that are considered unsuitable to those groups, and of collective mythologies, histories and the like. In most cases, attempts to dominate people or interfere with their identity have triggered violent opposition. Such was the case with the German annexation of Cameroon, when in 1884 several indigenous groups engaged in active resistance to the German annexation of their territory. Among these were the Nso, Bangwa, Bakweri, Duala and the Ewondo, groups that, driven by an undeniable siege mentality, fought to protect their cherished identity and their traditional institutions and hierarchies.<sup>1</sup> Given their reaction, it is evident that colonialism was imposed on them against their will, given the violence with which several coastal indigenous groups greeted the Germans (Fanso, 2017, 155–157). Even groups like Bali, Bamum, and Ewondo, who later collaborated with the Germans, either initially resisted or were coerced in one way or another to submit to German authority, which lasted from July 1884 to February 1916. After the fall of German *Kamerun*, the territory came under the direct tutelage of the League of Nations, which in turn surrendered its control to Britain and France as Mandatory Powers.<sup>2</sup> These powers experimented with a shared-dominion arrangement called the Condominium; with its ultimate failure Britain and France decided to partition the territory. In the course of the partition, Britain and France acquired 1/5 (20%) and 4/5 (80%) of the territory respectively (Ndi, 2013, 74–76). The territory taken by Britain was not only small in terms of surface area but was also narrow (elongated), non-contiguous (separated) and marred by transportation and communication difficulties that made its effective administration from Nigeria nightmarish (Ngho, 2001, 3). In spite of this, the British knowingly decided to administer Southern Cameroons as a part of Southern and later Eastern Regions of Nigeria.

This paper maintains that the administration of Southern Cameroons as an integral part of Nigeria saw the latter engage in a continual endeavour to politically dominate the former. But in the Nigerian political arena, Southern Cameroonians resisted all forms of political domination throughout the period of their attachment. Attempts by Nigerians to politically dominate the Southern Cameroons took many forms, both in Nigeria and in the Southern Cameroons territory. The features of some Nigerian constitutions such as the Clifford Constitution of 1922, the Richards Constitution of 1946, the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 and the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 contained signs of either political domination or absorption of the Southern Cameroons territory firmly into Nigeria (Ngho, 2001, 11–58). Moreover, Southern Cameroonians were largely underrepresented in the Legislative and Executive Councils of Nigeria, causing Southern Cameroonian politicians, through political pressure groups, political parties and parliamentary discourses, to mount a coherent and constant resistance to Nigerian ascendancy. Ultimately, in 1961, their massive vote against integration with the Nigerian Federation (Nohlen, 1999, 167) was partly informed by the desire

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<sup>1</sup> The different communities that existed in what was to become Cameroon were classified into several ethnic groups, each of which constituted a cultural unit. These ethnic organizations varied in their political and socio-economic composition. The highest authority in these communities was their “natural ruler” – the King. The power of the King was supreme and most communities viewed it as such. It was thus difficult for indigenous people to understand that the Kaiser of Germany or the Queen of England was greater than their ruler. This partly why people resisted European annexation of their territory.

<sup>2</sup> After the defeat of the Germans at the end of the First World War in Cameroon, the territory fell under the League of Nations' Mandate “B” Status and was to be administered by Britain and France on behalf of the League of Nations following the Terms of Mandate.

to steer clear from Nigerian politics – a sure way of escaping political domination and reasserting their identity.

The period between 1922 and 1961 has animated a great deal of scholarly discourse in Cameroon and beyond. Several scholars have skilfully treated the different aspects of the Southern Cameroons-Nigerian political intercourse. Atem (1984) offers a lucid discussion regarding the symbiotic connection that existed between Cameroon and Nigeria from 1884 to 1961. His study touches on the political, economic and social dimensions of the interaction between the two states. In his memoirs about his administrative exploits in British Africa, Milne (1999) unveiled with astonishing depth the constitutional and personality problems that were associated with the emergence of Southern Cameroons as a self-governing entity and its ultimate unification with the Republic of Cameroon. On his part, Ndi (2013) discusses the distinct political culture of Southern Cameroonian politicians during the period of political tensions over the choice of independence options (p. 103). Faced with the conflicting opinions of those who wanted the territory to remain part of Nigeria, those who wanted reunification with French Cameroon and those who wanted outright independence, Southern Cameroonian politicians demonstrated the maturity and political acumen needed to reach consensus. Southern Cameroons Constitutional History, especially between the years 1922 and 1961, has been handled by Ngoh (2001) with particular attention to the specific impact had by Nigerian Constitutions on the Southern Cameroons, while Chem-Langhee (2004) has painstakingly studied how and why Southern Cameroonians opted for the preservation of their distinct identity. Similarly, Nfi (2015) demonstrated how the Southern Cameroons' interaction with Nigeria led to attempts by the Nigerians to *Nigerianise* the Southern Cameroons' economy, civil service, judiciary and education. In another argument, Nfi (2014b, xii) has maintained that the reunification debate in the Southern Cameroons allowed immigrants from French Cameroon to interfere in Southern Cameroons politics and to ultimately influence the plebiscite results in favour of French Cameroon. Lastly Aka (2002), adding another dimension to the study of this period in Cameroonian history, has traced the underdevelopment of Southern Cameroons to the British administration in the territory which was, unmistakably, the outcome of the administration of Southern Cameroons as part of Nigeria. Thus, much ink has flowed in academe on the Southern Cameroons question. Though different aspects of the territory's interaction with Nigeria have been handled, the present study is different in that it gives insights on attempts to dominate and obliterate the Southern Cameroons as a political entity and the strategies its people employed to resist all forms of political domination.

### **British Southern Cameroons: Bases of Association with Nigeria**

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 saw Britain and France shelving their longstanding colonial rivalries to put up a united front against Germany in her African colonies (Elango, 1987, 7). Accordingly, they formed the West African Expeditionary Force (WAEF), a military unit that toppled the German government in Douala and led to the implantation of the condominium as a provisional measure, allowing for a period of time to reflect on how the territory would ultimately be administered once Germany was defeated. (Ndi, 74–76). However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the condominium model proved abortive, the concept being supplanted by both parties' desire to partition the territory. These unpredicted snags included, among others, disagreements over critical financial and territorial authority issues. Thus, while there was a dispute over the specific outlines of the condominium, there was a fairly strong consensus over the need to partition the territory between the two European powers. It thus followed that the Picot Line gave 432,000 km<sup>2</sup> (4/5) to France and 88,000 km<sup>2</sup> (1/5) to Britain, an unequal partition that was never disputed by Britain (Eyongetah, Robert, &

Palmer, 1974, 79). Meanwhile, Britain had controlled Nigeria following a colonisation that began as far back as 1861 after the acquisition of the Lagos Colony (Onwubiko, 1972, 254). France on her part had occupied territories at the eastern border of German *Kamerun*, in what became known as French Equatorial Africa.

Perceptions of geographical space are meaningful to imperial states as they develop, pursue and circumscribe their interests. Perceptions of the space necessary for the imperial community to progress and subsist are important, as empires develop a geographical “personality” that in some ways determines their political direction and spatial expansion. Thus, the interests of Britain and France in Cameroon, in view of the vacuum left by the German collapse, can be understood to hinge upon the desire to preserve and enhance the coherence of their colonial strategy in Africa, as well as of their strategies in war-torn Europe. In light of such strategies, in 1916 the British War Office was amenable to giving France the whole of German *Kamerun*, wanting to raise French morale during a dreadful moment in that nation’s history. The French diplomat Picot, apparently unaware of British intentions, drew a demarcation line that left 20% of Cameroon in British hands (Nfi, 2014b, 13). That partition gave the two powers territories adjacent to their colonies, and it was consensual. As a result, both parties agreed to and welcomed the partition as it was, but given that imperial perceptions of space are not generally shared by people that actually live in that space, the overall feeling among Cameroonians was one of dissatisfaction in view of a partition they perceived as arbitrary. Sultan Njoya of the Bamum Kingdom, for instance, was one of those who resisted the partition, especially due to the fact that his Kingdom fell under French tutelage (Ngoh, 1988, 82–84). The partition of Cameroon was therefore a thorny issue that brought difficulties and misery to the people of the territory (Mukete, 2013, 33–36). Thus, the resistance to political domination within Nigerian politics by Southern Cameroonians was an extension of the same spirit of resistance to the partition of their territory.

Thus Britain gained territories lying adjacent to her Nigerian colony while France acquired a large territory adjoining her colonies in French Equatorial Africa. As a measure that at the time seemed coherent with the strategic logic of their territorial holdings, the British chose to administer the British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons as separate parts of the Northern Nigerian Provinces of Benue, Bornu and Adamawa and the Southern (and later, Eastern) Province of Nigeria respectively. This decision was not taken with the consent of either Nigerians or Cameroonians. Thus, some Nigerians—notably the members of the Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) – as well as significant groups of Cameroonians disapproved of the decision (Ngoh, 2001). A number of considerations informed the British decision to administratively link her Cameroon holdings to Nigeria. In the first place, Britain (after much reluctance) ended up acquiring these portions of Cameroon mainly for strategic reasons. Administering her portion of the Cameroons as an integral part of Nigeria was a strategic move taken by the British administration to tidy her Eastern Nigerian Boundary with the Cameroons (Rubin, 1971, 71). In a memorandum dated May 29, 1919, Alfred Milner, the British Secretary of State for Colonies, argued that “The territory we have gained, though not large in extent, has a certain value in giving us better boundaries and bringing completely within our borders native tribes which have hitherto been partly within British territory and partly outside it” (Gardinier, 1967, 523, cited in Ngoh, 2001, 4). One example of territories that Britain needed in order to have its boundaries tidied was Yola. Having acquired the territory whose primary purpose was to tidy the eastern border, administering it as part of Nigeria became the logical thing to do.

Britain’s compulsion to connect her newly acquired Cameroonian territory to her Nigerian colony is better understood when one remembers the British disinterest in acquiring any part

of Cameroon after the First World War (Rothwell, 1971, 73 cited in Ngoh, 2001, 3). Ostensibly, the British lukewarm attitude towards the annexation of Cameroon – already manifested at the beginning of the “scramble” – had not completely disappeared. After having fought with France and defeating Germany in Cameroon during the First World War, she only needed a part of Cameroon to use as a bargaining chip in the ensuing negotiations that were expected to follow the end of the war (Osuntokun, 1978, 257, cited in Ngoh, 2001, 3). Akinjide submits that British Secretary of State for Colonies, Lord Lewis Harcourt, had suggested to Lord Lugard that Britain should give the whole of Cameroon to France in exchange for all of Togo and Dahomey (Akinjide, 1979, 231). The British reluctance to take over control of any part of Cameroon made associating the territory eventually acquired to Nigeria an understandable action.

The foregoing arguments should demonstrate that it was a rational decision by the British to administer Southern Cameroons as part of Nigeria. Britain thus took advantage of the leverage given by Article Nine (9) of the Mandate Provision to administer Southern Cameroons as part of Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> The association of British Cameroons in general and British Southern Cameroons in particular to the British Nigerian colony, which lasted for close to forty years, left indelible imprints on the Southern Cameroons territory and greatly shaped the political evolution of that political unit called Southern Cameroons. During this period of appurtenance with Nigeria, Southern Cameroonians generally demonstrated their unwillingness to be fully integrated politically within Nigeria, in spite of their compulsory administrative connection.

### **Southern Cameroons-Nigeria Appurtenance: The Administrative Arrangement**

The administrative system that was instituted in British Cameroons in 1922 was based on the policy of Indirect Rule. In fact, before 1922 it was not certain which administrative policy should be used in British Cameroons (Fanso, 2017, 236). After the partition, the Governor-General of Nigeria, Lord Frederick Lugard ordered that “the British Cameroons be administered according to the Laws of *Kamerun* so far as these were known, or according to the laws of the part of Nigeria in which the administering officer had previously held his appointment” (Fanso, 2017, 236). Eventually, what were implemented in British Cameroons were the laws of Northern or Southern Nigeria. This situation remained so until July 20, 1922 when the British administration in the territory officially began (Fanso, 2017, 236). Meanwhile, by April of 1922 the Secretary of State for Colonies had approved the use of Indirect Rule in the British Cameroons territory as the administrative policy. This policy was preferred because it was financially cost-effective to the British, who were not willing to shoulder an extra financial burden in the administration of overseas territories, desiring the colonies to pay for the cost of their own administration (Kilson, 1970, p. 74).

According to Coleman (1958), Indirect Rule refers to “a system of local administration in which the essential features were the preservation of traditional political institutions and their adaptation under the tutelage and direction of the British administration to the requirements of modern units of local government”. On his part, Onwubiko (1972) has defined Indirect Rule as “a system of administration under which traditional rulers were allowed to rule their people under the supervision of British officials” (p. 259). In this way, the British recognised indigenous administrations and organised chiefdoms as Native Authorities or Native Administrations (NAs). Through the NAs, the British administered the local people by passing

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<sup>3</sup> This Article permitted Britain to have full powers of administration and legislation in the area subject to the mandate and could be administered as part of their adjacent territories.

down orders through them and receiving feedback from the natives through traditional rulers. Thus, traditional rulers acted as administrative intermediaries in this particular system of administration.

The British portion of Cameroon was divided into two parts. These included British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons. The Northern Half adjoining Northern Nigeria was administered as an integral part of the three Northern Nigerian provinces. The Tigon-Ndoro-Kentu area became part of the Benue Province with its capital in Maiduguri; the Northern and Southern Adamawa Districts formed part of Adamawa Province with its capital at Yola, while the Dikwa Division became part of Bornu Province with its capital at Makurdi (Eyongetah et. al., 1974, 81). This particular connection resulted from the fact that British authorities, to a certain degree, regarded the British Northern Cameroons territory as an extension of Northern Nigeria and as part of that Fulani-dominated area (Ngoh, 1988, 4). Southern Cameroons was not split in the same manner, as it was initially administered as an additional province within the Southern Provinces of Nigeria; it subsequently became part of Eastern Nigeria, albeit as an unattached province (Eyongetal et al, 81). The administration of the Southern Cameroons as a single entity likely accounted for popular identity cohesion, which in turn enabled the preservation the area's traditional culture. Thus, political circumstances have determined the evolution of the present-day North West and South West Regions of the Republic of Cameroon. Southern Cameroons was divided into four Divisions: Victoria, Mamfe, Kumba and Bamenda. A subsequent addition was the Bamenda Division, which was further split into three: Bamenda, Wum and Nkambe (Ngoh, 1988, 4).

The ultimate authority in the administration of the Nigerian Colony and the mandated territory of Cameroon was the governor-general who resided in Lagos (Fanso, 2017, 236). Under the governor-general were two lieutenant governors who were in charge of the Northern and Southern Cameroons, while the “resident” was the principal executive officer of the Cameroons Province and was based in Buea (Fanso, 2017, 237–238). The district officers (DOs) headed the divisions and were assisted by the assistant district officers. Under them were the traditional rulers who served as district heads. The system of administration was thus hierarchical and highly organized, especially with the putting in place of the Indirect Rule system of administration. By this arrangement, Southern Cameroons was linked to Nigeria constitutionally, administratively, and legislatively. It thus followed that constitutional, administrative, judicial and legislative changes in Nigeria invariably affected the Southern Cameroons territory. For the most part however, such changes were either consciously or unconsciously designed to enable Nigeria to dominate Southern Cameroons politically.

### **Evidence of the Political Subjugation of Southern Cameroons within Nigeria**

The manner in which the administrative system was structured linked Southern Cameroons to Nigeria constitutionally, administratively, and legislatively. Since constitutional, administrative and legislative changes in Nigeria invariably affected Southern Cameroons, it followed that some of those changes were regarded by many Southern Cameroonians as unfair and designed to dominate them politically and obliterate their identity. Evidence of the political subjugation of British Southern Cameroons began to be perceived as far back as 1922 with the passage of the Clifford Constitution by Sir Hugh Clifford. This constitution abolished the old Nigerian Council and replaced it with a Legislative Council of 46 members. It also created an Executive Council that was essentially an advisory body to the Governor (Ngoh, 2001, 10). The passage of the Clifford Constitution coincided with the official commencement of the British Mandate in Southern Cameroons. But the Constitution apparently ignored the need for

Southern Cameroons to be represented in the Legislative and the Executive Councils. As such, Southern Cameroons was never represented therein despite the creation of the Legislative and Executive Councils. This situation was regarded by many Southern Cameroonians as an attempt to politically dominate and/or marginalise them, since between 1922 and 1951 they had no representation in the Legislative and Executive Councils in Lagos.

The 1946 Richards Constitution that replaced the Clifford Constitution illustrates the continuing legislative marginalisation of Southern Cameroons by Nigerians. Sir Arthur Richard believed in the full integration of the Southern Cameroons into the Nigerian Colony. This Constitution divided Nigeria into the Northern, Eastern and Western Regions.<sup>4</sup> Southern Cameroons formed part of the Eastern Region, with its Capital at Enugu. While the central Legislative Council remained in Lagos, Regional Assemblies were created in the three regions. Southern Cameroons was given two Native Authority seats in the Eastern Regional Assembly, and they were occupied by Chief Manga Williams of Victoria and *Fon* Galega II of Bali. Thus, besides introducing unwelcome constitutions, the British and the Nigerians made efforts to *Nigerianise* the Southern Cameroons administration by allowing only two seats in the Assembly.

The Southern Cameroons territory also witnessed an influx of Nigerian administrators. As early as 1923, different Southern Cameroons government departments, including post and telegraphs, police, prisons, agriculture, medical, education, customs, marine, and public works were dominated by Nigerians (Nfi, 2015, 33). By the 1940s, the first African Assistant District Officer for the Manyu Division (in Southern Cameroons) was a Nigerian (Nfi, 2015, 33). The British justified the non-appointment of Southern Cameroonians to top administrative positions between the 1920s and the 1940s by stating “Nigerians were already more acculturated with the British imperial system and the English language than their counterparts in Southern Cameroons” (Fanso, 1982, 475 cited in Nfi, 2014, 33). Interestingly, most of these Nigerians, on which the British depended for the administration of Southern Cameroons, were far less qualified and could not “deliver the goods” (Ibid.). This left many in Southern Cameroons with a distinct feeling of political subjection to Nigeria, a situation that led to the emergence of widespread resistance against and criticism of the British system. Resistance manifested itself in the form of political pressure groups, political parties and through petitions and elections.

### **Resistance to Political Domination: Political Pressure Groups**

The feeling of political domination by the Southern Cameroonian politicians brought the seeds of political pressure groups in the territory. One of the swiftest responses to the apparent attempts at political domination within Nigerian politics was the formation of the Cameroon Welfare Union (CWU), created in 1939 by G. J. Mbene in Victoria. Among its objectives, Chem-Langhee (2004) has submitted, was that of “... catering for the interests of Cameroonians which, at this point, included the assertion of a Cameroons identity” (p. 24). The question of the Southern Cameroons identity remained strong in the minds of the people throughout the period of their association with Nigeria. This invariably was the motivation for the determination by the Southern Cameroonians to resist all forms of political domination within Nigeria. Consequently, in early 1940, the CWU petitioned the British administration against the non-representation of Southern Cameroons in the Legislative Council in Lagos (Chem-Langhee, 2004, 24). This move, though delayed for two more years, eventually led to

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<sup>4</sup> This division corresponded to the location of the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Northern Region was Hausa-dominated, the Western Region was Yoruba, and the Eastern Region was Igbo.

the appointment of Chief Manga Williams in 1942 as the Southern Cameroons representative in the Legislative Council in Lagos.

The demise of the CWU necessitated the founding of a like-minded political pressure group, the Cameroon Youth League (CYL). It was founded on March 27, 1940 in Lagos and was led by Southern Cameroonian students in Nigerian Schools and Colleges. These included Paul M. Kale, Emmanuel M. L. Endeley and John N. Foncha. While the League had variegated objectives, its ultimate purpose was to seek a recognized political status for Southern Cameroons, and this had to be achieved through the creation of a separate legislature for Southern Cameroons (Chem-Langhee, 2004, 25). The creation of the CYL was thus another landmark move by Southern Cameroonians to maintain their identity and shield themselves against all types of domination from their Nigerian neighbours. In fact, it was the increased pressure of the CYL that eventually led to the appointment of Chief Manga Williams as the Southern Cameroons representative to the Legislative Council in Lagos. But it also led to the enfranchisement of the Southern Cameroons within Nigeria.

As a reaction to the terms of the Richards Constitution, another political pressure group, the Cameroon Federal Union (CFU) emerged in the Southern Cameroons in 1947 under the leadership of E. M. L. Endeley. This pressure group canvassed for the re-enfranchisement of the Southern Cameroons and the creation of a separate Southern Cameroons Region (Rubin, 1971, 84, cited in Chem-Langhee, 2004, 27). The Richards Constitution had paved the way for the Southern Cameroons to lose its seat in the Legislative Council in Lagos while being granted only two Native Authority seats in the Eastern Regional Assembly.

In May 1949 yet another political pressure group was created in Southern Cameroons, the Cameroon National Federation (CNF) also led by E. M. L. Endeley. This group demanded, among other things, the establishment of an administratively separate Cameroons Region with its own House of Assembly under a commissioner responsible to the Trusteeship Council. Beyond this, it also advocated for unification/reunification of the Cameroons (Chem-Langhee, 2004, 29). By 1951, a resurgent Southern Cameroonian identity buttressed the desire for the country to be restored exactly as it was under the German administration. Evidence of this is the emergence of the Kamerun United National Congress (KUNC) as a political pressure group, adopting the German spelling “*Kamerun*”. Clearly, though Southern Cameroons formed part of Nigeria, its people were demanding a separation.

Another way Southern Cameroonians contested political domination was the formation of political parties.

### **The Political Parties**

Political activism actually began in association with Nigeria. Southern Cameroonians such as Kale and Endeley were instrumental in the formation of political parties like the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), founded in 1940 under the leadership of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe. Through this party, the Southern Cameroons’ political standpoint rejecting the Richards Constitution was given a voice. This political party organized public demonstrations against that constitution (Chem-Langhee, 2004, 26), and while the NCNC was not led by *bona fide* Southern Cameroonians, members of this community militated in the party and used it as a shield against political domination *within* the Nigerian system. This was feasible because the party shared a number of the grievances held by Southern Cameroonians.

In 1946 the NCNC toured throughout Nigeria and the Southern Cameroons with the aim of galvanising popular moral and financial support so as to undertake a trip to London to lobby against the Richards Constitution. As a result, in June 1947 a seven-man delegation, including PM Kale of Southern Cameroons, traveled to London to present their case against the Richards Constitution (Chem-Langhee, 2004, 27). This gave Kale the opportunity to present the Southern Cameroons case against the Constitution while requesting the restoration of the Southern Cameroons seat in the Legislative Council in Lagos and the creation of a separate legislature for the territory. Thus, due to their militancy in the NCNC, Southern Cameroonians came to terms with the necessity of using a party led by Nigerians to campaign against political domination by Nigerians. Moreover, besides being used to drum up sympathy against political domination, the party offered political apprenticeship, a necessary requirement in the running of indigenous political parties that began operating in the territory in 1953.

Opposition to the Richards Constitution led to the introduction of a new constitution in 1951 by Sir John Macpherson, who had replaced Sir Arthur Richards as Governor-General. The Macpherson Constitution granted the Southern Cameroons territory thirteen seats in the Eastern Regional Assembly and four seats in the Legislative Council in Lagos. Besides, the territory was also represented in the Executive Council of the Eastern Region and the Central Executive Council in Lagos by S. T. Muna (Minister of Works) and E. M. L. Endeley (Minister of Labour) (Ngoh, 2001, 59–62). Yet, while the Macpherson Constitution addressed some of the issues created by the Richards Constitution, it was still regarded by Southern Cameroonians with contempt because it failed to grant a separate legislature. On the contrary, the Constitution reinforced the Southern Cameroons-Nigerian connection at a time when Southern Cameroonians were shifting towards increasing demands for a separate legislature for the territory. As Southern Cameroonians contemplated the possible steps that could be taken to ensure that the territory gained a separate legislature, a “disguised opportunity” appeared, the Eastern Regional Crisis of April 1953.

Constitutional and personality conflicts between top brass of the NCNC in the Eastern Regional Assembly came to a head when its chairman, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Vice Chairman Professor Eyo Ita proclaimed that the Southern Cameroons Delegation was being deceived and exploited. In the course of the conflict, the lone Southern Cameroonian Minister to the Eastern Regional Council of Ministers, S. T. Muna (Minister of Works) was dismissed. In reaction, nine of the thirteen Southern Cameroonian representatives to the Eastern Regional Assembly formed the Benevolent Neutrality Bloc (BNB), which called on Southern Cameroonians to steer clear of Nigerian politics (Ngoh, 2001, 67–74). According to Ngoh, their reasons for expressing the wish to sever links with Nigeria were that there was “a deliberate disregard of the wishes and aspirations of the Southern Cameroons” and that within Nigeria, “they were unable to make the wishes of the Cameroons people respected” (Ngoh, 2001, 67–74). After holding the Mamfe Constitutional Conference of May 22–24, 1953, Members of the BNB, after numerous discussions, formed the first indigenous political party in the British Southern Cameroons, the Kamerun National Congress (KNC). The Congress was led by E. M. L. Endeley and R. J. K. Dibongue (Fanso, 2017, 99–300). The aim of the party was to seek a recognised status for Southern Cameroons as separate entity and to pursue an eventual reunification with French Cameroon. By 1954, under the Lyttleton Constitution, Southern Cameroons was granted a Quasi Regional Status with a reasonable degree of autonomy. Dr E. M. L. Endeley became the Leader of Government Business. However, the territory had not fully extricated itself from the Nigerian connection and the possibility of continuing political domination. Thus, the struggle for separation continued until 1957, and by 1961 Southern Cameroons was granted autonomy within the Republic of Cameroon. To achieve this end, a

means that was thoroughly exploited by Southern Cameroonian dissidents was the use of petitions.

### **The Petitions**

Southern Cameroonians also used petitions to call the attention of the British and the International Community to the attempts at political domination of their territory by Nigeria. These petitions were addressed to political pressure groups, political parties and powerful individuals. In early 1940, for instance, while tension mounted on the non-representation of the Southern Cameroons in the Legislative Council in Lagos, the Victoria Branch of the CWU addressed a petition to the British administration requesting such representation (Kale, 1967, 51–55 cited in Chem-Langhee, 2004, 24). As a result of this petition, the British administration granted the request in principle in 1940; in 1942 it was formally granted with the appointment of Chief Manga Williams as the Southern Cameroons representative. This act was an unambiguous message to the British/Nigerian authorities that the Southern Cameroonians were politically conscious enough to challenge, competently and persuasively, their political subjection and their social marginalisation.

Similarly, in August 1947 and within the political framework of the NCNC, Kale petitioned the Secretary of State for Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones, to rescind the Richards Constitution. In this petition and among several other requests, Kale stressed the need to restore the Southern Cameroons representation in the Legislative Council in Lagos and the creation of a separate legislature for Southern Cameroons. When this request was not given adequate response, a protest march was organised in London during which calls were made for the independence of Nigeria and the granting of disengagement for Southern Cameroons. By June 1948, a provincial conference that brought together representatives of youth organizations and tribal unions took place in Mamfe. Therein, the resolutions calling for the Southern Cameroons to be declared a separate entity were approved almost unanimously. This event built up to another petition that was sent to the Governor in March 1949 calling for the establishment of a separate, wholly unconnected administration for the region.

In March 1949, a combined body of various associations and unions of the Southern Cameroons in Lagos, comprising the Mamfe Improvement Union, the Bakweri Improvement Union, the Bamenda Improvement Association, the CYL and the CNF, petitioned new governor Sir John Macpherson and the House of Assembly under a Commissioner responsible to the Trusteeship Council for the establishment of a separate region (Chem-Langhee, 28). It is worth mentioning at this juncture that though Governor Macpherson passed a new constitution that was apparently intended to improve the political representation of the Southern Cameroons within the Nigerian system, a majority of Southern Cameroonians at this point was already favouring the option of separation from Nigeria. Thus, they were unable to fully appreciate the innovations introduced by the Macpherson Constitution that increased the number of their representation from two to thirteen in the Eastern Regional Assembly in Enugu. While the Macpherson Constitution aimed at resolving the issues created by the Richards Constitution, a majority of Southern Cameroonians saw it as an attempt to fully integrate them within Nigeria, a situation that they were already considering with contempt and disdain.

Another petition addressed to the British administration came after the Mamfe Constitutional Conference of May 22–24, 1953, one that reiterated the desire of the Southern Cameroons for separation. This was done as a prelude to the London Constitutional Conference, held in July and August 1953. There, Endeley, J. C. Kangsen and S. A. George assumed the position of

“Benevolent Neutrals”. At the end of the Conference, the need for the revision of the Macpherson Constitution became sorely evident. Sir Oliver Lyttleton later replaced Macpherson as Governor of Nigeria and the Lyttleton Constitution granted the Southern Cameroons Quasi Regional Status on October 26, 1954, with Endeley as Leader of Government Business. The Quasi Regional Status only granted Southern Cameroons limited autonomy, so the struggle for full regional disengagement had to continue. This was achieved in 1957, and the Plebiscite of 1961 put an end to nearly 40 years of attachment to Nigeria.

### **The 1961 Plebiscite**

The 1961 plebiscite put an end to the political connection between the Southern Cameroons and Nigeria that had begun in 1922. In the end, the Southern Cameroons’ association to Nigeria had particularly unpleasant consequences. Besides the Igbo issue (a people that straddle the Cameroon-Nigeria border), the British did much to create division among politicians in order to manipulate them to their own advantage. This partly explains why in the 1950s Southern Cameroonian opinions were fractured among different shades of attitudes concerning the description of independence. Three of these shades are easily identifiable. Some believed that limited autonomy should be attained while staying within the Nigerian Federation. Dr E. M. L. Endeley championed this opinion. Led by JN Foncha, another group of politicians construed independence as unification with French Cameroon. Meanwhile, P. M. Kale held that Southern Cameroons should secede from Nigeria without reunifying with French Cameroon. In other words, this group of Southern Cameroonians stood for the independence of Southern Cameroons as a sovereign state. It is worth mentioning that the politicians did not disagree on the question of independence, but only on the nature of independence.

In the midst of these differences, a majority of Southern Cameroonians remained keenly aware of the 40-year history of Nigerian intrusion into their political life. To put these differences to rest, the United Nations decided on the organisation of a plebiscite in the territory on February 11, 1961. The questions were problematic and hinged on the following two options:

1. Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the Independent Federation of Nigeria? OR
2. Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the Independent Republic of Cameroon?

The conspicuous drawback to this plebiscite was that its questions reflected only two of the three core political options that should have been made available to Southern Cameroonian voters. The third and likely the most popular option, that of “Independence without joining” (secession) was obviated. By the day of the vote, J. N. Foncha of the KNDP, who championed the drive for Reunification with the Republic of Cameroon, had succeeded in charming Southern Cameroonians into believing that a vote for reunification would be the “lesser evil”. Thus, by a total of 233,571 votes against 97,741, Southern Cameroonians chose to achieve independence from Britain by “being annexed” to *La République du Cameroun*. On the other hand, the British Northern Cameroonians chose, by 146,296 votes against 97,659, to be integrated within the Nigerian Federation (Fanso, 2017, 324–326). The overwhelming victory of the Reunification option in the Southern Cameroons was indicative of the desire by the people of this territory to sever all links with Nigeria, this while steering clear from the constant attempts by their western neighbours to dominate the region’s political life. This final act by the Southern Cameroonians lay to final rest the almost 40 years of political attachment to

Nigeria, an era characterised by Nigeria's comprehensive political ascendancy in the Southern Cameroons.

### **Conclusion**

The administration of the British Southern Cameroons as part of Nigeria was a practical move. Thus, after the First World War came to a close in Cameroon, the Southern Cameroons region was administered as part of the British Nigerian Colony. This introduced the Southern Cameroons territory to the stark realities of political domination within a Nigerian system that many experienced as an alien intrusion. Foreign domination manifested itself in the forms of constitutions that seemed predisposed against Southern Cameroonians; these were instituted by successive British Governors the likes of Hugh Clifford (1922), Arthur Richards (1946), John Macpherson (1951) and Oliver Lyttleton (1954). Besides being fundamentally hostile to Southern Cameroonian self-determination, as may be observed in these constitutions' articles, the British also allowed for an environment that administratively discriminated against the people of the region, as most of the territory's administrators were Nigerians. Faced with this reality, Southern Cameroonians, through political pressure groups, political parties, petitions and the 1961 plebiscite, demonstrated their capacity to resist the diverse and numerous forms of political domination. Thus, in voting for Reunification in 1961, Southern Cameroonians were unambiguously castigating Nigerians for the nearly 40 years that they dominated the politics of the region. However, the union of the Southern Cameroons with the Republic of Cameroon still left much to be desired, as complaints of marginalisation, which ultimately resulted in the 2016 Cameroonian Anglophone Crisis, have come to show. This raises the question of whether Southern Cameroonians escaped political domination in Nigeria only to be marginalised and dominated within the Republic of Cameroon.

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