

The Neglect and Ramifications of The Political Opinion of Chief Nyenti Stephen Eyong and The Cameroon Commoner's Congress (1959-1961)

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Abstract: The article traces the activities of Cameroon Commoners Congress (CCC) under the auspices of Chief Nyenti Stephen Eyong and reasons for neglect of the political opinion advocated by his party during the 1961 plebiscite in Southern Cameroons. It also examines the political, economic and socio-cultural impact of the neglect on the territory. The article made use of secondary and primary sources for the collection of data. Concerning the secondary sources, use was made of an extensive literature that offered some general and specific information about the article. After critical analyses of archival data, tangible evidence emerged as to the fact that Southern Cameroonian inhabitants be they indigenes or non-indigenes were affected negatively due to this neglect. To ensure an easy understanding, we adopted a conventional analytical pattern. We used both the chronological and topical approaches aimed at chronologically illustrating the political neglect and thematically examining the changes that Southern Cameroons experienced over time. Our findings reveal four central issues: Firstly, that by neglecting political opinion of Chief Nyenti, the independence of Southern Cameroons was neglected also. Secondly, minority former British Southern Cameroons citizens have raised their voices for being marginalized by their majority French Cameroonians counterparts. Thirdly, personal interest took precedence over common interest. Fourthly, the neglected political opinion of Chief Nyenti was regretted because some citizens later called for a separate political entity for Southern Cameroons. The article argues that the neglect of the third option in the plebiscite laid ground for Anglophone problem, mutual suspicion and mistrust between Anglophones and Francophone in Cameroon.

Key Words: Southern Cameroons, Neglect, Reunification, Third option and Independence

I. INTRODUCTION

The most important political outcome of the Eastern Regional crisis of 1953 was the creation of indigenous political parties in Southern Cameroons. The first was the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) led by E.M.L. Endeley and the second was the Kamerun People's Party (KPP) of P.M Kale and N. N. Mbile. The third was the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) of J. N. Foncha and A N.Jua founded in 1955 and was an offshoot of the KNC. These parties and their leaders adopted divergent and or conflicting views concerning the political future of the British Southern Cameroons. In concrete terms, they advocated for reunification and integration of the territory. In the contrary, in 1959 Chief Nyenti Stephen Eyong created the Cameroon

Commoners Congress (CCC) to neutralize these divergent views by advocating for a separate political entity for Southern Cameroons.

II. THE CREATION of CCC

During the struggle for the independence of Southern Cameroons, it was not common to see an opinion leader who knew the truth and stood so strongly for it, even if it meant sacrificing his own life, or risking the possibility of pulling large crowds of people to himself. It is said, you can fool some people all the time but you cannot fool all the people all the time. Chief Nyenti Stephen Eyong happened to be one of those politicians who could not be fooled all the time. He stood for the truth when he discovered that his colleagues were not speaking the truth about the future of Southern Cameroons. Chief Nyenti intended to right the wrongs of pretentious politicians who wanted to destroy the political future of Southern Cameroons for their personal interests.^[1] In the face of this and taken into consideration that Chiefs exercised power, rule and authority over their people, Chief Nyenti took the courage and determination to create the first ever indigenous political party in the then Mamfe Division called the Cameroon Commoners' Congress (CCC) on 27th September 1959.^[2]

The detractors of the party called it 'Cameroon Cheap Cargo'.^[3] It was the desire of Chief Nyenti to serve his people both as a traditional ruler and as a politician.^[4] Thus, the willingness of the Bachuo-Ntai people to release him to the service of the nation culminated in shaping him as a politician. Under the banner of CCC, he went round explaining the relationship between Southern Cameroons with her neighboring Countries. and called on the British government to put finishing touches to Lord Frederick Lugard's work of building the Southern Cameroons Nation. He was prepared to collaborate with any political leader that

¹ Interview with Tabong Micheal Kima, Minister Penitentiary and Chief of Bakebe, Age 85 Years, Buea, 9th March 2012

² NAB, File No.504,Vb/b1961/4, "Administrative District Office MAmfe,"1962,p.12.

³ Chem-Langhe. (1995). The Road to the Unitary State of Cameroon, 1959-1972 : *Paideuma, Book Two*, p .10.

⁴ NAB, File No.504,Vb /b1961/3, "Cameroon Commoners Congress," 1961, p.12

never wanted to see Southern Cameroons dominated by a foreign country.

Although his party came late, Chief Nyenti informed his followers that it was better late than never. Time to act was then and not to be postponed. The party that started with close to 200 supporters and well-wishers participated at the Mamfe Plebiscite Conference. CCC supporters were found in Victoria, Kumba, Mamfe, Bamenda, Wum and Nkambe. Some prominent members of the party were Elias Tabi Nchong of Ntenako village, Joseph Mbi of Bachuo-Ntai the pioneer president, Nelson Arrey, Newu Andrew and Moses Enow.^[5] They undertook sensitization campaigns to inform the public concerning the objectives of the party.

1. Objectives and Structure of ccc

To ensure the smooth running of the party and to make the party known to Southern Cameroonians, its objectives and structures were established. The objectives of CCC were: to march the Southern Cameroons forwards to liberty not backwards to slavery; to see that Southern Cameroons become self-governing at a definite time, the delay of self-government caused by opportunists will not be tolerated; to get the Southern Cameroons stand shoulder to shoulder with Northern, Western and Eastern regions, before her Majesty's Government and demand dominion status, to put up a fight against unification with French Cameroon because such unification will ultimately lead the Southern Cameroons to the French Union and will separate the Southern Cameroons from her neighbouring brothers in the North, West and East.

Moreover, To put a brake on crude politician who spread false propaganda and give foreigners wrong impression that the Southern Cameroons is unstable. To do practical politics and not allow theorists spread the vain promise of leading the Southern Cameroons to El dorado. Time is precious to be wasted. While the Southern Cameroons wastes previous time, these very theorists feather in misery in their own nests and live in abundance. To preserve the customs of the natives of the land and see that they are respected. To practice what it preached and not to preach Christianity and turn round to practice paganism, to maintain the brotherhood between the Mamfe people on the one hand and the Kumba, Calabar, Ikom, Ogoja Aro Rivers people on the other hand. Finally, to work for peace and prosperity under which they shall bring the native and the stranger together to discuss their differences and thus try to reach agreement through compromise.^[6]

Meanwhile, the party was organized in the following ways: Seven Executive posts constituted the central working

Committee of the party made up of the President General, the Assistant President General, the Secretary General, the General Treasurer, the Auditor, the Chief Whip and the Finance Secretary. Once elected, they retained their offices for a period of five years. They were replaced as soon as a vote of non-confidence was passed on each of them. Each branch of the party was to have officers similar to those of the mother party. The officers were named: the president and his assistant, the secretary and his assistant, the treasurer and his assistant, the Whip (Dikama) and his assistant, the Messenger (Okini) and his Assistant.^[7]

The Party was also divided into five wings: the chiefs' wing, the officers' wing, the special wing, the women's wing and the ordinary wing. The chiefs' wing comprised of chiefs who were the heads of the party in the land. The officers' wing was made up of seven Central Officers together with branch Officers. The special wing was made up of indigenous natives. The ordinary wing comprised of members who were not natives of the land. The Women's wing was made up of the women who belonged to popular organizations in the land.

A way from that, the party derived its funds from donations. Funds also came from subscriptions, levies and fines. Each branch was supposed to keep its own money but the General Treasurer must be informed about it from time to time.^[8]

11. Code of Conducts, Motto and Symbol of the Party

For the day-to-day running of the party, code of conducts were included in the constitution. Also contained in the constitution were its Motto and Symbol. These codes of conducts were dished out to the militants as follows: Militants were to speak their truth to one another in order to retain their confidence; they were also expected to protect their customs.^[9] Any militant that was treacherous to any other member was tried and if found guilty, was expelled with ignominy. Members were to be ready to learn how to forgive and forget one another and to help one another. Any member of the party who failed to attend twelve consecutive meetings without sufficient and satisfactory reasons ceased to be a member.^[10]

Any member who in the opinion of the party was injured, attempted to injure the party, noted contrary to the interest of the party, attempted to break up and dissolve the party, bring the party into discredit, acted contrary to any orders and directions of the party was punished by censure, fine and expulsion. Any expelled member automatically

⁵Tabe J.T.(2005)"Chief Nyenti Stephen Eyong of Bachuo-Ntai, Mamfe : A Traditional and Politician 1925-1999" M.A Dissertation University of Yaounde1: p.60.

⁶NAB,File No.IS.111, Vb/b1961/3, "Cameroon Commoners Congress Information Service",1961.p.23.

⁷NAB, File No. 1504, Vb/b1961/4, "Cameroon Commoners Congress, Information Service," 1961, p.5.

⁸NAB, File No.504,Vb /b1961/3, p.13

⁹Interview with Abangma Samson N., ,Former Registrar of University of Buea and Chief of Bache Village, Age 65 Years, Buea, 8th February2013.

¹⁰ Ibid.

ceased to have any claim upon the funds and the property of the party.^[11]

The party motto was “No Domination” the chiefs made it loud and clear that when Britain and France were partitioning Cameroon even though French Cameroon was larger than British Southern Cameroons in population, there was no minor or major nation. Both nations had the same status. Britain decided to administer British Southern and Northern Cameroons as integral parts of Nigeria.^[12] Therefore, the sovereignty of Southern Cameroons could not be compromised either by a union with “La Republic du Cameroun.” or Federal Republic of Nigeria. Southern Cameroons should be made a sovereign state with a seat in the United Nations Organization (UNO) as contained in the Trusteeship agreement of 1945.^[13] Chief Nyenti told Southern Cameroonians not to throw this right away due to inferiority complex or cowardice.^[14]

The party had a traditional drum as a symbol .The registration of the party symbol was governed by section 104 of the elections of Southern Cameroons House of Assembly Regulations published as the Southern Cameroons Legal notice No. 10, of 1958 as native drum.^[15]The sound of the drum was to call, inform, persuade and educate Southern Cameroonians and to expose the selfish ambitions of some Southern Cameroons politicians. The Native Drum also served as a warning signal to both the politicians and masses to denounce to either reunify with “La Republic du Cameroun” or integrate with Nigeria.^[16]

In view of this development, the party intended to pass across Fon Achirimbi’s message during the 1958 Southern Cameroons House of Chiefs’ Conference (SCHC) in which he lamented on the suppression of Southern Cameroons’ identity and self-determination in Nigeria.^[17] The Fon never favoured any union of Southern Cameroons with either the Republic of Cameroon or Federal Republic of Nigeria because to him, the latter was “fire” and the former “water”^[18].To reinforce this position, the CCC hierarchy suggested that these identity and self-determination could only be recovered by joining forces to fight for the Southern Cameroons’ nationhood. Chief Nyenti invited Southern Cameroonians of good will and his fellow traditional rulers, masses, teachers, lawyers and doctors to join CCC to fight for their own chief justice, prime minister, ambassadors, seat in the United Nations, army, currency, University and National Radio.^[19]

In addition to these, he told Southern Cameroonians that if Sierra Leone that then had 2.100.000 people on 27,000 km² of land got its freedom on April 1961 , Pitcairn Island with then 143 people on 2 square mile land demanded freedom date fixed, Monaco with then 20.000 people on half square mile land has freedom, what more of the Southern Cameroons with 1,570,000 people on 16,000 square miles land.^[20] Chief Nyenti reminded the people of Southern Cameroons that the irresponsible government at the time never requested for freedom. That the United Nations reported the government to them with the following words: “considering the question of the Southern Cameroons the committees stated from the assumption that the people of the territory were politically mature and perfectly capable of deciding their own future, but it had heard no formal statement to that effect.”^[21]

Since, almost all the parties in Southern Cameroons were regionally based, it became difficult for CCC to command popularity nation-wide because the party faced strip competition from other parties in other regions , language barrier, uneasy means of transport and illiteracy of many who could listen neither to the radio nor read newspapers. Owing to the above facts, the CCC with stronghold in Mamfe dispatched its senior militants all over the Southern Cameroons for an informative tour. The party raised a cry that “if every man should sweep before his own door, the town will be clean.”^[22] This meant that if everyone rejected either to reunify with “La Republic du Cameroun” or integrate with Nigeria, a separate political entity for Southern Cameroons would be achieved. ^[23]

Largely, Chief Nyenti’s hope of making Southern Cameroons an independent state was shattered. As the UN Trusteeship Council never accepted the third plebiscite question proposed by his party, that read: “Irrespective of viability or not, do you wish the Southern Cameroons to become a Republic of its own with United Kingdom (UK) government assistance before joining the Federation of Nigeria or the Independent Republic of the Cameroun.”?^[24]The spirit of one’s own choice without imposition was very much alive with chief Nyenti. But he never succeeded to bring it to fulfillment. Meanwhile, the neglect of this political stance was a serious blow to the future of Southern Cameroons.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. p.14.

¹³ NAB, “Cameroon Commoners Congress, Information Service”, p.1

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ngarka, S.T.(1984).“The Third Alternatives Element in the 1961 Southern Cameroons Plebiscite: Issues and Perspectives, Ph.D Thesis in History, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Nigeria p.10.

¹⁹ NAB, File N^o-Va /A 1959/2,“Southern Cameroons Plebiscite”,1961, p.14.

²⁰NAB File No. 3552 VC/9 (1961/5),“Southern Cameroons plebiscite,” 1961. P.23.

²¹ NAB, File N^o310/s, 6,vb/6/1959/3,“Southern Cameroons plebiscite,”1959,p.12

²² Ibid.p.10.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Tabe. (2005) “Chief Nyenti Stephen Eyong of Bachuo-Ntai, Mamfe:A Traditional Ruler and Politician 1925-1999”, p.88.

III. THE EMERGENCE of CHIEF NYENTI'S NEGLIGIBLE THIRD OPTION

As earlier mentioned above, the main political parties in the British Southern Cameroons had divergent views about the political future of the territory. These views were the "integrationists" led by E.M.L. Endeley and the "reunificationists" led by J.N. Foncha.^[25] The administering authority in the territory organised series of conferences including the London Constitutional Conferences of 1957 and 1958 and the Mamfe Plebiscite Conference of 1959 in bid to seek for a lasting solution to the stalemate.^[26] During all these conferences, the British tried but failed to reconcile the leaders of British Southern Cameroons to accept either association with Nigeria or reunification with "La Republique du Cameroun".^[27]

The questions to be presented to the people of Southern Cameroons was the central issue in the political debate when it became certain that only a plebiscite could break the political deadlock in the territory.^[28] A close look at the policies pursued by the opposing camps revealed that they had clearly distinguishable goals.^[29] Especially, when it came to deciding on what alternative questions to put to the people, there was almost an insurmountable difficulty in reaching an agreement.^[30] However, the UN General Assembly Resolution 1352 of October 16th 1959 came out with two alternative questions as follows: (a) Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Federation of Nigeria? (b) Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroun?^[31]

As the debate between the protagonists unfolded, a third view about the political future of Southern Cameroons emerged in 1959 from Chief Nyenti the leader of CCC who never supported the reunification of Southern Cameroons with "La Republique du Cameroun" that the ruling KNDP stood for and the integration of Southern Cameroons with Nigeria that Cameroons People National Convention (CPNC) incarnated. In the contrary, the party stood for "the third question" as seen above that read: "Irrespective of viability or not, do you wish the Southern Cameroons to become a Republic of its own with United Kingdom (UK) government assistance before joining the Federation of Nigeria or the Independent Republic of the Cameroun.?" The British who

intended to use the Mamfe Conference as an opportunity to persuade Southern Cameroonians towards association with Nigeria were greatly embarrassed by the emergence of the third view on the political future of the territory, which was seemingly very popular.^[32]

The view advocated for a separate political entity for Southern Cameroons implied that Southern Cameroons should attain independence without integration with Nigeria and without reunification with "La Republique du Cameroun". Others adherents of the option in Southern Cameroons were P.M. Kale its chief advocate who, in 1959, withdrew from the KPP and founded the Kamerun United Party (KUP) and Samson A. George and Jesco Manga William of the Cameroun Indigenous Party (CIP).^[33]

In October 1959, the delegates from the Southern Cameroons were invited to the UN in New York in another attempt to establish a lasting solution to the political future of Southern Cameroons.^[34] At the UN, Foncha maintained his stance for the separation of the Southern Cameroons from Nigeria because "it would leave the door wide open for the building of a greater Cameroon." Endeley, on the other hand argued strongly in favour of association with Nigeria because he did not want" Foncha and KNDP to take the Southern Cameroons and its people to a joy ride to an unknown destination." He went further to state that it will be unwise to abandon a secured and floating vessel which offers us sure landing to allow ourselves to drift in an open life boat because we hope to be picked up by a new and better vessel which we have not even seen on the horizon."^[35]

One would have expected that since a consensus could not be reached at between Endeley and Foncha, the United Nations Organization (UNO) would have brought in the third option for Southern Cameroons to achieve independence as a separate territory but this option was neglected even though it was the most popular.

IV. JUSTIFICATIONS for the NEGLIGIBLE POLITICAL OPINION

It is possible to locate why in spite of the petitions, threats and intimidation from the advocates of the third option, the UN neglected its inclusion in the plebiscite questions. It was not convincing enough to believe as presented by J. O. Field that the 'third option' was never accepted as part of the plebiscite questions because it was raised after the final decision had been taken. As stated below:

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 100 – 101.

²⁶ Chem Langhë, B. (1976). "The Kamerun Plebiscites (1959-1961): Perception and Strategies," Ph.D. Thesis in History, University of British Columbia, 1976.p.65.

²⁷ Mbile N. N (2000) Cameroon Political Story Memories of an Authentic Eye Witness. Limbe; Presbyterian Printing Press. p.198-202.

²⁸ NAB File No: 1303, Vc/a (1961) 4.5, 1961, p.8.

²⁹ Ngarka, "The Third Alternative Element in the 1961 Southern Cameroons Plebiscite: Issues and Perspectives", p.24

³⁰ Mbile (2000)., Cameroon Political Story Memories of an Authentic Eye Witness, p.190.

³¹ Ngoh V. J (1996).. *History Of Cameroon Since 1800*. Buea; Press book Limbe . p.214.

³² .Ebune J. (2004) "The Making of the Federal System", In *Cameroon From the Federal to a Unitary State, 1901-1972, A critical Study* by Ngoh V.J. Limbe : Design House. pp.48-49.

³³ Kale P. M. (1967) *Political Evolution in the Cameroon*. . Buea : Government Printers. p.69

³⁴ Ngoh V.J. (2004). *Cameroon From a Federal to a Unitary State, 1961-1972, A Critical Study*. Limbe : Design House. pp.48-49.

³⁵ Ngoh, (2011) *The Untold Story of Cameroon Reunification: 1955-61*, Limbe: Press Print. pp 21-22.

There was undoubtedly a body of opinion in favour of independence for the Southern Cameroons but it was difficult to say how large it was. The political parties proposing independence had made their appearance only after the General Assembly had determined what the plebiscite questions should be; there had been no general election since then or any other means of testing their strength, and it was therefore very difficult to measure the degree of support they enjoyed.^[36]

An in-depth analysis would show that the neglect of third option was rather influenced more by lack of political will (bad faith) and economic considerations, than by anything else. Many have classified the above statement by J. O. Field as a misrepresentation of the actual situation that existed in the Southern Cameroons at the time. As matter of fact, political parties (KUP, CIP and CCC) that advocated for a separate political entity for British Southern Cameroons were created before the conference. Drawing from the discussion above, it can be observed that the idea of a 'third option' had been articulated before the adoption of General Assembly Resolution 1352 of October 16th, 1959.^[37] Furthermore, this statement contradicted Chief Nyenti's opinion above that "the irresponsible government of Southern Cameroons at the time never requested for freedom from UN Trusteeship Council."

The UN Trusteeship Council and the Administering Authority on their part were apparently concerned with the termination of the trusteeship irrespective of whether granting independence that denied the Southern Cameroons its unique identity or was in keeping with the terms of the Trusteeship Agreement. Actually, Britain was very hopeful that the integration option would be successful to her. Thus, they did not see any need considering the third option if all it could give them would be the promotion of British interests that could be achieved through integrating the territory with Nigeria.^[38]

In the run up to the termination of the trusteeship in the Southern Cameroons, leading politicians in the territory were more concerned with immediate election victories than the future beyond the elections. They lacked the vision to look ahead into the future to see what the impact of integration with Nigeria or reunification with "La Republique du Cameroun" would yield in the long term. Election campaigns were all centered on the negative aspects of opposing views with no thought of how to avoid the two impending uncertainties. Foncha and his KNDP centered their campaign on the 'Ibo scare', while Endeley capitalized on the political violence that characterized "La Republique du Cameroun" at

the time as well as on the uncertainties of the unknown French system and culture.^[39]

The newly independent Asian and African states also influenced the UN not to consider the third option. According to these states, a separate political entity for Southern Cameroons would further encourage the balkanization of Africa. Therefore, the Afro-Asian members of the UN such as Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Libya, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Republic voted against the independence of the Southern Cameroons.^[40] In addition, a famous political leader like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana argued that it would be an obstacle to the dream of creating the United States of Africa which was a vision that was popular among the newly independent African states at the time. This influenced the UN not to include the third option in the plebiscite questions.

However, the leading opposing political forces in the territory joined the United Nations indirectly in rejecting the idea of a third option. In rejecting the idea, the KNC/KPP alliance on its part naively argued that they would not subscribe to the idea of a second independent Cameroons state blocked between two independent African States. While the KNDP on the other hand approached the call for a 'third alternative' by uniquely advocating a short period of independence for the Southern Cameroons to serve as a first step to reunification with "La Republique du Cameroun".^[41]

On the economic fronts, It was alleged that financial handicap of the British Southern Cameroons was pointedly driven home to the inhabitants by the British Secretary of State for colonies, Alan Lennox-Boyd. Alan brought this to the limelight at the 1957 London Constitutional Conference when he stated that the Southern Cameroons "would not be given the golden key to the Bank of England if they decide to be independent."^[42] The financial difficulty was further buttressed by a Financial, Economic and Administrative Study Commission (FEASC) put in place by Foncha's government in 1959.

Sydney Phillipson who headed the commission came out with findings that revealed that the available revenues in the Southern Cameroons would "just suffice to enable it to maintain...a precarious hand-to mouth existence which amounts to saying that, as a completely independent sovereign state the territory would not at its present stage of development be viable."^[43] The report held that if the Southern Cameroons seceded from Nigeria to stand on its own for a short period before deciding to join "La Republique du Cameroun", its economy would not be able to sustain it during

³⁶U N, Document. No. T/SR, 1086. "Trusteeship Council, Twenty-sixth Session," New York, 1960, p.242

³⁷NAB File No. 3552 VC/9 (1961/5), "Southern Cameroons plebiscite," 1961.p.7.

³⁸NAB, Colonial Office, Document. File No. 340, "Cameroons under United Kingdom Administration: Report for the Year 195," London, 1958, p. 127.

³⁹ NAB, File No.Vc/b, 1959/6, "Fourth Committee of United Nations Organisation," 1959, pp.242-246.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ NAB, File No.Vc/b, 1959/6, "Statement to the Fourth Committee on 24th September, 1959 by Dr. E. M. L. Endeley," p.5.

⁴² NAB, File No.Vc/b, 1959/6, "Fourth Committee of United Nations Organisation," 1959, pp.242-246.

⁴³ Ngoh V. J (2011). Unravelling the History of Cameroon Reunification, 1959-61 In *Eden X'tra No.001*, October pp.5-6

the interval.^[44] The report greatly influenced politicians in the Southern Cameroons to the extent that they could not have any hope in the economic survival of their territory without its being united with either Nigeria or “La Republique du Cameroun”.^[45]

V. RAMIFICATIONS of the NEGLIGIBLE POLITICAL STANCE

With the neglect of the ‘third option’ by the UN Trusteeship Council, radical CCC militants, addressed a letter to the Secretary General of the UN, Dag Hammarskjold, on September 20, 1960. The letter in part stated:...“Judging from your silence, it would appear that both the government of the United Kingdom and the General Assembly of the U N have turned down the CCC’s request for a third question to be put during the forthcoming Plebiscite.”^[46]In this light, the militants were left with no choice but to boycott the plebiscite as a protest against it. They resorted to threats and other intimidating efforts to realize their objectives. However, they were discredited for having “threatened not only civil war, but also the disruption of peace during the plebiscite by either boycotting it or by mutilating the ballot papers.”^[47]

Nevertheless, it was the only way left open for democratically minded Southern Cameroonians to approach the issue.^[48] Radical approaches by advocates of the third option like that of the CCC had some impact on leading politicians in Southern Cameroons who attempted some initiatives at re-considering the third option. The CPNC, (a merger of the KNC and the KPP), suggested the abandonment of the plebiscite and requested that the U N should give the Southern Cameroons independence separately, outside Nigeria and Cameroon.

Chief Nyenti’s middle position during the plebiscite, push the ruling KNDP to reject him as the chief of Bachuo-Ntai village when reunification was finally achieved leading to the intensification of chieftaincy crisis in that village in 1964.^[49] Chief Nyenti paid very dearly for holding and expressing his own view on a political matter he was no stranger to. To confirm this, S M Ebai Agbaw, chief of Okoyong in a private correspondence to Emmanuel Egbe Tabi, a former Minister boastfully affirmed that he had been very instrumental in replacing chief Nyenti, an anti-

reunificationist with S Ncho Mbu, a staunch supporter of KNDP and a reunificationist in the village of Bachuo-Ntai.^[50] Upon discovering this after a number of years in 1989, Chief Nyenti openly accused Hon. E.T. Egbe for being the sole cause of chieftaincy crisis in Manyu Division as he addressed E.T. Egbe in the following words:

Hon . Egbe , stop fooling around with Cameroon social justice. You’ve come to grips with it . Surrender or triumph : the way out is your honourable retirement .Enough is Enough. Stagnant Manyu is tired of you – stagnant because Manyu hasn’t a trusted middlemen,as in Mezam, in delivering the goods .Withdraw your letter No ETE/185/BNCS/99 of 15 January,1989 to the Hon Minister,and repent from the lies written and unwritten therein. For now, you and any of your collaborators have swallowed a piece of burning coal because you work against the laws of nature.^[51]

Other examples of chiefs who were dethronement for not supporting the ruling KNDP’s position during the plebiscite of 1961,could be cited in the villages of Kembong and Nchang. In the village of Kembong, there was intensification of chieftaincy crisis that started in 1960 between Chief G.E.B Obenson who did not support the ideologies of the KNDP and Denis Tabot who stood strongly behind the KNDP.^[52] In the face of this, the government manipulated the people to replace Chief G.E.B Obenson with Denis Tabot. His dethronement was spearheaded by Hon.W.N.O Effiom who was the speaker of the West Cameroon House of Assembly (WCHA) at the time.^[53] This action was highly condemned by recognized quarter heads in a letter addressed to the Prime Minister of Southern Cameroons, Dr. J N Foncha, that reads:

We, the undersigned, on behalf of many others, hereby oppose to the deposition of chief G E B Obenson of Kembong Town in Mamfe Division. It is a well Known fact that the KNDP Controlled Council at Kembong and has no other duty to perform than to depose all chiefs who did not advocate of the KNDP ideologies as they have always done. The chairman of this Council and even Hon. WNO Effiom have been the people who have always come to incite the people of Kembong Town to pass a vote of no confidence on this chief and to arrange that people who are not even quarter heads sign false declaration deposing this chief and installing one Denis Tabot . We wonder what part Effiom and others have to play with Kembong Chieftaincy on the 23rd July, 1960, Effiom came to Kembong and held talk with his KNDP Supporters and assured them he will over-rule the matter with the Premier when it gets to Buea . after the has been over-ruled in the council meeting of 21st July 1960 that chief Obenson must

⁴⁴Phillipson S. (1959). .Financial, Economic and Administrative Consequences to the Southern Cameroons of Separation from the Federation of Nigeria . Buea : p. 34.

⁴⁵ U N. “Yearbook of the United Nations 1946-47,” New York, Kraus Reprint, 1974, p.839.

⁴⁶ NAB, File No.Vc/b,1960/1 “London November Talks, Press Release No. 1084 Southern Cameroons Information Service”. October -November, 1960,p.10

⁴⁷ Kale, Political Evolution in the Cameroons, p.70

⁴⁸ Chem-Langhee, B. and Njeuma M. Z (1980). The Pan-Kamerun Movement,1964-1961,”in Ndiva Kofele-Kale (ed) An African Experiment in Nation Building: The Bilingual Cameroon Republic since Reunificatio., Colorado: Westview Pres. p.53

⁴⁹ M.A.Nchong M. A (1984) “Emmanuel Tabi Egbe,”Maitrise Dissertation in History, University of Yaounde: p.25.

⁵⁰Ibid., p.26.

⁵¹ Ibid.p.29.

⁵² Ibid.p.14

⁵³NAB, File No:P.1147/s.3, Id192/1, “Chieftaincy of Mamfe Division West Cameroon,” 1962, p.4.

continue to rule . May we know whether he is a Minister of Chieftaincy or Works and Transport? [54]

The letter was signed by twenty Councilors namely: Joseph Ebot, William Njok, Napoleon Ebot, Ayuk Nchang, Peter Ako, Johnson N. Tambe, P.T. Agbor, Dorah Enow, Sarah Mbeng, Susanah Takang, Elias Ashu, I.A. Ojong, S.A. Tabe, B.T. Tambe, Thomas T. Etchu, Linus Ako, Mary Atem, Elizabeth Ofundem, Fredah Etaka and Polinah Tabot.

In the same light, Peter Ashu Nsoesie of Nchang village replaced Chief Moses Ndip Apie as the Chief of Nchang. The latter was a militant of the CPNC, the opposition Party in Southern Cameroons at the time. The former was a staunch supporter of the ruling KNDP. Chief Moses Ndip Apie was dethroned because he did not support reunification. [55] Since he never toed the KNDP line, he was simply removed from the throne when reunification was achieved. [56] This situation was particularly acute in the forest areas because chieftaincy in this area was not a formidable institution. [57]

In another mention, the February 11, 1961 plebiscite resulted to the overwhelming victory of the advocates of the reunification option. The neglect of the third option namely: independence of the Southern Cameroons as a separate political entity left the voters in the Southern Cameroons with the choice of voting for reunification. This explain why 233,571 people in Southern Cameroons voted for the reunification alternative and only 97,741 voted for the integration alternative. [58] As Ngoh. [59] Concisely puts it, “the overwhelming reunification victory was because a respectable section of the Southern Cameroons electorates thought that the reunification option had been replaced with secession and independence as a separate political entity” and they voted for it.

The neglect of the third option was a lost opportunity for the Southern Cameroons to obtain independence before choosing to join either Nigeria or the “La Republique du Cameroun” as the CCC had wished .This explained why the fate of the Southern Cameroons was sealed at the Fouban Constitutional Conference of 1961. President Ahmadou Ahidjo at the conference had an easy victory for his political goals. This is because the bargaining position of Southern Cameroons delegates was greatly weakened given the fact that they had voted in the plebiscite of 1961 to achieve independence by reunifying with the “La Republique du Cameroun” before the plebiscite conference. [60] This became a

very serious political blunder committed by leading Southern Cameroonian politicians.

It is evident from the paper that the Administering Authority and the United Nations did not respect the provision of the trusteeship agreement for the territory’s future in accordance with Article 76b of the UN Charter. Lack of vision was noted where at the height of the decolonization struggle in the territory, the main issues beckoning for the independence of British Southern Cameroons was a plebiscite to be conducted for them to have either integration with Nigeria or reunification with “La Republique du Cameroun” and not complete independence for the territory.

Besides, the limited voices that came from the CCC , the KUP, the CIP and traditional rulers, leading political leaders never saw the importance of the third view due to lack of political will. As a matter fact, there was no difference between joining either Nigeria or “La Republique du Cameroun” because either way, the identity of the Southern Cameroons would have eventually been lost. An approach was simply going to pass the territory from European to African colonialism.

However, taking into consideration the determined efforts by the third alternative advocates in Southern Cameroons like Chief Nyenti’s CCC and Kale’s KUP, we can suggest that an opportunity that would have saved the territory and the United Nations from its present embarrassment from Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) and those advocating for the State of Ambazonia was evaded. It is not out of place to observe that the United Nations did not get it right in the Southern Cameroons.

Finally, the neglected political stance laid ground for Anglophone problem in Cameroon. [61] The seed of the problem was sown by the failure of the UN to include the third option in the plebiscite questions. The Anglophone problem is one of the topics of contemporary Cameroon history. The problem has exhibited itself in various ways but one of its greatest manifestations has been the continuous call by the SCNC on the UN to grant the independence of the Southern Cameroons which had attained the status of a full Region in Nigeria by 1959. [62] The Anglophone problem is a threat to national unity and integration in Cameroon.

VI. CONCLUSION

During the quest for the independence of the British Southern Cameroons in the 1950s, there were two main tendencies namely : integration with Nigeria and reunification with “La Republique du Cameroun”. In 1959, Chief Nyenty’s CCC and some other political leaders advocated for a separate political entity for Southern Cameroons that was never supported by the political leaders that matter at the time in the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Tabe (2007), “The Chieftaincy Institution Among the Banyang and Ejagham of Manyu Division(1922-2011):An Intersection of Tradition and Politics in Cameroon”, Ph.D Thesis in History, University of Yaounde 1 ,p.275.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ngoh, History of Cameroon. P.227.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Tabe, “The Chieftaincy Institution Among the Banyang and Ejagham of Manyu Division.p.147.

⁶¹ CRTV, Bate Besong, Senior Lecturer University of Buea on “Hellow Programme,” National Television Yaounde , 2th March 2007.

⁶² Ngoh, History of Cameroon .p.213.

territory. Their political stance would have been accepted by any conscious Southern Cameroonian who thought first of common interest before personal interest.^[63] But in the above situation, personal interest took precedence over national interest and this was confirmed from the statement made by one of the architects of Reunification Dr John Ngu Foncha when he declared in December 1994 after he resigned from the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) on the 9th of June 1990 that: "The people of Southern Cameroons whom I brought into the union have been ridiculed and the constitutional provisions which protected this Anglophone minority have been suppressed. The people of Southern Cameroons would never have voted unification if it had not been for assurances given that the resulting union would take the form of a federation." Though the CCC strongly protested the two questions for the plebiscite, the protest was not sustained and the arrangement for the holding of the plebiscite on 11th February 1961 went on. The failure of the UN to consider the third option, proposed by the CCC, shaped the history of the Southern Cameroons in both the short and long.

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⁶³ Interview with Nyenti Ashu Elizabeth, Retired Primary Teacher and Wife of Chief Nyenti Stephen Eyong, Mamfe, Age 61 Years, 21st October 2006.