

Loss Aversion and ex-British Southern Cameroons' Nationalist Conflict Escalation in Cameroun Republic

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Abstract

Though the de-colonization of Africa has had a profound and lasting impact on political conflicts in the continent in general and on the war declared on former British Cameroons by President Paul Biya in November 2017, few studies provide an empirical understanding of what became known as the war on “Anglophone Cameroon.” This study explores loss aversion in the escalation of the conflict from the standpoint of rational policymaking in government (Rye, p. 16). Using a structural approach and with inspiration from Robert Mnookin's (1993) framework on barriers to negotiated agreements in conflict studies, I argue that the conflict between the two Cameroons escalated into a violent war because of loss aversion by authorities of Cameroon Republic, only sought to impede ex-British Cameroons' mobilization and to suppress nonviolent challenges to a centralized bureaucratic power structure (Blanton, Mason & Athow, 2001). I posit that the outcome of the policy of the Cameroon Republic to suppress the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons only further escalated the conflict and that it was easy to identify alternative resolutions that might have left the Cameroun Republic (former French Cameroun that gained independence on January 1, 1960) better off.

Introduction

Scholars of post-colonial conflict in Africa including Robert Blanton, David Mason & Brian Athow (2001, p. 473) contended that “With the demise of colonial rule, the former colonies, with

their colonial borders essentially intact, were transformed into some of the most ethnically fragmented states in the world.” The case of Cameroon goes further in that in addition to managing the challenges of “ethnically fragmented” states as described by Mason and Athow (2001), the postcolonial country of Cameroon had the bigger challenge of keeping within its boundaries the separate former UN Trust Territory of British Southern Cameroons. Like South Africa, which included Namibia in 1960, Ethiopia, which included Eritrea or Indonesia, which included Timor, Cameroun, independent on January 1, 1960, also included ex-British Southern Cameroons from October 1, 1961, following flawed decolonization of the latter by the United Kingdom as the trustee of the territory (Fossung, 2004; Anyangwe, 2014, Nfor, 2020). Since October 1961 then, this French-speaking Central African post-colonial state also had to contend with the nationalist aspirations of ex-British Southern Cameroons, who felt unjustly treated at independence by the UK (trustee) and the UN (trustor). The ensuing nationalist conflict in the Cameroons escalated from demands of limited autonomy in the 1960s through a desire to return to a two-state federation status before 1972 to outright separate independence and sovereignty by 1999 (Ekontang-Elad, 1995; Ebong, 1999) and especially more so from 2016. I argue that this conflict escalation was the result of loss aversion by the authorities of Cameroun Republic.

To understand the escalation of the conflict, this paper discusses the concept of loss aversion and rational policy choice as a theoretical basis of the study. It then traces the annexation and colonial occupation of ex-British Southern Cameroons leading to ex-British Southern Cameroons’ nationalism and the attendant violent conflict declared by President Paul Biya on November 30, 2017, against ex-British Southern Cameroons. The paper also links the concept of “loss aversion” to an understanding of the escalation of the nationalism conflict. In conclusion, I claim that the conflict escalated further to full-scale war because in trying to avoid

any losses in rational policymaking, the leadership of Cameroun Republic became involved in a gamble in which the loss would end up being far greater. The critical questions in this analysis are: how did the conflict evolve and what knowledge bases informed the choice of the ‘two cubes of sugar in a basin of water’ **policy***? How can neutral third parties help broker a negotiated settlement? Let’s begin with a discussion of the concept of loss aversion in the theory of social situations of group interaction.

Loss Aversion and theory of social situations of group interaction

According to Fudenberg & Levine (1998), the principle of game theory or what psychologists call the theory of social situations focuses on how groups of people interact. Game theory, according to Thomas Dye (2005, p. 26) is “the study of decisions in situations in which two or more rational participants have choices to make and the outcome depends on the choices made by each.” It is applied, Dye added, to areas in policymaking in which there is no independent “best” choice that one can make – in which the “best” outcomes depend upon what others do. In other words, “players” adjust their conduct to reflect not only their desires and abilities but also their expectations about what others will do. Seen as a “mathematical study of competition and cooperation,” Kaveh Madani (2010) indicated that “[G]ame theory provides a framework for understanding the strategic actions of individual decision makers to develop more broadly acceptable solutions” (p. 225).

In their analysis of loss aversion, psychologists discuss two main branches of game theory: cooperative and noncooperative game theory. Cooperative game theory focuses on predicting which coalitions will form, the joint actions that groups take and the resulting collective payoffs. This situation assumes that groups of players, called coalitions, are the primary units of decision-making, and may enforce cooperative behaviour (Serna, 2016).

Cooperative games can, consequently, be seen as a competition between coalitions of players, rather than between individual players. Noncooperative game theory, on the other hand, deals largely with how intelligent individuals, groups or nations interact with one another to achieve their own goals (Mnookin, 1993; McCabe et al., 2002; Madani, 2010). This branch which some researchers consider as “loss aversion” (Mnookin, 1993) is the one that retains my attention in this paper. As McCabe et al. (2002) stated, [I]n two-person or two-party exchange whoever moves first may give up a sure thing with a certain value in exchange for an anticipated future benefit. Receiving the future benefit, however, is contingent on how the second mover reacts to the first mover’s decision. Intuitively, the second mover can either pursue his/her dominant action (which may leave the first mover with a loss) or reciprocate to achieve a joint maximum to be shared by both movers.

As a concept, loss aversion was first demonstrated by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (1991). Loss aversion refers to the tendency for people to strongly prefer avoiding losses to acquiring gains. Some studies suggest that losses are as much as twice as psychologically powerful as gains. “The central assumption of the theory is that losses and disadvantages have a greater impact on preferences than gains and advantages.” Mnookin (1993, p. 26), a former Director of the Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation, made the point that “most people will take a sure gamble, even where the gamble may have a somewhat higher expected payoff.” The principle of game theory or “loss aversion” as considered in this perspective by Mnookin (1993, p. 27) is that “both sides in a conflict may fight on in the hope that they may avoid any losses, even though the continuation of the dispute involves a gamble in which the loss may end up being far greater.”

This situation may explain the genocidal war on ex-British Southern Cameroons declared by the President of Cameroun Republic on November 30, 2017. The failure, over the decades, to recognize the grievances of ex-British Southern Cameroons and to initiate negotiations toward the return to a two-state federation in the 1992-1993 Constitution Reform process especially after the 1993 Buea Declaration, and later in November 2016 through January 2017 in Bamenda may have become a far greater loss to the Republic of Cameroun (Agejo, 2023; Ashukem, 2023; Ngang, 2023). Failure to consider the grievances and demands of the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons for a return to the two State Federation as known from July 1961, and the repression of the people and arrests and incarceration of the leaders of ex-British Southern Cameroons in January 2017 by Cameroun Republic authorities, pushed the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons to seek total “restoration of independence and sovereignty, an effort begun by Fon Gorgi Dinka in 1985 and Justice Frederick Alobwede Ebong in 1999, viewed as a far greater loss to the Republic of Cameroun.

In arguing that “the process of conflict resolution affects both the size of the pie and who gets what size slice” Mnookin (1993, p. 239) stated that the “behaviour of disputants may affect the size of the pie in a variety of ways.” Once the leadership and people of ex-British Southern Cameroons became very aware that they had effectively been annexed and recolonized after 1972 (Anyangwe, 2008, 2014), and began to seek some form of redress, particularly after 1984 (Dinka, 1985), the Government of Cameroun Republic resorted mainly to repression rather than imagining collaborative problem-solving approaches to the demands of the aggrieved party, ex-British Southern Cameroons.

In his strategic behaviour discussion in game theory, Mnookin (1993) reminded us that when a rational self-interested party is concerned mainly with maximizing the size of his or her

slice of the pie, such behaviour can often lead to inefficient outcomes. Those subjected to claiming tactics often respond in kind, and the net result typically is to push up the cost of the dispute resolution process. Mnookin cited *Buchwald v. Paramount Pictures Corp.* as a good example of a case in which the economic costs of hardball litigation obviously and substantially shrunk the pie. Parties may be tempted to engage in strategic behaviour, hoping to get more. Often all they do is shrink the size of the pie.

Another barrier in loss aversion studies is a by-product of the way the human mind processes information, deals with risks and uncertainties, and makes inferences and judgments (Mnookin, 1993, p. 243). Research by cognitive psychologists, including Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1995) suggests several ways in which human reasoning often depart from that suggested by theories of rational judgment and decision-making.

In his monumental work on negotiation barriers, Mnookin (1993) also provided some reasons why loss aversion can be a cognitive barrier to the negotiated resolution of conflict. He cited the example where “both sides may fight on in a dispute in the hope that they may avoid any losses, even though the continuation of the dispute involves a gamble in which the loss may end up being far greater” (p. 244). Loss aversion, Mnookin contended, “may explain Lyndon Johnson's decision, in 1965, to commit additional troops to Vietnam as an attempt to avoid the sure loss attendant to withdrawal, and as a gamble that there might be some way in the future to avoid any loss at all.

In selecting policy choices in governance, governments may shoot for rationalism without often weighing the consequences. Rationalism in policy studies focuses on the achievement of maximum social gain. This choice of policy stipulates that in selecting policies, governments should aim at “making gains to society that exceed costs by the greatest amount”

(Rye, p. 15). In discussing this policy choice, Rye contended that “a policy is rational when the difference between the values it achieves and the values it sacrifices is positive and greater than any other policy alternative. In this kind of cost-benefit analysis, governments must be seen to make policy choices depending on the known weight of each value preference on the entire society. One may ask whether in selecting the policy considered rational, the government of Cameroun Republic took into account the many barriers that may exist to the rational policy choice (Rye, p. 16) to suppress ex-British Southern Cameroons rather than seek a dialogue approach to nation-building.

Ex-British Southern Cameroons’ almost 200 years of colonial subjugation

Carlson Anyangwe has decried the more than 168 years of British Cameroons' colonial subjugation under different masters: Britain (1858-1884), Germany (1885-1916), Britain again (1916-1961) and Cameroun Republic (1961- Present). In other words, British Southern Cameroons were always a subject of colonial subjugation. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 of December 1960 on the Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples did not bring independence to all former European colonies in Africa, including British Southern Cameroons. Although 1960 is considered historically the year of African independence, Southwest Africa, British Cameroons, Spanish Sahara, Angola, Rhodesia, and Mozambique, for example, were yet to gain independence. After the independence of Angola (1974.), Mozambique (1975), and Rhodesia (1985), came the turns of former Southwest Africa (Namibia) and Eritrea following protracted violent liberation wars. Ex-Spanish Sahara (Western Sahara) and ex-British Southern Cameroons continue to this day to wage nationalist struggles. Western Sahara seeks independence from the Kingdom of Morocco and ex-British Southern Cameroons struggle to break free from *La Republique du Cameroun* (Cameroun Republic) in

keeping with the UN Charter in its article 76(b), the UN Trusteeship Agreement of 1946, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and UNGA Resolution 1514 of 1960 on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

The ex-British Southern Cameroons (Southern Cameroons in short) is the southern half of the League of Nations Mandated Territory and, later United Nations Trust Territory known as the Cameroons under United Kingdom administration. The territory lies between the Federal Republic of Nigeria and *Republique du Cameroun* (Cameroun Republic) in West Central Africa. Ex-British Southern Cameroons has an area of 16,581 square miles and a population by the year 2005 of about six million people (SCNC, 2005).¹ In making a case for the restoration of Southern Cameroons' independence, Anyangwe (2005) notes that Southern Cameroons is larger both in area and in population than, for instance, British Honduras and Fiji, and several other former British colonial dependencies including The Gambia. Southern Cameroons is also larger than some other African countries such as Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Djibouti, Burundi, and Guinea Bissau.

A member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) today, former British Southern Cameroon is still seeking to "restore her independence and sovereignty" (Ebong, 1999) when considering the contradictions of the de-colonization of Africa. The Southern Cameroons' restoration of independence and sovereignty conflict can best be appreciated from a backdrop of the political history of Africa. This history reveals several landmark developments. They include Europe's scramble for and partition of the continent, colonization, the contradictions of the de-colonization process, and the nature of African independence.

¹ Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), an umbrella organization of nationalist movements struggling to restore the statehood of ex-British Southern Cameroons.

The Southern Cameroons Independence conflict is the story of a self-governing people with a homeland, a defined territory and fully functioning democratic institutions (Munzu, 1993), who were compelled to independence, by the United Kingdom and the United Nations, to achieve "independence by joining" one of its two neighbours, the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the west or the *Republique du Cameroun* (Cameroun Republic) to the east (UN Resolution 1608.) The people of Southern Cameroons felt they were unjustly denied their fundamental right of self-determination when other former colonies were granted independence and sovereignty by the 1960 United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples also known as United Nations Resolution 1514. The Southern Cameroons Independence conflict is, consequently, a nationalist conflict involving a people and a territory determined to "regain total independence and self-determination" (Epie, 1993). Described variously and by different interests as "secession," "separation," "restoration of statehood," or "revival of independence and sovereignty," this conflict pitches the former British Southern Cameroons against ex-French Cameroon or *La Republique du Cameroun* (Republic of Cameroon) in a conflict viewed as 'potentially explosive and capable of threatening the maintenance of international peace and security' (Elad, 1995, p. 9). Despite the potentially explosive nature of the conflict, several major reasons explained the invisible nature of the conflict for many decades. Some of these major reasons included the hostility of some people and groups on the creation of new states, the perception of self-determination as destructive to the modern state, and the inability of subordinate groups to use the power they have to change their situation.

Some proponents of the global marketplace argue against the creation of new nation-states in a world that is increasingly globalizing and coming together in regional blocs (Ohmae,

1995; Cooper, 2003). In *End of the Nation-State*, Kenichi Ohmae (1995) asserted that “regional economies are the engines of prosperity while traditional nation-states have become unnatural, even impossible, business units in a global economy.” Those who support this view perceive self-determination as serving no purpose at a time when state boundaries have diminished in significance in the lives of most people. Closely related to the views of these globalization scholars are state-centric scholars who perceive self-determination as destructive to the modern state.

Despite the existence of these views, groups that are victims of colonial, neo-colonial and other forms of oppression and have a sense of their distinctiveness continue to assert the right to self-determination. Such groups view self-determination as “a basic principle for realizing the freedom to control one’s own life...the prerequisite for achieving positive human conditions for a decent life and self-fulfilment; the unchangeable aspiration of a people” (Jeong, 2000, p. 223). According to Hannum (1990, p. 27), the principle of self-determination, developed with the emergence of nationalism in the 18th and 19th centuries, spread throughout the world unifying peoples into nations. The participants in this study culminating in this paper saw the independence of ex-British Southern Cameroons as a way of bringing peace between the ‘two Cameroons.’ For many ex-British Southern Cameroons people interviewed, the core list of human needs identified by Azar (1990) and Burton (1990), including the needs for personal and collective security, distinct identity, social recognition, freedom, participation in decision-making combined with historically separate self-governing status provided a particular focus of conflict. The people perceived their homeland as victimized through a denial of their separate identity, and consequently, an absence of security evidenced by the “*annexation and re-colonization*” of their territory. The notions of living under “annexation” and “re-colonization,”

very recurrent in the narratives of many interviewees, appeared to be part of the reasons why the need for an independent statehood remained so significant for the people.

The people interviewed claimed that “*the remedy to colonization is de-colonization*” explaining that their problem was neither ethno-linguistic, ethno-religious, ethno-racial, nor ethno-national as common in other post-colonial settings in Africa (Malaquias, 2002). According to the narratives of many of the people, ex-British Cameroons always had a separate colonial history. Yaounde University History Professor, Verkijika Faso (2009, pp. 141-150) has indicated that the “British Cameroons’ struggle for identity and autonomy dates back to World War I.” For the people of the territory, as a people in history, statehood restoration only seeks to correct an injustice done to ex-British Southern Cameroons when the United Nations facilitated the annexation of the territory rather than grant the people independence as the world body did to other European colonies in Africa in 1960.

Unfinished de-colonization

The literature on the British Southern Cameroons reveals a history of the unfinished business of decolonizing the territory (Anyangwe, 2008, 2014; Nfor, 2020; Ebong, 1999; Litumbe, 2012; Koning & Nyamnjoh, 1997; Jua & Konings, 1994; Jing, 2023). The idea of self-determination for all colonies, which was popular by the end of World War II, was given effect by Article 76(b) of the United Nations Charter. Winston Churchill, a representative of the British Conservative opinion, asserted that the idea applied only to European nations; the United Nations Charter was merely a guide and not a rule and he was not prepared to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire (Coleman, 1971, p. 232). This view in British colonial policy had a major effect on British Southern Cameroons. Rather than grant independence to the territory by UN Charter Article 76 (b), and UNGA Resolution 1514 of 1960 on Granting Independence to Colonial

Countries and Peoples, “the United Kingdom handed the territory to France as a small gift from the Queen to General De Gaulle and has since never been interested in anything happening in or to the territory” (Anyangwe, 2014)

Among the people of the territory, the external origins of the continued colonial experience that culminated in a genocidal war beginning in 2017 in the territory are well known. Many of the people expressed great frustration at the plight of the territory and its people from the way the territory was liquidated by Britain. The following excerpt, in Cameroon Pidgin English, collected in 2008 in the Seaport town of Victoria renamed “Limbe” to obscure the link with Britain, is an example of how a vast majority of the people of the territory feel.

Excerpt:

We understand say na white men dem kill we. But weti we are important na say if a woman get belly, the woman must come born one day. Wonna do weti do weti, the woman go born. Plenty this thing na Whiteman na dem de torment we so. And they know. All this big talk about mediation by big big countries na only an extension of big power colonialism when we do get a place. They decide weti whe they want and don't care what happens to us here. Why them no gi we independence as we are want? Them hand Southern Cameroons na for who? Na which Cameroon them hand nam? Wait! Na Whiteman de worry we and them know.

[Trans. We understand that our problem was caused by our White masters. But what is important is that if a woman is pregnant, she will ultimately give birth. Whatever happens, the woman will give birth someday. Most of these torments that we suffer are caused for us by the Whiteman. And they know. All the great talk about mediation by the big powers is just an extension of the colonialism of great powers and we have no place in it. They decide whatever they want and do not care what happens to us here. Why did they not grant us independence as we wanted? To whom did they hand Southern Cameroons? To which Cameroon did they hand Southern Cameroons? Wait! It is the Whiteman causing these problems and they know.]

The people of ex-British Southern Cameroons understood their helplessness but remained defiant and outspoken about what happened to them and how they continued suffering under a new colonial authority whom they named French Cameroon and France.

The people of the territory argue that after the Southern Cameroons achieved self-governing status in 1954, the territory established all necessary state institutions, attributes, and symbols. They know that the borders of ex-British Southern Cameroons were well-demarcated, precise, recognizable, and protected. Yet the administering authority, the United Kingdom, urged the United Nations to impose a plebiscite on the State of the Southern Cameroons despite the basic objective of the Trusteeship Agreement of December 13, 1946. As with other Trusteeship Territories, the logical, fair, and proper thing for the people of the territory would have been the independence and admission of British Southern Cameroons into membership of the United Nations following the results of the 1961 elections in the territory (UN Res. 1608). According to Article 76 (b) of the UN Charter, they understood that their independence was in no doubt especially following the results of the April 21 independence vote at the UN General Assembly as 64 YES, 23 No, and 10 Abstentions.

The basic objective of the Trusteeship System was to promote the development of the inhabitants of Trusteeship Territories progressively toward Self-Government or independence by Article 76 (b) of the United Nations Charter. The people argue that ex-British Southern Cameroons achieved Self-Government within the meaning of Article 76 (b) of the United Nations Charter in 1954. The Cameroun Republic or ex-French Cameroun achieved the same status in 1958; was granted independence by France on January 1, 1960, and became a member of the United Nations on September 20, 1960, as *Republique du Cameroun*. Unlike the other Trusteeship Territories, British Southern Cameroons, self-governing from 1954, were denied independence status and admission into membership of the United Nations. The United Kingdom, the Trustee, rather decided to barter the Southern Cameroons to another former Class B Trust Territory.

It is evident from interviews conducted in the territory that the people blame their plight on the United Nations and the United Kingdom for not finishing the job entrusted to them by the international community. Regarding the nature of the liquidation of the territory at independence, the people hold the view that the problem arose when the United Nations forced a deceptive federation on them. They believe the “*UN’s deceitful ‘independence by joining la Republique du Cameroun’ has not worked. Instead, it has created a predator/prey relationship between the two states; former category B territories of the League of Nations and later Trust Territories of the United Nations.*” They state clearly that they were deprived through that “joining” which never existed and does not exist legally and that their people were reduced to paupers and as an eternal colony.

Britain and the United Nations imposed an unnecessary plebiscite on the territory: (1) “Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the Federal Republic of Nigeria?” (2) “Do you want to achieve independence by joining the independent *La Republique du Cameroun*?” (UNGA. Res.1608 XV of April 21, 1961). Many of the territory’s people cited a local Chief in their territory, Achirimbi, who, appalled by the predicament imposed on the territory, said “*Nigeria na water, Cameroon na fire*” meaning that the options were like choosing between the devil and the deep blue sea. With the dilemma created by the United Kingdom and the United Nations, *Republique du Cameroun* overran Southern Cameroons, occupied it and proceeded to re-colonize the territory. According to Fossung (2004, p. 4), “the territory was the only United Nations Trusteeship Territory bartered from sovereignty to sovereignty as if it were mere chattel. The territory lost its identity, its sovereignty, and national existence.”

The people think the consequences of the pseudo-choices imposed on them by the United Kingdom and the United Nations “...are unacceptable, inadmissible and unfathomable.” Not

only has the population continued to suffer political exclusion in *Republique du Cameroun*, which many refer to as “marginalization,” but the territory’s natural resources continued to be plundered and depleted; their rights and basic freedoms as a people remained violated with impunity from October 1961 (Fonlon, 1964). The people believe the international community helped create the problem for them. It all started with Britain, the Trusteeship administering authority. Contrary to the option of independence as given to Togo, another British-administered Trust Territory inherited from German colonization and the League of Nations after WW I, British Southern Cameroons were refused the independence option. To get the cooperation of the United Nations and the Western world, the United Kingdom portrayed the Self-Governing state of the Southern Cameroons as an unviable territory that was not to be allowed to become a separate political entity as “The golden key of the Bank of England” was not going to be given to the British Southern Cameroons described as incapable of surviving. The nonviability was a stunt considering that a 1963 survey report on Southern Cameroons’ balance of trade from 1959 to 1961 by Bowling Green State University’s Professor, D.E. Gardinier, confirmed the viable economic standing of Southern Cameroons at that time in history. The refusal of independence and sovereignty per UNGA Res 1514 signified therefore that Britain, the Trusteeship Administering Authority, had considerations other than economic viability for handing Southern Cameroons to *La Republique du Cameroun* and France.

The nonviable thesis on the territory, it turned out, was merely a ploy to sacrifice the territory considered “expendable.” As political historian Aka (2002, p. 171) found out, the Southern Cameroons yielded more revenue than The Gambia, another British territory in West Africa. Though a mere quarter the size of British Southern Cameroons, The Gambia was granted independence and British Southern Cameroons were refused because the latter was not viable.

The inconsistencies of this de-colonization provide the historical and legal foundations of the restoration of statehood struggle and the genocidal war in the territory.

Annexation, colonial occupation, and subjugation

As soon as British troops left Southern Cameroons on September 30, 1961, at midnight, troops from *Republique du Cameroun* occupied the territory (Anyangwe, 2008, pp. 5-19). Since then, the government of *Republique du Cameroun* initiated manoeuvre after manoeuvre to destroy British Southern Cameroons politically, economically, and culturally. To further this goal, the *Republique du Cameroun* ended the autonomy of Southern Cameroons. It all began with the unilateral Constitution passed into law without the participation of British Southern Cameroons (Buea Declaration, 1993), and the change of the name of British Southern Cameroons to West Cameroon. For *Republique du Cameroun*, ex-British Southern Cameroons was only a part of Cameroun's territory (German Kamerun) that returned home such that for the Government of *République du Cameroun*, the 1961 Foumban Talks were intended only to welcome home British Southern Cameroons (Fonkem, 2014). This perception may be erroneous considering that German Kamerun was extinct in WW I and even then, many parts of German Kamerun are today in Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, and Gabon. Besides, from WW I and all through the interwar years, both territories evolved separately through the League of Nations and the United Nations as separate entities under different colonial masters.

In the data collected and analyzed, the people of the territory lamented the situation of ex-British Southern Cameroons. They stated that since they were made to join *Republique du Cameroun* in 1961 in a union without act, they have degenerated a great deal. As they stated, their “*democratic institutions - parliament, Common Law system, government, strong educational system - have been suppressed. The few tarred roads we inherited from British*

colonialism decayed daily. No new ones were constructed. There is no hope for any shortly. Most of the people have no portable water at all. Yet, we are an oil-producing territory. The whole Southern Cameroons buy gas, produced by us, dearer than it costs in Yaounde, Douala, Sangmelima, Garoua, and Bafoussam, all towns in La Republique du Cameroun and hundreds of miles away from the Southern Cameroons, the seat of gas production. This is our colonial situation.”

This picture of the territory, as painted by the people, can only exist in a colonial situation where people and territory are exploited and coerced into silence. From the stories of people, ex-British Southern Cameroons fit the colonial mould in many ways. The stories collected in the territory were complemented with literature on the colonial experiences of the territory. For example, a library search revealed that the territory was marginalized in national life in *Republique du Cameroun*. A territory considered one of two constituent states of the 1961 Federal Constitution, equal in status had, by 2005, been completely re-colonized and assimilated, such that it was considered not one of two equal states of the country, but one of numerous ethnic groups. Some citizens of ex-British Southern Cameroons indicated that the territory currently known as “*Anglophones*” was now sequestered among the 230 or more ethnic groups of the country such as *Bassa, Beti, Bamileke, Anglophone, Nordist, and Douala*. Having reduced the territory to the status of an ethnic group, the governing elite, and people of *Republique du Cameroun* did not find anything wrong with awarding only a few governing positions to the people of the territory. The people stated, “*What Francophones need to know is that the people of Southern Cameroons are tired of being ruled by Francophone prefects and sous-prefects and governors who come from backgrounds they do not know.*” The people of ex-British Southern Cameroons found it unacceptable “*to be reduced from a people in international law, a nation*

with an international personality and recognized boundaries, to a tribe in another nation.” One of those interviewed recalled a story in which Mayor Smith Becke of the Buea Council in ex-British Southern Cameroons reminded President Paul Biya of Cameroun in his official speech during the former’s visit to Buea that “*Mr. President, there is no Anglophone tribe in Cameroon.*”

As a subjugated and repressed people in *Republique du Cameroun*, the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons were not only labelled “dogs but also not regarded worthy of participating in the governance of the country in any apparent numbers. Increasingly, the governing elite in *Republique du Cameroun* resorted to the colonial tradition of co-opting a few people of Southern Cameroons’ origin who were used as the appointed leaders of the people periodically as colonizers used native inhabitants as policemen or soldiers in the past. A senior official of the ex-British Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), mentioned that his people had conducted a great deal of research to demonstrate what he described as, “*The list of colonial administrators and occupying forces that La Republique du Cameroun used to strengthen its oppressive rule in Southern Cameroons.*” Of the fourteen senior administrative personnel in the Southwest Region or Province (Southern Zone of Southern Cameroons), eleven of them were French Cameroun nationals representing 79% of the senior administrative cadre. Many of these officials were said to not understand English, the administrative language in ex-British Southern Cameroons. The situation was not different in the Northwest Region or Province and each of the thirteen Administrative Divisions of the territory of Southern Cameroons. Given the authoritative nature of governance in Cameroon, the different administrative officials are very powerful in the territory; they recognize and boast about their power because they know they do not owe the power to the people under them.

The colonial officers are appointed by the President of the Republic of Cameroon, the only person to whom they owe allegiance. The people of the ex-British Southern Cameroons recount several stories to illustrate their colonial situation. One such story was the 2006 crisis at the University of Buea in which the students had gone to the colonial Governor of the Southwest Province with their grievances. The governor [name withheld], a man of French Cameroun origin, remarked in French that "*Vous ne pouvez rien, on a des armes*" [Transl. There is nothing you can do, we have the arms]. The seemingly helpless people affirmed during the interviews that most colonial administrators in ex-British Southern Cameroons are people of French Cameroun descent and that in their work they mainly use the French language of the colonizing country. The government eventually directed those arms at the unarmed students, killing some and wounding several others (Nsom, 2006). This situation demonstrates Robert Hind's (1984, p. 546) view that the administration of a place by outsiders is an essential feature of conventional colonialism. Fanon (1967, p. 38), on colonial experience, stated, "In the colonial countries...the policemen and the soldiers, by their frequent and direct action, maintain contact with the native and advise him using butts and napalm not to budge." This situation is typical in ex-British Southern Cameroons. According to Fomotar (2007, p. 4), "The police and gendarmerie are all over the territory."

Repression as a Colonial Tradition

In 1961, the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons were contemplating their political future based on the Two Alternatives imposed on the territory by the United Nations (Res. 1608). On the subject of the two options imposed on the people, Tande (1999, p. 12) recalled the following questions posed to the people by Premier Endeley, one of the leaders of Southern Cameroons, in 1961: Who amongst you would like to live in French Cameroun, a country red

with the blood of thousands of innocent victims killed by terrorists and the Ahidjo regime...who amongst you will like to live in a country which lacks complete respect for human dignity and where you cannot speak out your mind freely or pursue your business in peace ... Who amongst you would like your children to grow up in servitude? ... That will be our lot if we join French Cameroun. Endeley's questions and warning were similar to the prophecy by Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, who noted in his address to the people of Southern Cameroons on Radio Nigeria on January 22, 1961, that "*If you vote against Nigeria, I cannot see how you can avoid living a life of poverty and hardship, and under the constant shadow of violence which the Government cannot control. You will be putting yourselves under a country which has different laws and a completely different attitude towards life.*"

According to many accounts of the people of the territory, the picture of things in French Cameroun questioned by Emmanuel L. Endeley and envisaged by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa turned out to be prophetic for the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons. To achieve its goals in ex-British Southern Cameroons, *Republique du Cameroun* changed the governance system immediately after they moved in troops to take over from the British forces. The President of *Republique du Cameroun* issued Decree Number 5 of October 4, 1961, to make the state of emergency declaration renewable every six months. The Decree empowered the President to declare a state of emergency without any consultation and introduced detention camps called *Centres d'Internement Administratifs*. Albert Mukong (1990, pp. 48-50), a victim of the repressive machine of *Republique du Cameroun*, described the situation in *Prisoner without a Crime*. In the book, Mukong pointed out that under the decree, persons considered by the government to be "dangerous to public security" were sent to Gestapo-like camps and other

detention centres. Known as the *Brigades Mixes Mobiles (BMM)*, the brigades were infamous for using torture instruments such as the *balançoire*, and for passing electric current through sensitive parts of the bodies of victims. This Decree was followed by Ordinance No. 62/18 of March 12, 1962, on the repression of dissent. These repressive policies, which were features of political life in French Cameroon, were imposed on ex-British Southern Cameroons. In their discussion of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon, Konings & Nyamnjoh (1997, p. 228) described how “the Government of Cameroon relied on a strategy of repression” over the years to silence the population of ex-British Southern Cameroons. These scholars on Cameroon society noted how the leaders of the Anglophone movements tend to be harassed by security forces, threatened with arrest, and subjected to travel restrictions. Before the declaration of war on ex-British Southern Cameroons on November 30, 2017, repression had increased with mounting threats of the proclamation of an independent Southern Cameroons, and Southern Cameroons Peoples Council rallies and demonstrations were officially banned in the territory referred to in *Republique du Cameroun* as “Anglophone provinces.”

The highly repressive atmosphere and the regular raids on the population, known as *calé calé* (Fomotar, 2007, p. 4) greatly cowed the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons, who had not known such experiences under British colonialism. Many people in the territory recalled how they had to carry National Identification papers including a *Laissez Passer* (Pass) each time they travelled in the country. People who intended to move out of town for any reason had to first obtain a Pass from the *Prefet's* (colonial administrator) office, detailing who they were and where they were going. While on a trip of only ten miles, for example, a traveller in ex-British Southern Cameroons could be stopped several times by different armed units of the police and the *gendarmerie*, and his/her papers checked for any number of reasons, which were unclear to

the ordinary people. Carlson Anyangwe (2003, p. 13), painted the picture of life in ex-British Southern Cameroons in the *Republique du Cameroun* as follows: “The subjugation and terrorization strategy [is] meant to impress on the people that they [are] hopeless, powerless and that any contemplated resistance to *Republique du Cameroun* occupation would be futile.”

Anyangwe also provided a picture of the situation of people who do not necessarily have to travel to encounter the regime, since *Republique du Cameroun* officials come to your home. As Anyangwe (2003, p. 13) observed,

Routinely carried out, the operation followed a fairly standardized pattern. As early as 4 a.m. heavily armed military forces would invade a pre-selected town or village; moving systematically from house to house; breaking in if the occupant hesitated to open at the first command to do so; moving from street to street, from one locale to another; demanding each person to produce their *carte d'identité*, *ticket d'impôt*, *recepissé*, *reçu*, *carte du parti*, *patente*, *permis de conduire*, *laissez passer*, *carte de séjour*, or other *pièces* (documents) the soldiers chose to ask.

Anyangwe (2008, p. 97) also presented an image of the psychological warfare waged with sadistic intensity on the people of Southern Cameroons by the Government of the Cameroon Republic. He described how on 1 October 1961, the peaceful people of Southern Cameroons woke up from sleep and found, to their utter terror, their land occupied by trigger-happy Cameroon Republic forces. Those forces habitually harassed and terrorized people in and out of their houses, ransacked homes, and businesses, and committed acts of violence and banditry in the process. Those forces continued into the war to collect taxes and illegal impositions, to ensure compliance with anti-people government policies, and to abuse persons from ex-British Southern Cameroons' territory, a territory perceived to be anti-establishment.

As the decades rolled by from 1961 to the declaration of war on November 30, 2017, and even after, the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons had to adapt to the new culture unwillingly, mainly for survivalist reasons. They either had to adapt to that imposed culture or risk death. In describing the situation in Republique du Cameroun, political historian Verkijika Fanso (1999, p. 4), also provided this clear and dramatic picture of what Ahidjo did after October 1961. For him, it was an absolute use of state power to intimidate and to do and undo, at any time. In 1967, Ahidjo organized the first strange and undemocratic election into the West Cameroon House of Assembly. All the candidates were put on a single list without opposition as if they belonged to one constituency. The single lists in every constituency were then sent to the electorate to endorse. Following this election, Ahidjo surprised every citizen of ex-British Southern Cameroons by sacking the much loved and charismatic Prime Minister, Jua, replacing him with his collaborator, Solomon Tandeng Muna, who was not even a candidate on the list but just endorsed by the electorate to become Members of the House of Assembly. After thus replacing a democratically elected Prime Minister (Augustine Ngom Jua) with a handpicked appointee (Solomon Tandeng Muna), Ahidjo followed this move by flooding ex-British Southern Cameroons with French-speaking administrative officers, many of whom did not understand the English language or the Anglo-Saxon culture of the territory.

The tactic of flooding a colonial territory with citizens from a colonizing state referred to as “demographic dilution” (Aditjondro, 2000, p. 182) has been used very effectively in many colonial situations including the Chinese about the Turkic areas of their country and Iraq in its Kurdish areas. In describing the use of this practice by Indonesia in East Timor, Lawless (1976, p. 948) and Aditjondro (2000, p. 182) noted how “Indonesia tried to quell East Timorese nationalism by tampering with the population balance in the colony.” In the case of the

Cameroon Republic, the practice was started in 1964 with the super-imposition of ex-British Southern Cameroons of a French-speaking Federal Inspector of Administration, a French Cameroonian, Jean-Claude Ngoh, as Federal Inspector of Administration, a position that was neither known nor provided for in ex-British Southern Cameroons. With this Federal Inspector of Administration came a contingent of administrators and military officers from French Cameroon. The practice continued even after the 1990s with the imposition of super mayors known as “Government Delegates” in Bamenda and Kumba, Southern Cameroons cities in which the elected Mayors were individuals of the Southern Cameroons-based Social Democratic Front party (Monono, 2002, p. 2). Stories of a brutal subjugation by a foreign army, culture, and population in Southern Cameroons abound among the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons with whom I had conversations. This is probably the reason the resistance started by Lawyers and Teachers received massive support in the territory from October-November 2016.

Stories of the humiliation of ex-British Southern Cameroons’ disintegration of its governance system, dismissal of its elected authorities, and the demeaning of its people in *Republique du Cameroun* are numerous among the people of the territory. They lament the quality of life in their memory of ex-British Southern Cameroons and the treatment they and their territory continued to get under *Republique du Cameroun*. Such humiliating developments characterized the end of Southern Cameroons’ political autonomy and existence on the political map of Africa. As political historian, Nzefeh (1994, p. 8) stated, “the Anglophones (Southern Cameroons) lost the power to determine their destiny and had henceforth not had any bargaining weapon.” For Nzefeh, “The only secrets Anglophones were initiated into were those of how to thwart the popular aspirations of the Anglophone populace and deliver the critics, dissidents and the non-conformists to the sledgehammer of the secret police.”

Obliterating the existence of the Southern Cameroons as a separate political entity signalled to the people of the territory that, henceforth, the citizens of that territory were not allowed to have or to express their political opinions and aspirations freely.

As a law-abiding people and a people bent on enforcing their legal rights as a people, the people chose "the force of argument" as a slogan for their freedom struggle. The slogan was not an innocent choice because the people did not believe that war was always a solution to political problems. Looking back on history, the people of the territory always recognized how they left Nigeria after 46 years of British administration without even showing a finger. Then the leaders of Nigeria recognized their rights to self-government in 1954.

The determination to break free from over 168 years of colonial subjugation was very evident in the narratives of the people. One of them, emphatically summing up the situation for himself and the majority of his people stated how for him, "and a majority of Southern Cameroons people, anything other than a regain of sovereignty in conformity with international law is simply unacceptable. The contrary will give tacit blessings to impunity and crimes against the peace for which the UN and the civilized world are firmly opposed." While explaining how the situation was part of the ontological outlook as a British Southern Cameroon person, another interviewee noting the dictatorial habits of life in the Cameroon Republic observed that "The president always has his way all the time. Parliament is handpicked; opposition parties exist but in name; and the courts are under the president's direct control. Paul Biya can expect to win the next election because election management, like every institution, is under his control. Every single election, presidential or legislative, since October 1992 has been a deceit forced down the peoples' throats, irrespective of protests. In 1990 a one-party dictatorship was changed into a multiparty system, which promised competitive politics along with the democratic institutions

that should have made it functional. But as soon as Paul Biya saw his power slipping away, he quickly reneged on the change.” This outlook was but one among the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons. It revealed that the people always had a clear understanding of the situation in Cameroun Republic and did not want to continue to be a part of the country.

Missed Opportunities

A close study of the evolution of conflict reveals three missed opportunities after Fomuban in 1961 and the ill-advised 1972 Referendum choice between YES and OUI. These missed opportunities to remedy the situation were in 1993, 1999 and 2016. Let’s discuss each opportunity and seek to understand the rational choice by the government of Cameroun Republic.

UNGA 1608 was itself a major source of conflict. Despite the warnings from plural state theorists including Waltz (1979), Furnivall (1986) and Smith (1986) and despite the warnings from Ambassador Clement Zabloski (1959) and UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold (1961) regarding bringing together peoples with contrasting colonial legacies within the same post-colonial nation-state, the UK and the UN did not hesitate to impose "independence by joining" on the people of British Cameroons. Robert Blanton, David Mason & Brian Athow (2001) provide the major differences between the indirect, decentralized rule of the British which fostered an unranked system of ethnic stratification, and the legacy of the centralized French style which approximated a ranked system. Because unranked systems foster competition between ethnic groups - which can readily spiral into conflict - we posit that the British colonial legacy is positively related to both the frequency and intensity of ethnic conflict.

For the Government of the Cameroun Republic, the pie was always of a fixed size such that a larger slice for ex-British Southern Cameroons would mean a smaller one for the

Cameroun Republic. In other words, the Government of Cameroun Republic failed to think critically in terms of creating value, and options considering both parties' underlying interests and preferences. By insisting on pursuing a “one-and-indivisible Cameroon” policy at all costs and ignoring the historical and legal basis of the postcolonial country, the government of Cameroun appeared to have become far more averse to any loss. In doing so, the government of Cameroun which thought it would use the power approach to silence the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons, was to realize the fear of loss became more costly to the country. Using the power approach refers to using one’s power to try to influence the other and gain an advantage. Conscious of her power as the party with the greater military strength, military arsenal, political clout as a sovereign state, the monopoly of intelligence, or ownership of financial abilities, the Cameroun Government assured herself of a quick victory in silencing the people of British Southern Cameroons. In this kind of power-based negotiation, with no rules and committing other savage acts, including indiscriminate killings of civilians, and outright burning down of hospitals and hundreds of villages (BBC, 2018) the government of Cameroun opted out of the two negotiation attempts by Switzerland and Canada (Kindzeka, 2023). In targeting winning militarily as the highest value, the Cameroun Government believed she would as stated earlier use her superior strength, superior weapons, superior political clout as a sovereign state, superior finances, and other assets to emerge victorious in very little time. That did not happen as this assessment is happening eight years into the war.

The failure to dialogue resulted from the nature of French colonies, which inherited “a centralized bureaucratic power structure that impeded ethnic mobilization and suppressed nonviolent ethnic challenges” (Blanton, Mason & Athow, 2001, p. 473). As a typical example of French colonies, the Government of Cameroun (former French Cameroun) never thought of the

importance of openness and disclosure in which a variety of options could be analyzed and compared from the perspectives of both the Government and the people of the former British Cameroons, who had practically been sold to the Government of Cameroun and by implication to France as chattel at independence in 1961 within the context of Cold War politics (Anyangwe, 2014). Rather than open up for a dialogue with the people of the former British Cameroons who made their grievances public from 1992 at the Owona Constitution Reform Committee, the Buea Declaration, 1993; the Bamenda Proclamation, 1994; the London Communiqué, 1995; the Common Law Lawyers' 2015 and 2016 Memos to Government; Teachers' Trade Union 2016 Memo, and several court cases in Abuja and Banjul), the Government of Cameroun never created room for any form of dialogue that would permit trade-offs to make both parties better off. Instead, the Government remained buried in her policy of “one-and-indivisible Cameroon” supported by severe repression which sent many young people of the former British Southern Cameroons’ origin seeking asylum in Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Southern Africa.

Conclusion

This paper set out to argue that the Government of Cameroun Republic adverse to loss in terms of negotiating a return to the 1961 two-state federation ended up with the risk of losing the Southern Cameroons. The failure to recognize the grievances of Southern Cameroons summarized in the 1993 Buea Declaration and to offer concessions through political dialogue and engineering turned out to be a much greater loss than the government perceived.

I argued that for the Government of Cameroun Republic and her policy of national integration hackneyed as “one-and-indivisible Cameroon,” any attempt to perceive or treat the people of British Southern Cameroons as being different in some ways was considered a loss. The discussion in this paper included the consideration that this notion of exclusive rights of the

Government of Cameroun Republic to treat the grievances of the people of British Southern Cameroons was a more extreme form of loss aversion that Kahneman and Tversky termed "enhanced loss aversion." For these scholars, losses "compounded by outrage are much less acceptable than losses that are caused by misfortune or by legitimate actions of others" (Kahneman et al. 1982, pp. 84-98). The war in postcolonial Cameroons declared in November 2017 on ex-British Southern Cameroons raging on in 2024 demonstrates the kind of loss discussed by these scholars of loss aversion in rational policymaking in government action.

In the interviews conducted in the territory, it was striking that every one of the participants referred to the Cameroun Republic by its French name at independence, "*La Republique du Cameroun*," or as "*a foreign country*," or as "*our neighbouring country*" or also as "*the colonizer*," but never as "*our country*." The interviewees considered "*La Republique du Cameroun*" as a foreign country, and there was a near-unanimous view among them that they had nothing to do with that country. Referring to the United Nations Trusteeship Agreement, one participant conveyed "*We must do anything, everything possible and necessary, to enforce the Trust, come what may. No right-thinking people would act differently.*" This kind of strong position demonstrates how far the minds of the people of ex-British Southern Cameroons have gone in thinking about Cameroon as their country. If this situation of repression and the war persists and the territory succeeds in restoring its independence and sovereignty, *La Republique du Cameroun* would have experienced much greater loss than negotiating a return to the 1961 federal arrangement between the two former Class B UN Trust Territories under French and British administrations.

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