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Uprising and Human Rights Abuses in Southern Cameroon-Ambazonia

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Abstract

In 2016, lawyers, teachers and students in the two Anglophone regions initially led demonstrations and strikes, which eventually involved a wider section of the population. This mobilization was against their marginalization by the Francophone-dominated government in which they were chronically under-represented in all aspects of national life: political appointments and professional training and had been treated as second-class citizens since their reunification. They argued that their vibrant economic and political institutions had been completely erased, and their education and judicial systems had been undermined and degraded. Activists spread videos that show security forces abusing human rights (by suppressing peaceful gatherings, beating, harassing, arresting and killing protesters, burning their houses, schools and hospitals) in order to produce a counter-narrative to the 'official story' that main-stream media had been producing. We collected and analyzed 30 videos to better appreciate the human rights abuses. The videos provide information that cannot be provided by other types of data. They are used as 'proofs of facts' and they contain much more visual information on bodily movement and acoustic data. The videos show appalling images not just of how French-speaking soldiers tortured Anglophones but also their inability to communicate with them adequately although they share the same country.

Keywords: protest, cultural hegemony, human rights, uprising, videos, alternative media, Ambazonia, judiciary and education

1. Introduction

It seems people everywhere are questioning the ability of traditional political actors to represent their interests and are increasingly seeking a more direct and unmediated relations to the decisions that affect their lives [1]. The Southern Cameroon-Ambazonia crisis commonly known as the Anglophone crisis revolves around the marginalization of the Anglophones and the dilution of their cultural identities especially concerning education and the judiciary by the Francophones in their attempt to assimilate them. Anglophones have therefore collectively given voice to their grievances and concerns and are demanding that something be done about them and they have taken extra-institutional actions by arming themselves to defend themselves against the government security forces who abuse their human rights by arbitrarily arresting, torturing, detaining, killing them, burning their houses, raping their women and also refusing them the right to self-determination.

The collective challenge that from the onset of the crisis was predominantly regressive, that is, a return to federation as it was from 1961 to 1972, changed due to Cameroon government's failure to listen to their plights. They overwhelmingly became progressive, that is, they wanted absolute independence except for their elite (parliamentarians, ministers and other prominent government workers) still clamoring for federation and a unitary state because they benefitted from the government and were afraid of losing their jobs. The question we ask is: how have Anglophones historically sustained social solidarity with their common opponent, which is the government of Cameroon, in order to attain their desired policy change? What means have they used to make their voices heard in the international scene? And finally, how have the government responded to their protest?

The rise and spread of new ICTs have transformed the way that society is organized, which of course include social movements. Internets and SMS messaging for examples have enabled activists to coordinate protest in record time, giving rise to the 'flash mob' phenomenon. 'Flash mob' is a term that originally referred to social experiments and countercultural movements to reclaim 'public spaces' Salmond [2]. The Anglophone movement can be dubbed as the 'Twitter Revolution' or 'Facebook Revolution' emphasizing the role of social media in diffusing videos of human rights abuses and to organize protest mobilizations both at the local and international levels.

The videos were diffused all over the world thereby creating huge impact in the international community. Diffusion is the process through which movements import and export ideas, tactics, strategies, organizational forms and cultural practices as Entman [3] puts it, by framing: a way of selecting and highlighting a particular claim to mobilize supporters, demobilize antagonists and convince observers of the worthiness of their course. The frame Ambazonian highlight is that their union with Francophone is fake and it never took place because there is no certificate of union and that they are culturally different, therefore the need for the restoration of their independence. Their frames are deeply rooted in local or national political and cultural context and are more open to diffusion especially as it concerns the abuse of human rights. They use a frame that makes them to think globally and act locally, that is, they take a political action frame that links global problems with local action.

Many videos have been spread on the brutality of the security forces that disrespected the universal declaration of human rights. They can easily be downloaded from the Internet clearly showing that due to the age of Twitter and Facebook revolution, the images have been globalized in order to gain international attention from organizations and countries that matter in the world. The spreading of these videos and other information led to the shutting down of the Internet in Ambazonia for 93 days.

The objective of this work is to collect and analyze short videos and journalists' reports for television stations using social movement theory.

2. Origin of the Ambazonia uprising: dominant not consensual cultural hegemony

The Ambazonia crisis is an attempt of Southern Cameroonians to break the dominant Francophone cultural hegemony. Since 1972, La République du Cameroun has dominated the Southern Cameroonians, which came into union with them from a weaker position with a population numerically smaller. As a result, La République du Cameroon has been making efforts not just to dominate them but to absorb them into the broader Francophone cultural system. They silently destroyed

the dignity and statehood of Anglophones-not by the French-speaking community at large, but by the government which was led and dominated by Francophones.

Marx and Engels [4] famously argued that, in any epoch, the dominant ideas are the ruling ideas in society that serve to maintain the dominance of the ruling classes. Those who have the means of economic production also have control over the production of ideas, and the class which is the material force of society is at the same time the ruling intellectual force. The ruling class, rules also as thinkers and as producers of ideas and regulate the production and distribution of ideas of their age. Similarly, La République du Cameroun has been producing ideas to suppress Southern Cameroonians because of their dominance over the economy, judiciary and political institutions. When the crisis started in order to dilute it, they produced many unsuccessful concepts such as the promotion of Bilingualism and multiculturalism, the national disarmament and demobilization and reintegration committee all headed by Anglophones and whose reports were dropped in the dustbins. Finally, they gave Anglophones what they termed 'Special Status,' which Anglophones rubbished as being empty. How did these two separate entities come together and form a union?

Cameroon was initially a German's territory from 1887 to 1914 before the British invaded it from Nigeria in 1914 and the German surrendered in February 1916. After the war, the League of Nations partitioned the colony between the United Kingdom and France on June 28, 1919, and France gained the larger geographical share. French Cameroon became independent as La République du Cameroun in January 1960 and Nigeria was scheduled for independence later that same year, which raised question of what to do with the British territory. A plebiscite was agreed on and it was held on February 11, 1961, and the British Southern Cameroon voted to join Cameroon as West Cameroon I.C.B Dear [5]. To negotiate the terms of the union, the Foumban Conference was held on July 16–21, 1961 in which the Federal Constitution was drafted. It stated in Article 47.1 that "No bill to amend the constitution may be introduced if it tends to impair the unity and integrity of the federation."

This poorly conducted re-unification was based on centralization and assimilation, and has led the Anglophone minority feeling politically and economically marginalized as their cultural differences are ignored. "On the 1st September 1966 the Cameroon National Union (CNU) was created by the union of political parties of East and West Cameroon. Most decisions were taken without consultation, which led to widespread feelings amongst the West Cameroonian public that although they voted for reunification, La République du Cameroun was absorbing or dominating them," Wikipedia [6].

Achankeng [7] states that although the plebiscite was an expression of willingness to associate with French Cameroon, no necessary discussions took place to arrive at an agreed document and set the legal basis of the federation. So it never took place and neither were any agreements subsequently signed between the two countries.

In 1972, President Ahidjo (the President of the Republic of Cameroon) conducted a referendum on the form of the state. Although the West Cameroon lawmakers heavily opposed and rejected it on the ground that it was a violation of the 1961 Federal Constitution, he went ahead with the referendum and the Federal Republic of Cameroon became the United Republic of Cameroon [8]. All these events were calculated attempts meant to incorporate a former colony into another state. Bongfen [9] and Ajong [10] state that it abolished "all federal legislative, judicial and administrative institutions, and removed all guarantees that protected the rights of the minority Southern Cameroonians in the federation. Unlike during the plebiscite of 1961 wherein only Southern Cameroonians voted to decide on their

destiny, the May 1972 referendum was extended to all the people of la République du Cameroun. It was 'a creeping annexation than unification'. However, the dissenting voices of Southern Cameroonians rejecting the centralized United Republic of Cameroon were dwarfed by the wide majority of La République. Many Southern Cameroonians regard 20th May, - the national day of today's Cameroon – as a day when they lost their freedom”.

In 1984, Paul Biya removed one of the stars from the flag and changed the official name of the country to the Republic of Cameroon (La République du Cameroon), which Cameroon had before her unification with Southern Cameroon. Some Anglophones such as Gorji-Dinka, Bernard Fonlon and Carlson Anyangwe from the Southern Cameroon considered it as the dissolution of the 1961 union.

Citizens from these regions, that is, the Anglophone regions, have been mobilizing against their marginalization by the Francophone-dominated government. They complain about chronic under-representation in all issues of national life, including political appointments and professional training. They argue that since their reunification, they have been treated as second-class citizens. Their vibrant economic and political institutions have been completely erased, and their education and judicial systems have been undermined and degraded.

Gorji Dinka and Albert Mukong: Southern Cameroonian nationalists who protested the ill-treatment of their people by the central regime were arrested and detained. Representatives of southern Cameroonians in the tripartite talks of 1991 proposed a return to the federation, but the leaders of La République du Cameroon ignored them. In 1994, John Ngu Focha and Salomon T. Muna both former Prime Ministers of the Southern Cameroons returned to the United Nations in New York and demanded separate independence for the Southern Cameroons. The mission to the UN preceded the All Anglophone Conference (AAC 1), which took place in Buea in April 1993 bringing together all Southern Cameroon citizens who unanimously called for the restoration of the statehood of the Southern Cameroons. A second All Anglophone Conference (AAC 2) was held in Bamenda in May 1994, at which the decisions of AAC 1 were reiterated and a reasonable time was given to French Cameroon to accept a return to the two state federations or Southern Cameroon would revive its statehood and independence. The implementation of AAC 1 and AAC 2 was however stalled by the brutal arrests and incarceration of the leaders of the AAC with several others escaping into exile.

The ACC was renamed the Southern Cameroons Peoples Conference (SCPC), and later the Southern Cameroon People's organization (SCAPO), with the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) as the executive governing body. Southern Cameroon National Council younger activists formed the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) in Buea on May 28, 1995.

When they felt their demands were met with contempt and total disregard, the SCNC took their case back to the United Nations led by John Foncha and protested against La République du Cameroun annexation of their territory. Their focus has been maintained on the restoration of the statehood of Southern Cameroon, and the government brutal repression has helped to unify them.

Police routinely disrupted SCNC activities: On March 23, 1997, gendarmes killed about 10 people in a raid in Bamenda. The police arrested between 200 and 300 people, mostly SCNC supporters as well as members of the Social Democratic Front. In the subsequent trials, Amnesty International and SCNC found substantive evidence of the government torturing and using force on them. The raid and trial resulted in a shutdown of SCNC activities. On October 1, 1999, SCNC militants took over Radio Buea to proclaim the independence of Southern Cameroon but failed to do so before security forces intervened. After clashes with the police, the SCNC was

officially declared illegal by the Cameroonian authorities in 2001. In 2006, a faction of SCNC once again declared the independence of Ambazonia Lansdorf, ed. [11].

Although Cameroon is bound by the international law and its own constitution to respect human rights and freedoms, many human rights have been violated in Southern Cameroon. This work pays particular attention on the cruel treatment of people who exercise the right to association and peaceful assembly. We use videos to show how these rights were violated in Ambazonia. We argue that the videos helped to globalize the crisis and attract the attention of the international community to the severity of the killings and abuse.

3. Data collection and interpretation

In the age of smartphones, images or video-making has become less problematic as most people even in the third world possess a smartphone with a built-in camera. They take pictures of what is relevant to them in their daily lives. They usually film the remarkable, the extraordinary, the exceptional and not the ordinary or everyday activities [12]. From the onset of the Anglophone crisis, participants made many videos to expose the human right abuses of the military and they flooded the Internet. That was why the government cut-off the Internet in the English-speaking areas to stop them from circulating incriminating images.

We decided then to collect 30 videos to analyze them because they provide information that cannot be provided by other types of data. They are used as ‘proofs of facts’ and as it is often said, a picture or video is more, and different, than a thousand words because they contain much more visual information on bodily movement and include acoustic data. Although images are specific reality constructions, ambivalent, subjective and diffuse, their interpretation must be substantiated in words [13].

The videos collection contribute toward answering a research question and are interpreted by providing verbal accounts and linked to the theoretical concept of cultural dominance and media and information communication. The questions we asked concerning each of the videos were similar to those asked by Becker [14]: What are the acts of violence and human rights abuses in each video? How can they be interpreted and linked to our theoretical concept? What insight do they generate and substantiate? What different kinds of people are there? We link observations to theoretical concepts such as status, groups, norms, rules, and common understandings, deviance and rule violation, sanctions and conflict resolution.

4. The Ambazonia uprising

The relationship that exists between Southern Cameroon and La République du Cameroun is one of two people, two inheritances, and two divergent mentalities: one struggles for its liberation, while the other suppresses and abuses its human rights or struggles to maintain control over it by using its mighty state military. They speak different languages with little or no rapprochement although they live in the same country. The various videos below clearly show the differences. The oppressors’ troops speak in French, while the oppressed speaks in Pidgin English. A country divided predominantly by language although language is not the cause of the Anglophone crisis: it is the history of people. This shows the struggle between the two people and languages while one is resisting the onslaught and domination, the other is trying very hard to overcome and crush them. Having been oppressed for long, the oppressed is not willing to give up and the oppressor

is not willing to let her leave her unitary state, and then the struggle of two people stiffens. The government that has been in power for over 38 years does everything to suppress the uprising by sending its brutal security forces to harass the Anglophones who are striking for a just course.

According to Cameroon Concord News 2019 [15], “being Anglophone or francophone in Cameroon is not just the ability to speak, read and use English or French as a working language. It is about belonging to the Anglophone or Francophone ways including things like outlook, culture and how local governments are run. Anglophones have long complained that their language and culture are marginalized”. They thought it necessary to protect their judicial, educational and local government systems. They wanted an end to annexation and assimilation and more respect from government for their language and political philosophies. They preferred a total separation by creating their own independent state if the government failed to listen to them.

According to www.Amnesty.org [16], “towards the end of 2016, the two Anglophones regions were rocked by demonstrations and strikes, initially led by lawyers, teachers, students, and eventually involving a wider section of the population. They protested against what they viewed as the growing marginalization of the Anglophone linguistic, cultural, educational traditions and systems in various sectors such as the failure to use the Common Law in courts and Standard English in classrooms, as well as the improvement of their representation in politics”.

They decided to express their grievances by protesting. The protests began in the streets of Anglophone cities as thousands of Anglophone Cameroonians, from lawyers and teachers as well as irate youth, protested against the Francophone hegemony. Handfuls of videos show young men manifesting determination and strength for change in the Southern Cameroon-Ambazonia. They collaborated especially when one of them was shot because they were conscious of their marginalization. They knew the police would shoot them but they moved on. This shows that a disillusioned unemployed youth is very dangerous for the health of a country. They all hungered for independence and not even federalism that some elite would talk of. Although largely, but not always peaceful in nature, these protests were met with sustained repressions from the Cameroon authority and security forces. Some peaceful protesters were killed during the demonstrations; hundreds of people were arrested and detained without trial. Our objective in this work is to analyze the confrontation between the protesters and security forces using amateur videos secretly taken by the protesters.

4.1 Cultural domination in the judiciary section

The protest began on October 6, 2016, as a sit-down strike initiated by the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC), an organization consisting of lawyer and teacher trade unions from the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. Barrister Agbor Balla, Dr. Fontem Neba and Tassang Wilfred led the strike.

According to Wikipedia [17], “the common lawyers of Anglophone Cameroon were said to have written an appeal letter to the government over the use of French in schools and courtrooms in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon. In an effort to protect the English culture, they began a sit-down strike in all courtrooms on October 6, 2016. Peaceful marches began with marches in the cities of Bamenda, Buea, and Limbe calling for the protection of the common law system in Anglophone Cameroon and the practice of the Common Law sub-system in Anglophone courts and not the Civil Law as it was used by French-speaking

magistrates”. They equally demanded for the creation of a common law school at the University of Bamenda and Buea [18].

More so, Francophones occupied all the juicy positions in the Supreme Court. Although Francophones had little or no knowledge in English and the Common Law, most of the magistrates and bailiffs in the Anglophone zone were Francophones. Anglophones lawyers were disgruntled of the domination of the Civil Law as if Cameroon was uniquely a Civil Law country. There was equally a problem of translating the Business law for Africa (OHADA) uniform acts, CEMAC code, and others because the Francophones wanted to assimilate the Common Law sub-system.

In Africanews Morning call [19], Barrister Bobga Harmony declared that the government of Cameroon had completely ignored them, which was a violation of the right to self-determination. According to him, “since 1972, they have been a progressive, an inexplicable, illegal and illegitimate erosion of the common law.” He regretted that Francophones had been replacing the Common Law with the French Civil law as if Anglophones “were a conquered people.” The lawyers had complained for years through writing to competent authorities before realizing that if they did not take concrete actions, they would be swallowed up by the dominant Francophone system. So they held a Common Law conference on the May 9, 2015, which was followed by a second conference in Buea where they made a declaration reinforcing their position.

Although they had sent a communiqué to the presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, nobody listened to them. Instead of defending the Common Law lawyers, the Minister of Justice insulted them in the government newspaper: Cameroon Tribune. As a result, they protested and insisted to talk only with the president of the Republic of Cameroon or his properly mandated agent because they had exhausted all negotiation with the executive and the legislature. They had filed a petition to the national assembly and the senate and they were planning to file a petition to the constitutional council for the determination of the question of whether there had been any act of union between West Cameroon and East Cameroon. They planned to proceed to the international jurisdiction like the African Commission for Human and People’s Right, the Human Right Commission if the government did not listen to them. Bobga Harmony said “We are going to seize the international community because these are grave abuses of human rights. The international community cannot fold its arms and allow us to be brutalized in our land,” Barrister Bobga Harmony said in Africanews Morning Call [19].

4.2 Cultural domination in the educational section

Teachers and the general public joined the lawyers in the strike. They reportedly opposed what was described as the “imposition of French in schools in Anglophone parts of the country.” According to Catherine Soi reporting for Aljazeera [20], students battled on their own at school because even private school teachers had deserted classroom in support of the public sector teachers and so many classrooms and schools across Ambazonia were empty. They wanted the government to stop sending teachers who spoke only in French or Pidgin English. Even students supported the strike action because after completing school, they were unable to find jobs.

“For over fifty years Anglophone students have not been able to have a headway in Cameroon in most disciplines that bring about development: science and technology because the government has refused to train teachers for our schools,” declared Tassang Wilfred over Aljazeera (2016).

According to University of Buea strike Report [21], a mammoth crowd of students came out protesting in order to attract the authority of the university attention to their plights. A student carried a placard on which it was written: “enough is enough.” They had a variety of complaints: the non-payment of the 50,000frs CFA that the government had promised them, the cancelation of the 10,000frs CFA penalty fees for the late payment of school fees, and the payment of fees before being given a semester result, and as it was the general cry with the secondary and high schools in the Anglophone zone, they also demanded the removal of French-speaking lecturers from the faculty of the university.

They stood in front of the Administrative Block wishing to meet the Vice Chancellor to tell her their problems but instead security forces took her away and a huge number of security forces were sent to dispatch them. As they arrived, the students ran into different directions and the atmosphere became very misty because the security officers had thrown teargas and fired gun shots in the air. The students shouted no violence as they ran away for safety. Although students were beaten and arrested, it did not dampen the spirit of the strike action so the students left and marched into the street.

4.3 The white coffin revolution

According to Bamenda protest close to one hundred wounded [22], protesting residents voice other grievances, including – poor roads, no jobs and water. “On November 21, 2016, Mancho Bibixy, the newscaster of a local radio station, stood in an open casket in a crowded roundabout in the Anglophone city of Bamenda. Using a blow horn, Bibixy denounced the slow rate of economic and structural development in the city.”

“When that Chinese them di come, m-e-y they come tell we when they dig road, na we di fix’am back,” he declared his discontent with the bad state of roads that Chinese would only construct but would not repair. He showed his defiant attitude by declaring he was ready to die while protesting against the social and economic marginalization of Anglophone in the hegemonic Francophone state.

“I don tell them, if na teargas I go drink’am.”

“Let them chase me....it won’t mean anything to me,” he declared.

He emerged as a key leader in the Anglophone political movement who were among the first to be arrested and he was later slammed a 15-year prison term (**Figure 1**).

In a video entitled “Bamenda Protest Close to 100 wounded,” [22] it shows how the white coffin was carried about and a mammoth crowd of young men followed it with Bibixy himself leading.

“We can never be defeated by the police,” they declared when the police came to stop them. They rounded-up one of them and chased the others who came to stop their peaceful march. One can clearly hear a voice saying in the video:

“You no take hi gun?” asking whether he has not taken his gun.

“Cameroon must change,”

“That independent na today where i go start o-o,” which means: the independence will start today.

Young men came in their bikes honing while those who were on foot shouted. Protesters were all over the whole streets.

“I say... bamenda di hot yah,” they said in the background.

“We need change in Bamenda,” they said.

“whosai the police them dey where they di try their nonsense, make them come now,” they declared with determination.

Then suddenly trucks of military men arrived shooting in the air and killed a good number and wounded about a hundred.

Figure 1.
The White Coffin Revolution. Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=picture+of+white+coffin>.

“Jesus, they are killing us in Bamenda,” they said. Another truck arrived on which it was written “Gendarmerie Nationale” and it sprayed huge amount of water on a hostel: Grand Plaza; certainly where some of the protesters were hiding. The video shows how two persons hurriedly took away a shot person on a bike and some were taken and given private treatment at homes.

In a video entitled: Bamenda Boiling, they Escaped Teargas, on December, 8th 2016 [23], shows some young men shouting loudly and running away as fast as they could from the police who were throwing teargas on them to stop them from manifesting. Some covered their nostrils with handkerchiefs to prevent them from inhaling the toxic gas.

The struggle as well was not only between the Francophone and Anglophone but also between the Anglophone and their elite who enjoyed juice positions in the government and were not ready to resign from their positions. They were enablers: the government used them to crush their own people. They always would preach anti-struggle campaign and would bring other Francophone authorities to fight against their people. Each time they visited the Anglophone zone, there was always a battle between them and their people. The elite wanted to maintain the status quo, while the general population wanted a change.

The video Bamenda Boys against CPDM [24] shows a comic scene where a young man brought a large catapult and took a stone to support the big stick and another one pulled the rope from behind him and then they took the catapult to confront the CPDM barons. According to Zigolo Tchaya 2016 [25] reporting for France 24, when the Prime Minister of Cameroon (an Anglophone) and the Secretary General of the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement, the party of the government in power, went to Bamenda to hold a pro-government rally with its militants to calm down the striking lawyers and the teachers’ association, who had been striking for 2 months, a group of young men burnt the CPDM party uniform of an elderly person who was going to attend the rally. The angry youth blocked the hotel where the Prime Minister and Secretary were lodging and there was a confrontation between them and the security. According to Gigova [26], it led to four deaths and several wounded and about 50 arrested. The Prime Minister, The CPDM Secretary General, the Governor of the North West region, and the national security adviser were forced to go into hiding.

5. Government response and human rights violations

Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report [27] states that “although the law provides for freedom of peaceful assembly, the government often restricted this right. The law requires organizers of public meetings, demonstrations, and processions to notify officials in advance and does not require prior government approval of public assemblies, nor does it authorize the government to suppress public assemblies that it has not approved in advance. However, officials routinely asserted the law implicitly authorizes the government to grant or deny permission for public assemblies”.

It equally states that, “the government often refused to grant permits for gatherings and used force to suppress assemblies for which it had not issued permits. Authorities typically cited “security concerns” as the basis for deciding to block assemblies. The government also prevented civil society organizations and political parties from holding press conferences. Police and gendarmes forcibly disrupted meetings and demonstrations of citizens, trade unions, and political activists, arrested participants in unapproved protests, and blocked political leaders from attending protests.”

In the Stream: Alzeera 2017 [28], Anne Marie Befoune put it as “The strike action is a reflection of a bigger problem, people have had a lot of pains, frustration and anger in their hearts and they were just looking for the slightest opportunity to express what they feel.” The irony is that each time the security forces brutalized the protesters, they instead united against the common enemy, which was the government security forces.

Government responded by cruelly torturing and exerting inhuman or degrading treatments or punishment on demonstrators. Although the constitution and law prohibit such practices, there were reports that security force members beat, harassed, or otherwise abused citizens, including separatist fighters. Cases have been documented of how security forces severely mistreated suspected separatists and detainees [27].

Below we show videos that demonstrate gross human rights violation of the lawyer, the students and the general public.

5.1 Molestation of lawyers

The government sent over 5000 troops to thwart the Anglophone crisis. According to Zigolo [25] reporting for France 24 [25], the crisis was considered to be “a strong organized and well-coordinated violence from angry protesters and government did not want to allow that part of the country to be destroyed and the protesters too said they would not stop protesting until the government solved their problem”.

According to *StopBlaBlaCam* [29], policemen blew the ‘the men in uniform’: lawyers with their batons in Buea. The whole city was also under lockdown, monitored by Special Rapid Response (ESIR), the police and gendarmerie. There was also a strong police presence to face the demonstrators. Incidentally, the policemen were demanding that the lawyers hand over their black robes.

On November 10, 2016, the demonstration of lawyers in Buea in the Southwest region met with heavy-handed police response. Lawyers were reportedly brutalized, their offices ransacked, and their wigs and gowns seized by police. Many were injured and harassed in their cars. Their phones were seized and destroyed, and some were barred from joining the demonstrators. Police reportedly raided hotels in search for lawyers and were harassed by law enforcement officers (Figure 2).

Figure 2.
Confrontation between the police and lawyers. Source: Cameroon Online [30].

The video entitled: Uprising 4 Police Brutality on Lawyers [31] clearly shows the commotion that took place in the Muea police station. One sees a police officer running after a young lawyer and then another lawyer is pushed into the police station by yet another policeman. Another lawyer is beaten and pushed out of the police station. The police kicks another who falls down and his watch falls off but the police pulls him up by dragging his coat. A female fat police encourages her colleague to hit the lawyer by clearly articulating the phrase in French “frappe,” “frappez-lui” over and over.

The episodes of police brutality in Cameroon were not limited to lawyers only; it extended to University of Buea students as well as the general public. Many were molested by police and disturbing videos show police officers armed with stick hitting or rolling them in water, invading students’ quarters and beating them.

5.2 Molestation against university students

The videos show appalling images of how French-speaking soldiers, who were alienated from the sufferings of English-speaking citizens, inflicted pains on them. Although they were in the same country, they could not communicate because they spoke different languages.

The video Police and Gendarmes severely torturing University Students in Buea strike [32] certainly was filmed while in the house because of the iron bars of the window. In it, two policemen force a student to lie down very fast: “Couches-toi” the police ordered him to lie down.

“Comment ca,” the young man retaliated by asking why.

“Couche-toi vite,” he ordered again.

“Ne parle pas,” “viens ici,” “Enleve la cle ci,” “viens d’abord ici, regarde la bas,” they continuously ordered him. Then one of them raises his baton and hits him while the other forces him to lie down while they hit him counting the number of strokes in French. The police standing by takes the baton from his colleague and asks the students to roll on the soil while he hits him with all his force. “Tourne, c’est votre pays-ci?” he asked whether it was his country. “Vous savez que vous allez gravez?” he asked while hitting him whether he knew they would go on strike.

The video entitled “2 police and Gendarmes severely torturing University Students in Buea, Buea strike [33] shows with a lot of noise in the background, two policemen harassing university students in their neighborhood. Three university students are laying down, one in a puddle and a female student is brought in and the police man brutally pushed her in the puddle.

“Attend d’abord, je vais te giffler hei,” the policeman said in French threatening to slap the girl and then the girl’s leg is pulled and is forcefully pulled in the puddle, rubbing her head in it.

“They go kill man,” they camera man exclaimed that they would kill them.

The Southern Cameroon updates: Police Brutality at UB 28/11/2016 [34] certainly taken from a story building shows how a group of police and gendarmes in the street of Molyko molested a young man. While one of the policemen was pulling him ahead, another one came from behind and kicked him and he fell down. It is clearly seen how one of the security officers had wounded a female student’s head, one also sees a student whose t-shirt had been torn and blood dripping from his head.

The video: Université de Buéa - les forces de l’ordre entrent dans les residences et torturent des etudiants [35] starts with the camera woman inviting fellow students to run for safety. “Yuna enter o-o-o-h,” she invited other students. Then students are seen running very fast into their residence for safety as scores of security men followed them behind with batons. They caught some married women and hit them severely. “They go kill we that married woman them, I swear,” the camera women lamented. A woman is drawn from her house and mercilessly hit by the security officers. “Pour les hommes faire les descendre,” an order is given in French to bring out all men. “Faire descendre tout les hommes,” the order is repeated for emphasis. A boy is removed from his house and the French-speaking security officers hit his head with their batons.

“Amenez-le, ca va,” an order is given and the boy is held from his belt.

The Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa [36] reported that at least 14 student hostels were attacked that day. More than 140 rooms were vandalized, their occupants tortured on the Buea (Molyko) main boulevard, and some students were asked to sing that “an Anglophone will never rule the country.” Even though most students were finally released, several of them spent 3 days in detention facilities in overcrowded cell conditions, with little or no communication with their families.

5.3 The molestation of the general public

The video Bamenda in turmoil today December, 2006, part 1 [37] shows a group of predominantly young men lamenting because a police had shot one of the protesters who wore a t-shirt with white and red lines on it, stained by blood and mud. He lay helplessly in the hands of his comrades.

“Oh my God, wait, wait. Bring he s-o, hold i hand,” they held him and he dangled in their hands while those around him lamented.

The video This is Bamenda [38] shows a group of young men carrying peace plants and marching very fast in a street in Bamenda. They were carrying a dead young man to the main street in Bamenda called the Commercial Avenue. The commentator said “Bamenda is turning into something else,” which means that many people are dying in Bamenda, and then he calls on “BBC, CNN and Alzeera, you guys need to support us, people are dying,” he said. The spectators and the participants shouted and lamented.

“Y-e-e-u-h Bamenda, Bamenda, Bamenda, Bamenda,” he shouted several times.

“w-e-e-e-h massa,” he shouted several times again. Then the dead man is shown with a blue band that fastened him to the stick he was tied. He is being carried away by other young men marching very fast and singing: “Amba, Amba, Ambazonia.” It means they identify themselves more with Ambazonia than Cameroon.

5.4 Internet shutdown

The various videos incriminated Cameroon security forces and therefore as a result as [27] shows Cameroon experienced its first Internet shutdown in January 2017 for 93 days. It came after Anglophone teachers, lawyers, and students went on strike over alleged social bias in favor of Francophones. Education, financial, and health-care institutions as well as businesses that relied on Internet access were stunted. International bodies applied pressure on the government to restore Internet access. Despite Internet access being restored in April 2017, there were continuing reports of network instability. In October 2017, the government effected a second Internet blockade, targeting social media and apps such as Whatsapp and Facebook where such videos as those described above were sent. It continuously affected the country economically, and many citizens were forced to travel back and forth to regions with Internet access for business or information.

6. The Ambazonian war

Two weeks into the protests, more than 100 protesters were arrested, and six were reported dead [39]. Throughout September, separatists carried out two bombings: one targeting security forces in Bamenda Quartz Africa [40], and while the first bombing failed, the second injured three policemen Reuter [41]. On September, 22, Cameroonian soldiers opened fire on protesters, killing at least five and injuring many more [40]. On November 30, 2017, the president of Cameroon declared war on the Anglophone separatists Sun Newspaper [42].

“I have learned with emotion the assassination of four Cameroonians military and two policemen in the South of our country --- things must henceforth be clear. Cameroon is victim of repetitive attacks claiming a secessionist movement. Facing these aggression acts, I would reassure Cameroonians that everything has been put in place to take out of the dark these criminals so that peace and security reigns all over the territory.” This marked the start of a very violent confrontation between government forces and armed separatists.

Non-state actors, including local armed groups, also bear much responsibility for the violence. Separatist militias are battling government forces as well as pro-government “self-defense” forces that consist of what separatists term criminal gangs who are terrorizing local inhabitants and wreaking havoc. The military also conducts a deliberate violent campaign against civilian population. Lawyer Right Watch Canada [43], “There is evidence that much of the violence is intentional and planned, including retaliation attacks on villages by government security forces, often followed by indiscriminate shooting into crowds of civilians, invasion of private homes and the murder of their inhabitants, and the rounding up and shooting of villagers.”

According to the International Crisis Group, at least 1850 people have been killed since 2017; the ICG reports that at least 235 soldiers and police officers and 650 civilians, and close to 1000 separatists have lost their lives; and Anglophone federalists estimate 3000–5000 dead, and separatists estimate 5000–10,000 dead.

6.1 The consequences of the war

6.1.1 Arbitrary arrests and detentions

The Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa [44] reports that in early January 2017, the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (Consortium

or CACSC) agreed to meet with the government about the release of protesters arrested during a 2016 demonstration in Bamenda. The Consortium accused the government for shooting four unarmed youth and proceeded to declare “Ghost Towns” on January 16 and 17. The reports equally state that, “in response, the government cut the Internet and banned the activities of two groups: the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) and the Consortium on January 17, 2017. The same day, two prominent Anglophone civil society activists who headed the Consortium: Dr Felix Agbor NKongho and Dr Fontem Neba were arrested”.

On January 9, 2017, armed soldiers forcibly entered the home of Mr Mancho Bibixy, a journalist and Newscaster of “Abakwa” (a local radio program reporting on the rights of the Anglophone minority), and arrested him, along with six other activists. He was taken to a vehicle with neither shoes nor identification papers and was arbitrarily detained for 18 months and his hearings were postponed for more than 14 times.

On May 25, 2018, Bibixy and his co-accused were sentenced to between 10 and 15 years of prison each by a military court, for acts of terrorism, secession, hostilities against the state, propagation of false information, revolution, insurrection, contempt of public bodies and public servants, resistance, depredation by band, and non-possession of national identity card. He was being held in an overcrowded cell at the Kondengui Central Prison, a maximum-security prison in Yaoundé.

Between September 22 and October 17, 2017, 500 people were arrested, with witnesses describing the detainees as being packed into jails in the South West region. In December 2017, a group of about 70 heavily armed Cameroonian soldiers and BIR sealed the village of Dadi and arrested 23 people returning from their farm or were in front of their homes.

On January 5, 2018, 47 separatist activists, including Sisiku Ayuk Tabe of the proclaimed Interim Government of Ambazonia, were arrested and detained by Nigeria authorities in Abuja. The detainees were repatriated afterwards and imprisoned in Yaoundé incommunicado for 6 months awaiting trials. They were not given access to their lawyers nor charged with any offense.

Mass arrests and detentions have caused harsh and often life-threatening prison conditions in Cameroon, including gross overcrowding, lack of access to water and medical care, and deplorable hygiene and sanitation. Prisoners are transferred out of the region to other more secure areas.

6.1.2 Internally displaced persons (IDPS)

Several hundred thousand persons abandoned their homes in some localities of the Northwest and Southwest Regions because of the socio-political unrest. Estimate of IDPs varied depending on the source, with the government estimating 74,994 IDPs as of June, while the United Nations estimated 350,000 IDPs from the Northwest and Southwest as of September.

On December 2017, the Senior Divisional Officer for Manyu: Oum II Joseph asked the population of Manyu residents in Akwanga, Eyumojock, and Mamfe sub-division to relocate or they would be considered accomplices or perpetrators of ongoing criminal occurrences registered on security and defense forces [45].

By the end of December 2018, the crisis had forced mass displacement of the population in the North West and South West regions, with estimates of between 450,000 and 550,000 displaced persons. This represents more than 10% of the region's population. Cameroon now has the sixth largest displaced population in the world. Many are fleeing violence as a result of raids on villages and surrendering areas. They take refuge in the forests where they lack hygiene,

health services, sanitation, shelter and food. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian assistance estimates that approximately 32,000 Cameroonians are registered refugees in Nigeria. More than 200 villages have been partly or completely destroyed, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to flee. The rate of attacks has increased steadily, usually causing significant damage. An additionally 30,000 to 35,000 people have sought asylum in neighboring countries.

6.1.3 Destruction of schools and villages

Separatist activists who seek an independent state for the country’s English-speaking regions began to set fire on schools and attack teachers and students to enforce a boycott they had declared on local schools. In June 2018, UNICEF reported that at least 58 schools had been damaged since the beginning of the crisis in 2016. Human Rights Watch documented 19 threats or attacks on schools, and 10 threats or attacks on education personnel (Figure 3).

Most children in the two regions have been deprived of the right to an education, with 30, 000–40,000 children affected. As of June 2018, armed separatists

Figure 3.
Government soldiers supervising the burning of a school and a burnt school [46].

Figure 4.
Genocide in Ambazonia, burning of villages and IDPs [45].

had reportedly attacked 42 schools, at least 36 of which were burnt down; the Cameroonian's figure indicated that they had burnt at least 120 schools. Rural areas are especially affected.

Anglophone villages suspected of harboring separatists or arms have been burned and pillaged in both the South West and North West regions. Homes have been burned to ashes, sometimes with their inhabitants. About 206 settlements have been raided and partially destroyed by state defense forces during attempts to crack down on armed separatists. Several villages in Mbonge and Konye subdivision have been completely emptied of their population. Civilian witnesses say that army attacks are routinely followed by the ransacking of houses and shops, the destruction of food stocks, and the rounding up and mistreatment or killing of civilians, often as reprisals for their killing of a member of the defense and security forces (Figure 4).

7. Discussions

One of the key ways social movements engage in cultural resistance is by means of the production and dissemination of multiple forms of media in order to mobilize support, to reach out for supports beyond those already in agreement with movement claims, and to increase the legitimacy of their claims and demands. Social movements operate at a considerable disadvantage when trying to influence news portrayals of issues than do their better-funded opposing groups and organization.

Anglophones or Ambazonians who are defending themselves from the Cameroon security forces that kill them are presented in the state television and other media as “terrorists” and never as those fighting for a just cause, whereas as seen above, they did not start the war; it was declared on them. The main stream media equally promoted hate speech and incitement to violence, which radicalized separatist groups the more. Government officials refer to protesters in dehumanizing or incendiary terms, such as “dogs” and “terrorists” in the main stream media. When the security agents who terrorize the population are presented in mainstream media, they are considered as valiant and patriotic agents of the republic who protect the population. Did they really protect the population when they tortured them, arbitrarily arrested them, and burned their houses as seen above?

Therefore, media serve to propagandize and serve the interests of the powerful that control and finance them. The propaganda model shows that media function to represent the agendas of the dominant social, economic and political groups that exercise power nationally and globally. Therefore, social movements face difficulties in their attempts to transmit their claims and to traverse the gap between their intended messages and their target audiences.

Activists in the Ambazonian crisis created a strategy that Mattoni [47] considered as alternatives that are the creation of their own independent media or public forums of communication in order to communicate for a lack of interest or bias by established media. Alternatively, in the Ambazonian crisis, many videos were produced that facilitated the mobilization and production of a counter-narrative to the ‘official story,’ which indicates that there is no Anglophone problem in Cameroon and the professionalism of the security forces. The Internet makes the process of sharing easier and faster and with a potentially larger audience than ever before. These messages in the videos from the alternative media environment have made their ways into mainstream mass media like the various reports carried by BBC, France 24, TV5 Monde, etc.

8. Conclusion

The Ambazonia crisis was triggered by the Southern Cameroonians' attempt to break the dominant Francophone cultural hegemony. They came into union with them from a weaker position with a population numerically smaller. As a result, La République du Cameroun has been making efforts not just to dominate them but to absorb them into the broader Francophone cultural system. They silently destroyed the dignity and statehood of Anglophones-not by the French-speaking community at large, but by the government that was led and dominated by Francophones.

Toward the end of 2016, the two Anglophone regions were rocked by demonstrations and strikes, initially led by lawyers, teachers, and students and eventually involving a wider section of the population. They protested against what they viewed as the growing marginalization of the Anglophone linguistic, cultural, educational traditions and systems in various sectors such as the failure to use the Common Law in courts and Standard English in classrooms, as well as the improvement of their representation in politics.

Many videos were produced showing their repressive response of the government, which were opposed to the official narratives produced by the main stream media. We collected 30 of them because they provide information that cannot be provided by other types of data. They are used as 'proofs of facts.' The videos show appalling images not just of how French-speaking soldiers tortured Anglophones but also their inability to communicate with them adequately although they share the same country.

The government response to the demonstration led to the violation of the following rights: the right to life, liberty, and security of persons; the right to be free from torture or cruel, degrading and unusual treatment; the right to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention; the right to association and peaceful assembly; the right to equality before and equal protection of the law; the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs; the right to have criminal charges and rights determined by a competent, impartial and independent tribunal (and in the case of civilians, a civilian court); the right to a fair trial, representation by a lawyer of choice, and (where the defendant does not have means to pay for legal representation) legal aid; the right to prompt, detailed notice of charges in a language understood by the defendant and adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense against them and communicate with counsel; the right to an interpreter where required; the right to appeal; the right not to be persecuted for any act or omission that was not a crime when committed; and the right to self-determination.

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