POLITICS OF SECURITY AND THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS IN CAMEROON: POLITICIZATION, MILITARIZATION, AND PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND STABILITY IN AFRICA

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Abstract

In post-independence Africa, issues of insecurity, identity, and governance critically affect nation-state stability, exemplified by Cameroon's Anglophone crisis. Originating in 2016 with historical background, peaceful protests by lawyers and students against marginalization in the Northwest and Southwest regions, the movement has since 2017 escalated into a prolonged armed conflict. The Cameroonian government's tendency to politicize grievances and emphasize militarized responses has deepened mistrust and heightened tensions. Public discourse remains fragmented, largely ignoring root causes such as governance failures, socio-economic disparities, and cultural marginalization. This analysis examines how Cameroon's security policies, influenced by postcolonial state-building that views dissent as a threat to national unity, inadvertently foster insecurity. Utilizing securitization theory and human security frameworks, the study explores how these strategies intensify, rather than alleviate, conflict. Central questions focus on Cameroon's security culture and potential methods to replace fear-driven governance with sustainable peace strategies. The paper employs an interdisciplinary approach combining political theory, socio-spatial evaluation, and conflict analysis, situating the crisis within broader identity-related insecurities in post-colonial Africa. Advocating inclusive governance, meaningful dialogue, effective decentralization, and prioritization of human security, the study proposes alternatives to militarization. Aligning with frameworks like the African Union's Agenda 2063 and UN Sustainable Development Goals, it provides actionable insights for peacebuilding within postcolonial contexts. Through these measures, Cameroon could pave the way for lasting peace and stability, serving as a model for similar challenges across Africa.

Key words: anglophone crisis, governance, conflict resolution, human security, violent extremism.

Introduction

The Central African region has been dealing with insecurity for the past two decades with the reoccurrence of conflicts and socio-political crisis in about five (5) countries (Burundi, Cameroon, the CAR, Chad and the DRC, the armed conflicts in Cameroon and Chad) out of the 15 witnessed by Sub-Saharan Africa (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024). These conflicts are in many cases, deeply rooted in the nation-building process with historical legacies of colonial rules, ineffective governance frameworks, uneven resource distribution, and fragmented political institutions. The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon represents one of the most enduring and intricate internal conflicts in the Central African region. Since its reemergence in 2016, what initially began as peaceful

demonstrations regarding 'Lawyers and students' peaceful protest has evolved into a violent conflict between governmental forces and non-state entities, particularly separatist militias. This crisis, which is deeply rooted in identity grievances and systemic inequities, underscores significant structural deficiencies in the formulation and execution of security policies within Cameroon and, by extension, throughout much of postcolonial Africa (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003; Awasom, 2004).

The political and administrative unification following the 1961 plebiscite left unaddressed discord between the Francophone-dominated central government and the Anglophone minority. This has perpetuated systematic marginalization in terms of political representation, cultural acknowledgment, and equitable access to public resources (Anchimbe, 2010; Fanso, 1999). The state's primary responses have been twofold: politicization, by reinterpreting grievances as threats to national cohesion, and militarization, through oppressive security operations under the 2014 Anti-Terrorism Law. These approaches have largely failed to tackle the underlying causes of the crisis and have, instead, further intensified tensions leading to over 6000 deaths, approximately 638, 000 internally displaced persons, and at least 1.7 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance (International Crisis Group, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2024). At the core of the issue lies the Cameroonian security paradigm, which prioritizes regime preservation and territorial integrity over human security. Drawing on Buzan et al.'s (1998) Securitization Theory, this research contends that the state's framing of protests as a security threat has sanctioned extraordinary measures that inhibit dialogue and perpetuate fear. As Jarvis & Holland (2015) assert, security efforts become counterproductive when they engender the very insecurity they claim to mitigate. The Anglophone conflict also reflects the broader crisis of postcolonial governance in Central Africa, where historical injustices, fragile institutions, and exclusionary nationalism intersect. The region continues to grapple with armed conflicts, institutional degradation, and disparate development, as evidenced in Chad, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024; Meyer, 2015).

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how Cameroon's securitized governance exacerbates identity-driven conflicts. It seeks to address two fundamental questions: (1) *How does the prevailing conceptualization of security perpetuate conditions of fear, mistrust, and violence*? and (2) *What institutional and governance reforms are necessary to cultivate inclusive, sustainable peace*? Through an integration of political theory, empirical data, and comparative regional analysis, this study advocates for a shift from coercive security models to a human security framework predicated on decentralization, justice, and participatory governance. It aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (AU, 2015; UN, 2015), which emphasize the importance of inclusive institutions and peace as essential elements for sustainable development and conflict resolution in Africa.

Results and Discussion

I-The Dilemma of the Politics of Identity, and the Rise of the Anglophone Crisis
Though the contemporary aspects of the Anglophone conflict can be traced back to the grievances against the then governance system, its foundation can also be linked to the 1961 plebiscite. The extended hostility between West and East Cameroon has often been the source of the calls for either constitutional reorganisation of the federal system or secession of the Anglophone regions (Agwanda, Billy and Uğur, Yasin Asal, N.D). These arguments can be classified into the nature and characteristics of identity politics and grievances in Cameroon, (A), that led to the projection of national identity disparities (B).

   A- The National Identity Politic Construction and the Anglophone Minority Grievances and Victimisation

Victimisation in pluralistic societies often creates a strong feeling of identity amongst minority groups who may then develop coping mechanisms to facilitate their breakaway from by dominant sociocultural groups. The debate on such circumstances and the transformation of the post-colonial State is at the centre of the emergence of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon. The government attempts to reform the minority identity (Anglophone cultural legacy) in West Cameroon through different systems including the education, and judicial sectors, have been greatly rejected. Minority groups in these sectors, from the Anglophone regions have often decried prejudice and discrimination in being admitted in leading institutions and administrations (Caxton, 2017).

The bureaucratic transformations of the 1960s, aimed at constructing a national identity, intervened as a socio-spatial identity regulation, in a context of political fractures that animated the Cameroon society before the second phase of its independence in October 1961. This wave of transformation seems to be one of the main elements that stimulated the grievances, which find here, a detonator with corporatists effervescence, and a major contributing factor to curb the appearance of socio-spatial identity struggles of the Anglophone crisis. One of the prominent root causes of the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon lies on the socio-political, cultural and economic grievances. Politically, the centralization of power has developed a feeling of marginalisation of the Anglophones minority, which representation is reduced in government and public administration, and according to the national survey of 2014 (ECAM4, 2014) to only 11%. The dismantling of the federal system in 1972 further eroded regional autonomy, fuelling the perception, or feeling of exclusion and subordination of the Anglophone minority (Konnings & Nyamnjoh 1997). Economically, and according to the Anglophones, their regions, despite being resource-rich, faced disproportionate underdevelopment, limited infrastructure, and high unemployment. Socially, cultural and linguistic discrimination has exacerbated tensions, with Francophone legal and educational systems imposed on them. These combined factors have fuelled resentment, and the allegedly subordination of the Anglophone region in a unitary State.

The sociological aspects lie on the generating and organising logics of the 1962 political conflict in the post-colonial Cameroonian state intends to take an interest in a historical-critical and historical-empirical examination of the socio-spatial identity disparities posed by the *'recomposition'* of the political field. To achieve this, it is then necessary to critically identify the logics of production of a crucial conflict of identity through an investigation and a revealing interrogation of the springs of these socio-political dynamics showing the difficult relationship linking to the routinized perspectives of reflection and observation to the historical conditions of its construction. The rise and resurgence of the ambazonian secessionism as a para-terrorist movement, is also as a result of the perception of the existence of social disintegration and identity generative conflicts arising principally from low representation of minorities in the administrative and educational sectors, as mentioned above. This situation leads to the widespread and serial production of structural particularities at more localised levels. As the problem developed from the creation of pro-anglophone movements to the voluntary separation from the French part of the country in search of a sovereign state, there arose a new problem, that of security. Isaiah Munang Ayafor indicates that, the territorial divide shows that any integrative measures would be understood as *"assimilation strategies"* due to the fact that the Anglophone minority frequently make different concerns of cultural or identity harm (Munang AYAFOR, 2005).

It should however be noted that, coined with the idea of reducing socio-spatial disparities and promoting a harmonious national setting (Cameroon Tribune n°5438, 1993:3), President Ahidjo adopted a policy of *'regional balance'* (*équilibre régional*), via the Decree n°75/496 of July 3, 1975, which envisaged the distribution of places in the administration, and other schools, considering the "area of origin" of the citizens. This policy was applied and institutionalised by President Biya, when he came to power in 1982, via the Decree N° 82/407 of September 7, 1982 modifying that of July

1975, and that N° 2000/696/PM of September 13, 2000, fixing the modalities of ethno-regional distribution of places in the administration, and revising at the same time, the quotas between the ethnic groups and old former soldiers (Figure 1): (Center 15%, South 4%, Adamawa 5%, F.N 18%, N 7%, East. 7%, Littoral 12%, N.W 12%, West 13%, S.W 8 %…). The policy of regional balance, appeared to be at the heart of the Unitary State, and determined that access to the socio-political, and/ or, administrative and economic positions should be conditioned by a socio-cultural, or identity equation. This policy was a mechanism to mitigate the complex geo-cultural and geo-spatial nature of the country, with regards to the existence of minorities (autochthones and Anglophones) whose rights were recognised in the January 1996 revised constitution.
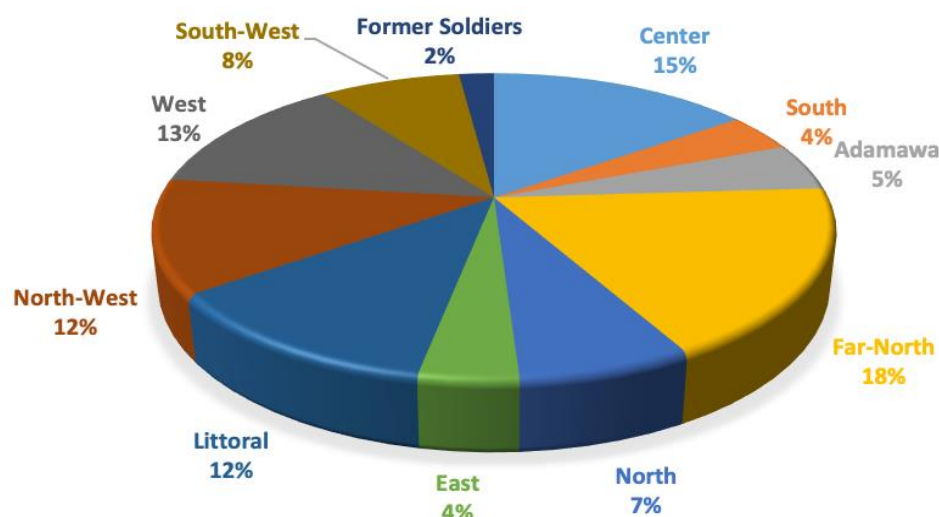

Figure 1: Ethno-regional distribution of places in the administration and important schools (PM Decree 2000)

The application of this policy has been catastrophic (Figure 2), a situation that inevitably led to an increase in the demand for societal integration with the result being the socio-spatial identity claims which aggravates the population's resentment against other groups.

With such a feeling, combined with the situation of regional socio-economic and political disparities, as well as poverty, (though the South West region has a poverty rate of 18% against 38% at national level, the North West region figures among the regions with a high level of poverty, 55% in 2014), (GPS-SHaSA, 2014), the problem of securing socio-spatial identity has been aggravating to the Anglophone problem or *dilemma* (Caxton, 2017). However, the reference cases of Anglophone under-representation are also in strategic positions of government and a somewhat exclusion from other administrative positions, like in the case of the judicial corps. There are some issues of representation and the recruitment of legal personnel, with regards to data from the Minister of Justice, Laurent Esso who mentioned that, out of the 1 542 active magistrates at the Ministry, 1 265 magistrates are French-speaking, and 227 are English-speaking, making 3.2% (Republic of Cameroon, 2016). 499 out of the 514 judicial officers in Cameroon are Francophones, and 15 are Anglophones. Of the 128 magistrates practicing in the North West region, 67 (52.3 %) are French speaking with a civil law background. Of the 97 magistrates in the legal services, 64 (65.9%) are Francophones and 33 are Anglophones. Of the 27 magistrates in the legal services in Bamenda, 21 are Francophones (77.8 %), and 6 are Anglophones (Caxton 2017). The same tendency is observed in the South West region, where, of 89 magistrates in the legal department in the SW, 54 are Francophones, ie about 61%. Of the 28 magistrates in the legal department in Buea, 20 are Francophones (71.4 %), and of the 30 new bailiffs appointed in January 2014, 28 are Francophones (93.2 %), and 2 are Anglophones.
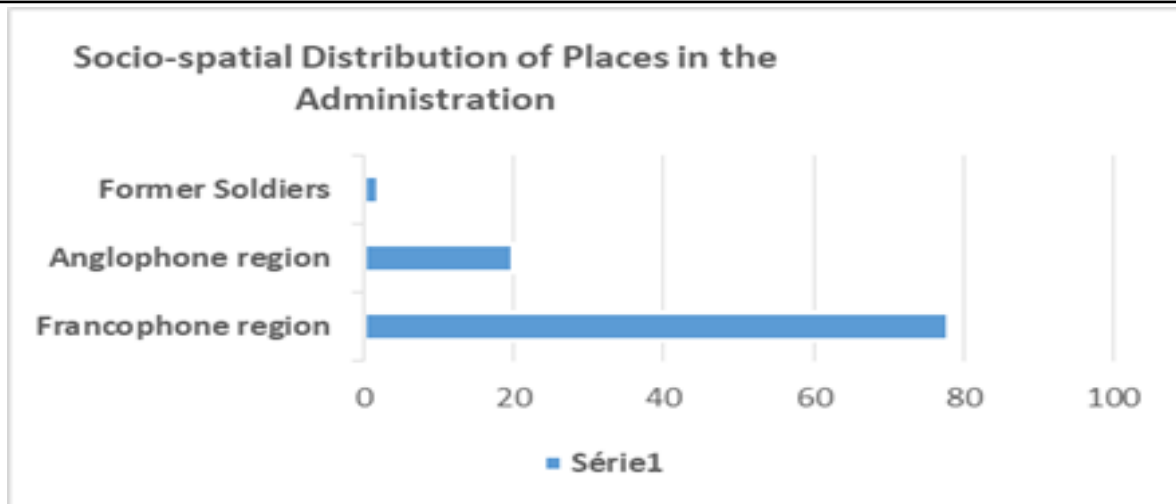
Source: *The Authors, build from official sources*

The figure highlights the disparity in administrative representation among the two macro-identities in Cameroon. Specifically, it clearly illustrates the domination of the Francophone community in Cameroon's public administration. Despite being one of the two official languages in the country, Anglophones hold a disproportionately small number of administrative roles. This socio-spatial imbalance contributes to feelings of exclusion and fuels long-standing grievances, which have been at the heart of not only, the Anglophone dilemma, but also, the resurgence of the recent crisis. The figure therefore underscores a key issue in the political and institutional inequality that continues to challenge national unity and stability in Cameroon.

B- Socio-spatial Disparities and the Projection of Identity Politics in Deepening the Crisis

The Anglophone predicament in Cameroon, underpinned by historical grievances and perceptions of systemic marginalization as previously mentioned, has been sharply intensified by the government's security apparatus since 2016. The deployment of security personnel and the consolidation of power have inflamed tensions, resulting in widespread unrest and conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions. In this context, the state's security strategies have considerably aggravated the Anglophone conflict, considering historical context, specific incidents, and the broader ramifications of such approaches.

The resurgence of the Anglophone struggle in the late 1970s and early 1980s fundamentally shaped perceptions of security practices in Cameroon. This movement, rooted in the Anglophone regions, showcased a genuine desire to secede a part of the national territory and establish a sovereign state (Fonchingong, 2013). Since its independence, Cameroon's security policy, characterized by the state's monopolistic posture, has been articulated through public security initiatives in both conception and execution. The government's response to Anglophone grievances has predominantly entailed militarization and the deployment of security forces. In late 2016, peaceful protests by lawyers and teachers in the Anglophone regions were met with excessive force. The protesters opposed the appointment of Francophone judges and teachers in Anglophone courts and schools, seeing it as an existential threat to their common law system and educational heritage. The state's heavy-handed response, which included the use of live ammunition and mass arrests, substantially escalated tensions. Reports indicate that security forces have engaged in unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, and the burning of villages. For instance, Amnesty International documented cases where security operations resulted in the destruction of property and civilian fatalities. Such actions have not only violated human rights but also deepened the mistrust between the Anglophone community and the central government (Amnesty International, 2023). The aim is to maximize the political center's domination over the periphery. Consequently, the development

of public security policy has been constructed through the nation-building process, aimed at suppressing what is deemed as 'rebellion' (Meyomesse, 2016). Broadly, nation-building in Cameroon involves policies geared towards rapid and effective assimilation of diverse peoples, particularly national minority groups (Boyce, 1999). This situation emerges directly from how Cameroon's hegemonic security stance has been created and evolved.

Map 1: The Self-Declared Republic of Ambazonia
Source: *Martin W. Lewis*

A significant factor in expressing this security framework is the socio-spatial identity claims inherent in the Anglophone issue, which led to the creation of the Ambazonian state in 1985 (Map 1), reflecting discourses protesting the marginalization of Anglophones. The establishment of this state introduced specific challenges for national coexistence.

The inception of Ambazonia prompted the Cameroonian government to adopt and legitimize an authoritarian security stance, with a more compelling rationale not only to consider pro-Anglophone movements as 'domestic enemies' but also, more prominently, to reinforce legislative and strategic measures to quell the resistance (Piet Konings, 1997). This reflected an explicit concern for cultural homogeneity and socio-spatial uniformity (Fru Awasom, 2004) at the expense of existing cultural diversity and socio-spatial disparity. In 1984, the official name of the country was changed from the "United Republic of Cameroon" to the "Republic of Cameroon," (the former name of French Cameroon) the former name of French Cameroon. This "performance" [1] aimed to protect and consolidate territorial integrity, given that Anglophone secessionism posed a significant threat to state identity. The state's emphasis on a centralized national identity, often enforced through security measures, has marginalized Anglophone cultural expressions. Policies promoting the French language and Francophone traditions in official capacities have been perceived as attempts to assimilate or erase Anglophone identity. This cultural suppression, paired with economic neglect, has fuelled feelings of second-class citizenship among Anglophones.

However, the security approach to the Anglophone crisis has had profound implications for civil liberties. The presence of security forces has led to restrictions on movement, assembly, and expression. Educational institutions have been targeted, with schools being closed or destroyed,

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[1] 'Performance' is a concept that refers, according to Simon Clark, to the conscious effort of individuals to project a given image of them in the society and make people take this image for granted. See Simon CLARKE, "Culture and Identity", *The Sage handbook of Cultural Analysis*, 2008.

depriving thousands of children of their right to education. Furthermore, the conflict has resulted in significant internal displacement, with many fleeing their homes to escape violence.

Globally, the spread of the Anglophone protest since the 2016 episode has elevated identity claims to a major security issue in Cameroon, alongside Boko Haram's aggression in the northern part of the country. The Anglophone problem is among the priority issues in national politics as reported by official discourses, indicating that the situation has become one of the country's leading hotspots. Incidents reported include administrative authorities being kidnapped, convoys attacked by gunmen, and the increasing use of improvised explosive devices. This transformation of the socio-spatial identity struggle into semi-terrorism has become a major concern for the central government, significantly impacting socio-political and security domains.

II- The Security Approach as a Catalyst in Intensifying Conflict: Conflicting Political Objectives, Violence, and Routes to Sustainable Peace and Security

In changing from a Federal to a Unitary State in 1972, the Cameroonian leaders have endeavoured to culturally integrate and construct a national identity from the states inherited English and French identities at the onset of political independence (Eyoh, 2007). This process, characterized as the evolving socio-historical endeavour whereby, the Cameroonian authorities' cultivation and/or promotion of national consciousness, identity, unity, integration, and sovereignty, has fundamentally been seen by the Anglophones as a minority and its own identity project, and as a way undermine its authority within its resource rich region (Konings, and Nyamnjoh, 1999). This was marked by the 2015 All Anglophone Lawyers Conference, themed around preserving Anglophone identity, making the crisis to take a turning point in 2016 with the emergence of violent extremist clashes between separatist groups and the Cameroon government.

A- The Politicization of Security and Its Role on Conflict Escalation

The move from a crisis to an opened conflict is marked by the use of direct armed confrontation and *para-terrorist* [2] actions by both the state and the Ambazonian fighters stem from the inherent characteristics of nationalism. The conflict has resulted in a death of over 6,500 people, and the displacement of 584,000 others, with an additional 73,000 seeking refuge in Nigeria (International Crisis Group, 2024). As reported by the United Nations, 1.8 million inhabitants of the Anglophone regions' population of four million necessitate humanitarian assistance, while approximately 250,000 children are impacted by the cessation of schools due to the ongoing strife. This escalation into conflict was exacerbated by some key events. In effect, it was students, academics, and lawyers who propelled the nation into a novel stage of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, culminating in numerous Anglophone activists perceiving secession as the sole resolution. During the autumn of the same year, outbreaks advocating for bilingual reforms in the legal and educational frameworks of Cameroon encountered violent governmental reprisals. Military forces were dispatched to university campuses, where students fell victim to sexual assault, brutalization, and incarceration. Anglophone political entities and organizations faced prohibition, with their leaders massively detained. As Operation Ghost Town Resistance commenced, President Biya instigated an internet shutdown in the Anglophone territories. The nation's Rapid Intervention Battalions (BIR), notorious for their excessive force and substantiated human rights violations, were mobilized to the region, accompanied by army and gendarmerie units. Separatist militias emerged, ultimately proclaiming the establishment of a new Anglophone state by October 2017.

Essentially, this implies that there must be a singular nation within defined borders. This proclaimed Anglophone States endeavour, aims to homogenize and essentialize the Anglophone identity, making any other identities a potential threat to this standardized identity. Consequently,

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[2] Activities that are not explicitly labeled as terrorism or directly classified as such, yet in practice serve the function of instilling fear or terror in the population.

citizenship status, along with its associated privileges and rights, is exclusive to individuals who conform to the conceptualized national identity, thereby laying the groundwork for nation-building and national identity policy.

Given this turbulent situation, the political and security implications at the national level increases, with the development of a variety of measures aiming at keeping a socio-political stable, secured, and saved environment. This objective has then appeared to be vital not only for the survival of the state, but also of the 'national unity', allowing the government to enhance its socio-political and security architecture. On January 23, 2017, a *National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism* was created, with the principal mission of managing the identity complexity in Cameroon, beside the detention of some pro-anglophone leaders and activists.

The government also reformed the judiciary and educational sectors, which aim was to increase inclusion of the Anglophone Cameroonian in those institutions. At the time when the Anglophone crisis appears to be a serious threat to the national security [3], the President of the republic decided to sign a decree on February 21, 2018, to reorganize the territorial military command of the defense and security forces. The aim of this measure was to create a fifth (5th) joint military region, with the headquarters in Bamenda, the regional capital of the North-west region which appears to be the epicenter of the Anglophone crisis (*map 2*). The territorial competence of this new military region covers the North-west and West regions. The region has then been flooded by defence and security forces. Their presence however, created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty on the population.
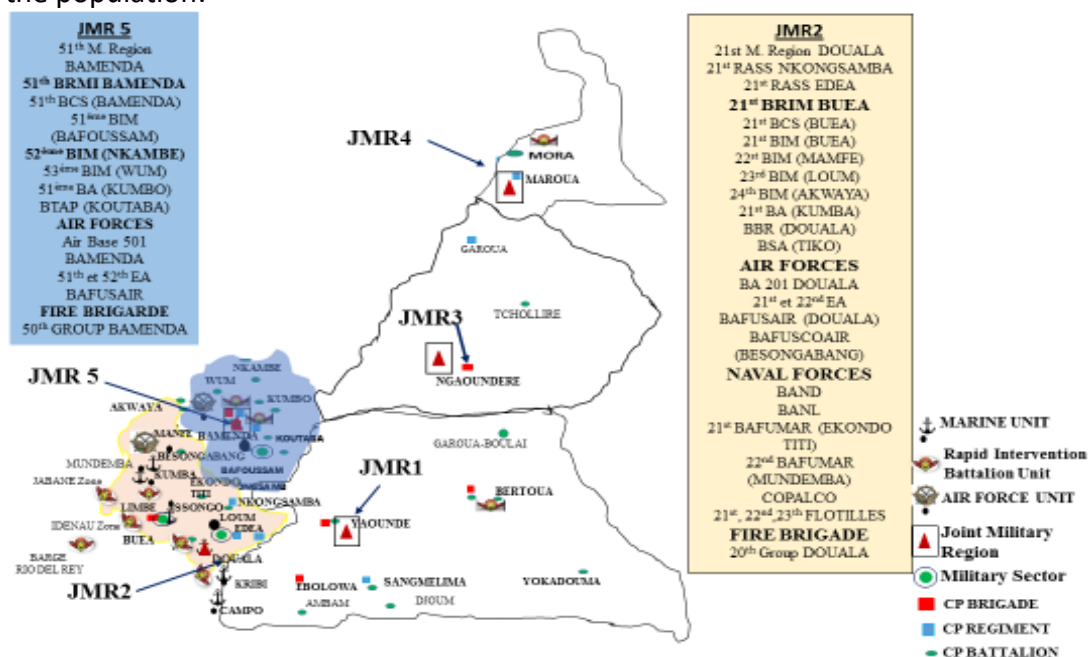
Map 2: The (Re)Organization of the territorial military command posts
Source: The Authors

The map illustrates the new territorial military command designed to reorganize the combat and training of the defense and security forces. This includes the establishment of the 21st and 51st Motorized Infantry Brigades, the creation and organization of external military health services, the air force, regional firefighting units, and the national gendarmerie's traffic management division. The strategic objective is to bring the command post closer to the operational field in the fight against radical activism led by pro-secessionist groups advocating for the independence of

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[3] During his inauguration speech, delivered at the National Assembly Palace on 6 November 2018, the re-elected Cameroonian Head of State, President Paul Biya, issued an ultimatum to the separatists who have been carrying out violence in the northwest and southwest, the two Anglophone regions, for more than a year. "To these war entrepreneurs, who are undermining our national unity and advocating secession, they must know that they will face not only the rigor of the law, but also the determination of our defence and security forces.

Cameroon's English-speaking regions. Notably, Bamenda now hosts a joint military and gendarmerie regional command post. As a reminder, the last reorganization of the territorial military command occurred in 2014, establishing a fourth joint military region in the Far North to efficiently combat and eradicate Boko Haram's terrorist threat.

The resurgence of the Anglophone issue in 2016 swiftly made this region appear hazardous, posing a potential threat to national unity. Since 2016, the state's endeavour to protect *territorial integrity* has intensified, beyond community and identity clashes or Anglophone secessionism. President Paul BIYA emphasized in his 2016 end-of-year speech that Cameroonian citizens have the right to express their opinions on any national life aspect, including peaceful protests declared in accordance with the law, a fundamental right as enshrined in the Constitution. However, he noted that some individuals misuse this freedom to commit violent acts and challenge national unity. The Minister of Communication, Issa TCHIROMA, labeled this struggle as "*terrorism*" and further highlighted that the state was under attack by a terrorist organization. This concept of 'securitization' arises not as an objective reality but as a result of a particular political process, including 'discourse,' where threats are framed and recognized. From a critical geopolitical perspective, politics involves generating images, symbols, and values of the place, which has led to the politicization of the Anglophone issue and its portrayal as a threat to national security, unity, or territorial integrity. Rather than prioritizing and highlighting diplomatic solutions to address the crisis, central authorities frequently resort to coercive tactics to suppress protests (Pommerolle and Heungoup 2017:532). In 2017, arbitrary arrests of activists led to incarcerations, undermining dialogue efforts to resolve the conflict.

However, the situation seems more influenced by the special security measures deployed by the Cameroonian government, which are contested, rather than an outright rejection of the nation-building project itself. This security-focused approach may have encouraged the emergence of groups advocating for Anglophone rights through various radical means, possibly intensifying demands for secession or exacerbating the issue, with violence becoming more pronounced. Reports indicate that several armed separatist groups, like the Ambazonia Recognition Collaboration Council (ARCC), have formed umbrella organizations, claiming thousands of fighters (Matfess, 2018). Actions by armed separatist groups have continued to escalate.

B- Rethinking Security Policy in Cameroon: Toward Inclusive and Sustainable Peacebuilding Approaches

The security approach mobilised to addressing the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon is revealing a larger regional security policy issue, where efforts at constructing postcolonial African nation-states have constantly been crisis-ridden with identity-based claims, marginalization, and governance shortcomings. Most countries in the Africa have witnessed either intra or inter-state conflicts, perversity of mutual distrust and lack of confidence, poor political coordination and even dependence syndrome. Using survival analysis, Sanghamitra, and Elliott Green (2013) show evidence of a significant relationship between the proximity of the implementation of nation-building policies and the onset of civil war in modern Africa. The transformation of the Anglophone conflict into a low-intensity insurgency with para-terrorist characteristics highlights a correlation between the nation-building policy, ranging from the changing the name and nature of the state to the politicization and the introduction of enforced military mobilisation and the rise of the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon. The securitization of identity-based demands has resulted in a vicious cycle where coercion exacerbates resistance and erodes trust in state institutions. Central to this crisis is a deeply entrenched security culture rooted in postcolonial governance traditions. The prevailing security culture in Cameroon derives significant influence from the national unity doctrine embedded in the 1996 Constitution (art 1 (2)), asserting that ("*Cameroon shall be one and indivisible...*"). While this constitutional disposition, used as a political slogan serves as a symbolically

cohesive purpose, it simultaneously operates as an ideological limitation that interprets any expressions of regional or identity-focused autonomy as a menace to the integrity of the State. Within this framework, security aligns more closely with the preservation of the regime than with the safeguarding of citizens or the strengthening of societal resilience (Fanso, 1999; Achankeng, 2014).

This security model reflects what Barry Buzan et al., (1998) describe as a state-centric model of securitization, where the survival of the state takes precedence over societal well-being. In Cameroon, the extensive reliance on the political, and military aspects of security, with little corresponding investments in socio-economic inclusion, or equity, has contributed in exacerbating the crisis. As Smouts and Badie (1992) explain, culture, especially security culture, functions as a set of shared representations and norms. Here, the dominant ideology equates unity with uniformity and dissent with disloyalty. As posited by the Securitization Theory of Barry Buzan et al. (1998), the characterization of an issue as an existential threat justifies the employment of extraordinary measures. In the case of Cameroon, the deployment of specialized units such as the BIR (Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide) in the Anglophone regions (notably in Bamenda and Buea) since 2017, along with the increased arrests under anti-terrorism Law (Law No. 2014/028), illustrates a trend of repression rather than engagement. Civil society organizations, including International Crisis Group (2024) and Amnesty International (2019), have consistently documented incidents of arbitrary detentions, widespread displacement, and extrajudicial executions.

Cameroon's security policy is thus, characterized by centralised and reinforced security-oriented approach. Academics such as Mbembe (2001) and Yenshu Vubo (2006) emphasize that the centralized authority, rooted in the French administrative tradition results in systemic marginalization of outlying areas. The Anglophone regions, shaped historically by British colonial influences have persistently raised issues regarding inadequate representation, linguistic exclusion, and economic neglect (Anchimbe, 2013; Awasom, 2004).

The incomplete execution of decentralization reforms, as pledged in the 1996 Constitution and reiterated in Law No. 2019/024 of 24 December 2019 on the General Code of Decentralized Territorial Communities, exacerbates dissatisfaction. The special status conferred upon the North West and South West regions under this legislation remains largely symbolic, lacking the financial independence or administrative flexibility required to address local needs (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003).

The current predominant perspective of security, which is centred around the state, must evolve into one where human security is the focal point, as suggested by the UNDP in 1994 and expanded upon by Jarvis & Holland in 2015. This notion redefines the subject of security, moving from protecting the state to safeguarding individuals, emphasizing liberation from fear and want, and the preservation of human dignity. Empirical evidence from successful peacebuilding scenarios, such as Sierra Leone's post-conflict reintegration initiatives and Rwanda's community-driven justice approach (Gacaca) accompanied by decentralization efforts, underscores the significance of integrating inclusive governance with the stabilization of security (Autesserre, 2010). These instances provide instructive comparative insights for Cameroon.

However, a reconceptualized security strategy must be comprehensive and rooted in good governance, devolution, and development equity. This strategy encompasses (1) effective Decentralization Execution, that consist of delegating significant powers to local councils and regional authorities, including financial independence and local law enforcement jurisdiction (Fombad, C. & Steytler, Nico , 2019; Ngoh, 1996). It also includes (2) dialogue-oriented conflict resolution approach, which consist of institutionalising inclusive and sustainable dialogue platforms beyond elite-level discussions, engaging civil society, traditional leaders, and the diaspora (International Crisis Group, 2017). Aspects of (3) Security Sector Reformation (SSR) consisting at transition from coercive measures to protective roles, and incorporating community policing, human rights education, and conflict sensitivity into the operational practices of police,

gendarmerie, and military units (Amnesty International, 2021) are needed. (4) Addressing socio-spatial inequities, that confront underlying causes of dissatisfaction by ensuring equitable investment in infrastructure, access to education, and employment opportunities in perceived marginalized areas (Eyoh, 1998; Konnings, 2004). (5) Institutionalizing Human Security principles by integrating preventive diplomacy, early warning measures, and inclusive development agendas into the national security framework. This needs to shift the focus from managing threats to reducing risks and enhancing resilience.

The Anglophone crisis, and other implicit identity tensions like the "*Bamileke problem*," "*North problem*," and "*Pygmy issue*", highlight the limitations of the security policy in Cameroon. The state should embrace pluralism, viewing identity not as a threat but as an asset for deepening democracy and fostering social harmony. Charles Ateba Eyene (2006) cautioned in "*Les paradoxes du pays organisateur*" [4] that failing to accept diverse voices within the national conversation will lead to alienation. Only through institutional reforms that validate differences and a security culture respectful of human rights can Cameroon pave the way for sustainable peace and stability in Cameroon.

Conclusions

The Anglophone problem in Cameroon appears to be an indispensable tool for describing and identifying the security dimension of the socio-spatial identity struggles in the country, and the dynamics of para-terrorists movements on the African continent. The security policy related to these struggles is coined on the one hand by the geo-historical and socio-historical processes, inherent to the production of commonly shared ideologies of identity. It is also derived from the (re)production of a militaristic strategic security related to the global doctrine of the fight against terrorism and para-terrorism. The critical reading of the security culture with regards to the Anglophone problem allows us to see not only the role of values, ideas and representations in the habit of the government within the national identity project, but also, to better acknowledge the particularity of its security paradigm. This study is not preoccupied with the social cleavages of various kinds, but on the explicit assessment of socio-spatial identity claims, and cleavages, and the policy responses, as well as its implications on the security macrocosm of the country, as a para-terrorist movement. However, territorial identity is at the center of cleavages, which shows that the national identity is a far-fetch outcome, though socio-spatial integration is not an unlikely scenario in Cameroon. But it has been going hand to hand with the formation of an identity ruling class that includes representations from ethnic parts of the country, creating discontentment and feelings of disintegration, or the "self vs. the other". This situation clearly indicates that, Cameroon, just like other Sub-Saharan African states have not sufficiently integrated the new paradigm of security, making it to still focus on the dominant discourse. If since its independence, the government has adopted a security culture that permits to ensure the resilience and stability of the political regime, it is urgent to think about a new security culture that will less expose the population to insecurity and will contribute to remove fear among them. The recent years have seen the creation of *ad hoc* security mechanisms, designed to suppress the contextual threat, rather than long term human security measures. Our approach thus proposes to develop actions capable of reconciling the interests of the government and that of the population, in terms of security. This will pass through the establishment of institutions needed by the state to manage developmental problems and the public security action. The aim is to better manage socio-spatial identity disparities, which, via the spectre of the Anglophone problem, have proven to be potent threats to the Westphalian system,

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[4] In his book published in 2008, it shows how the populations found in the region of the president of the Republic (South) face problems and mistakes of the political elites and stagnate, like other Cameroonian on poverty; a situation unfortunately badly perceived by other citizens who think that they are been favoured and protected by the regime. See Charles ATEBA EYENE, Les paradoxes du pays organisateur, élites productrices ou prédatrices : le cas de la province du Sud à l'ère Biya (1982-2007), Yaounde, Saint-Paul, 2008.

with regards to the self-reliant development of para-terrorism. Some have executed remarkable projects such as the rehabilitation of roads, pipe-borne water supply, community halls, support to health centres, scholarship schemes etc. The Cameroonian government, however, could use the different identity struggles as an opportunity to rethink the paradigm guiding the nation-building security policy.

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